

Call to Higher Consciousness:
When Transcendent Events Kindle Inner Motivation

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming
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ABSTRACT

Transcendent experiences exceed “the normal, everyday time and space limitations of the self and they can both facilitate development of, and provoke development” (Holden, 2000, p. 92) into higher stages of consciousness. Wilber’s (2000b) correlation of basic structures of consciousness with separate lines of consciousness and Assagioli’s (1976) depiction of normal and ascending individual consciousness aided explanation of transcendent experience, the felt call, related issues, and possibilities. Assagioli’s *ray* connecting the Higher Self with the conscious self was studied as the common structure of the felt call to higher consciousness.

This qualitative research used a transcendental phenomenology design (Moustakas, 1994) with in-depth interviews to investigate the inner motivation of one pilot participant and four main participants, each of whom had experienced multiple transcendent events and responded to a felt call to higher consciousness.

The analysis distilled data into eight major themes relating to the noetic and noemic aspects of the phenomenon. Professional competency in the area of transpersonal development was evaluated using Wilber’s (1983) elucidation of authenticity, legitimacy, and authority. Implications for educators included curriculum inclusion of the nature and range of human development into transpersonal stages; for the mental health community, the results called for better understanding of transpersonal development, transcendent experiences, calls to higher consciousness, spiritual emergence and emergency, related issues and potentials, and increased competence in handling these issues.

Examiners:

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the five participants who made this research possible and rich, with gratitude for their openness, generosity, and trust. May each of you continue to hear your call clearly and bravely respond in the direction of your inspiration.

CHAPTER 1

Aspiration for further transcendent experience may grow in some who have even one such experience to a point where they feel ineluctably *called*. This study focuses on the lived experience of *feeling called to a higher level of consciousness*, its essence and its effect on the person.

Lukoff, Lu, and Turner (1998) in reviewing literature on the prevalence of mystical or transcendental experience, found corroborating reports from 1972 to 1993 indicating that “30% to 40% of the population have had mystical experiences.” Back and Bourque (1970, in Hutton, 1994) reporting Gallup poll surveys showed a range of 21.5% to 41.2% of people stating they have had a sudden religious or mystical awakening. Maslow (Alexander, Rainforth, & Gelderloos, 1991) found that most of the people he interviewed reported at least one mild form of transcendent experience.

Transcendent experiences exceed “the normal, everyday time and space limitations of the self and they can both facilitate development of, and provoke development beyond” (Holden, 2000, p. 92) and into higher stages of consciousness. Higher stages are also known as transpersonal (literally *beyond the personal*), transegoic, or simply higher stages of adult maturation. Holden cited her own research and other sources (e.g., Walsh, 1996; Grof, 1988) in stating that even distressing transpersonal experiences generally result in healing and growth.

I wonder how well North American culture engenders an ability to connect these experiences to the trajectory of human development into transpersonal stages. How many people realize in a useful way that stages higher than the rational exist or can be attained or are aware of reasons for doing so?

Since, as stated above, a substantial number of people report temporary states of transcendence at some time in their life, important questions exist. For example, how does North American culture cultivate sufficient knowledge about these experiences to

promote balance and health for the person who experiences them? How do we cultivate and support the desire to attain higher consciousness? It has been my hope in this study to contribute empirical and theoretical information for the purpose of raising counsellor and educator awareness about the nature of transition into transpersonal stages of development.

Transpersonal experiences have the power to affect human development, healing, and growth Holden (2000). These effects are immediate. Transpersonal experiences also have the power to initiate development, or maturation. *Feeling called to a higher level of consciousness* is the term used in this study to identify the type of powerful longing which is kindled by transcendent experience. The term describes as well the lasting power of a transcendent event to provoke development, healing, and growth.

Statement of Problem

In attempting to contribute knowledge to the fields of developmental and transpersonal psychology, I explored the following research question: When people experience transcendent events and feel powerfully called to higher levels of consciousness, how have they responded physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually?

Purpose of Study

Wilber (1983) distinguished between theory and dogmatism by the former's "call to experiential or data-based verification" (p. 69). He also stated that a theory or hypothesis is an attempt to create a useful map that "will not be surprised by future data"

(p. 69) and the way to find out if such a map will be surprised by future data is to gather future data! This speaks to the purpose of conducting research in this area of psychology.

How, specifically, will this research topic be useful to the social sciences? By gathering and analysing in-depth data, I hoped to identify theoretical frameworks and general techniques that benefit people as they transition into transpersonal levels of consciousness. That is, I hoped to provide information to increase counsellor and educator competency in motivating and supporting populations whose transcendent experience has triggered transition into higher, perhaps transpersonal, stages of development.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are offered to ensure the intended interpretation of the terminology used in this study:

Authenticity - “A measure of the degree of transformation (vertical growth) offered by any particular psychosocial institution” (Wilber, 1983, p. 252). Authenticity is measured by how much *vertical ascension or development* the institution is capable of promoting in people who adhere to its practices. Effort and length of time and risk factors such as financial, psychological, social costs are also important.

Call to higher consciousness - operationally defined for this study as the felt inner motivation to enter into transpersonal states of consciousness. The call refers to sensations, feelings, and intuition that are strong, a yearning, not easily suppressed. The essence of this phenomenon, that is, its inherent structure in consciousness, is the subject of investigation in this study.

Immanent experience or event – a type of transcendent event in which the reality of Spirit is perceived directly underlying and shining through form in the material world.

Mystical experience - Although definitions of mystical experience used by researchers and clinicians vary considerably, the definition used in this paper is one that Lukoff et al. (1998) have described as “congruent with the major theoretical literature and clinically applicable...the mystical experience is a transient, extraordinary experience marked by feelings of unity; harmonious relationship to the divine and everything in existence; and euphoria, sense of noesis (access to the hidden spiritual dimension), loss of ego functioning, alterations in time and space perception, and the sense of lacking control over the event (Agosian, 1992; Allman, De La Roche, Elkins, & Weathers, 1992; Hood, 1974; Lukoff & Lu, 1988, in Lukoff et al., 1998, p. 11).

Peak experience - Intense “phenomenologically lived experiences” (Assagioli, 1976, p. 5) which may be either positive, creative, and joyous or painful and tragic; they

may take the form of “self-realization, fulfillment, achievement, illumination, peace, joy” (Assagioli, 1976, p. 5), “cosmic consciousness” (Bucke, 1923, in Assagioli, 1976, p. 19), “spiritual awakening” (Assagioli, 1976, p. 38), as well as internal auditory or visual perceptions (Assagioli, 1976). For the purposes of this study, only those aspects of peak states that are mystical, transpersonal, or transcendent will be considered.

Psychosynthesis – “An approach to human development fostered by Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974) beginning around 1910 and continuing to the present day. It is both a theory and practice where the focus is to achieve a synthesis, a coming together, of the various parts of an individual's personality into a more cohesive self. That person can then function in a way that is more life-affirming and authentic. Another major aspect of psychosynthesis is its affirmation of the spiritual dimension of the person, i.e. the *higher* or *transpersonal* self. The higher self is seen as a source of wisdom, inspiration, unconditional love, and the will to meaning in our lives...Psychosynthesis is founded on the basic premise that human life has purpose and meaning and that we participate in an orderly universe structured to facilitate the evolution of consciousness” (www.chebucto.ns.ca/Health/Psychosynthesis).

Participant – Among terms such as seeker, quester, traveller, and participant, I have chosen the latter to describe people who feel called to higher consciousness or to activities, perspectives, and functions that express transpersonal states of consciousness. I refer to the participants in this research as participants for the reasons that they participated in the study and that they feel called to higher consciousness.

Religion - “**1** the belief in a superhuman controlling power, especially in a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship. **2** the expression of this in worship. **3** a particular system of faith and worship... [...from Latin *religio- onis* ‘obligation,

bond, reverence']” (Thompson (Ed.). (1995). *The concise Oxford dictionary*, p. 1161).

Self-actualization - the experience and awareness of one’s synthesizing spiritual Centre; realization of the Self. It entails a movement from unreal problems of the personality such as neuroses to “real,” existential problems such as isolation, death, meaningfulness, and responsibility; a conscious state characterized by joy, serenity, and radiant love (Maslow, 1959, in Assagioli, 1976, p. 39).

Spiritual - All states of consciousness, which possess higher than the average values such as the ethical, the aesthetic, the heroic, the humanitarian, and the altruistic (Assagioli, 1976). *Spiritual* may encompass religion but only to the extent that religion addresses these areas. The spiritual dimension has received more attention since the beginnings of the transpersonal psychology in the 1960s.

Spiritual emergency – Grof and Grof (1989, in Lukoff et al., 1998) coined the term and defined it as “crises when the process of growth and change becomes chaotic and overwhelming. Individuals experiencing such episodes may feel that their sense of identity is breaking down, that their old values no longer hold true, and that the very ground beneath their personal realities is radically shifting” (p. 6). Watson (1994) provided a practical table showing differences between spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency. For example, spiritual emergence is indicated when “experiences of energy are contained and are easily manageable” (p. 37). The corresponding experience of energy in a spiritual emergency is, “Experiences of jolting tremors, shaking, energy disruptive to daily life” (p. 37).

State of consciousness – Temporary, passing phenomena that have structural features (Wilber, 2000, p. 286); “a condition of being with regard to a set of circumstances” (Clark, 1998, p. 352) such as, waking, sleeping, dreaming, anger, joy, meditative, etc.

Transpersonal psychology - emerged 35 years ago from humanistic psychology. It is international and interdisciplinary, and concerns itself explicitly with health and

well-being in the transpersonal levels of human development (Walsh, 1993). “The *fourth force* in psychology after analytic, behavioural, and humanistic schools. It involves theory and applied research regarding “ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences...ecstasy, mystical experience...self-actualization, spirit, oneness...transcendental phenomena...” (Sutich, 1969, in Clark, 1998, p. 351).

Transpersonal development - (literally *beyond the personal*) Stages of development that are transegoic; a ranking according to holistic capacity, i.e., broader than and always inclusive of previous stages (Wilber, 1993a). I have used this term as similar and equivalent to *higher consciousness*.

Transcendent or transpersonal event – A state in which “the sense of identity of self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche, or cosmos” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993a, in Clark, 1998, p. 351). Experiences of this nature tend to be viewed as profound and important by persons experiencing them and may trigger a true spiritual awakening. May also involve a sense of presence, inspiration (Hart, 2000), experiences of synchronicity and of the miraculous, being outside of one’s physical body, glossolalia, synaesthesia, and déjà-vu, or extrasensory perceptions and metacognitions that are auditory, visual, or involve telepathy. Transcendent experiences may occur in many contexts, in the course of daily life such as when walking or sitting or in the context of a spiritual emergency such as a near death experience or sudden life changes. They may occur in a lucid dream or within a purposefully focussed context (meditation, prayer, yoga).

Delimitations

The following statements set out the boundaries of this study:

1. The findings of this study are assumed to be limited to its participants, whose written narratives will substantiate, in the author's analysis, that they have experienced one or more transpersonal events and feel strongly called, yearn, to attain further experience of transcendence and/or to develop higher levels of consciousness.
2. The study is limited to exploring the essential nature of a call to higher consciousness arising from transpersonal events that will include an analysis of participants' responses to such inner motivation.
3. It will be useful at this point to clarify that non-ordinary or paranormal events such as premonitions or finding oneself out-of-body belong to the field of parapsychology and are not clearly understood. Such events do not by themselves indicate a person's level of development. For the purpose of this study therefore, such events were viewed as transpersonal provided they were accompanied by other criteria defining transpersonal, transcendent, peak, or mystical experiences as described above *and* ignite a call to higher levels of consciousness in the participant.
4. This study was limited to individuals without a mental health diagnosis involving delusion or psychosis.
5. This study was limited to individuals who obtain transcendent states of consciousness without the use of mood-altering drugs, including prescription drugs, alcohol, opioids, hallucinogens, designer drugs, nicotine, and stimulants.
6. All variables, conditions, or populations not so specified in this study will be considered beyond the scope of this study.

These delimitations point to this study's main limitations. That is, its findings cannot be generalized past the reports of its participants. As well, the study involved procedures that were time-consuming for the researcher and participants, such as: (a) written responses to four open-ended questions, (b) in-depth interviews, (c) involved analysis and interpretation of the data, and (d) the philosophical groundwork inherent in the topic and in qualitative research itself.

These limitations are generally accepted aspects of qualitative research and acceptable in light of the depth of meaning and import that this research approach permits.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were expected to prevail throughout this study.

1. Participants were honest in their responses.
2. Participants would accurately carry out the instructions provided by the researcher.
3. Universal structures of consciousness exist in order of ever more expanded levels that include all preceding levels or structures - *holons* (Wilber, 2000b, p. 7) or *memes* (Wilber, 2000b, p. 232) - and these structures are universal across all groups of humans.
4. Transpersonal experiences are, in and of themselves, beyond consideration of sanity or insanity.
5. It is within the range of normality for humans to experience at least one distinct event classifiable as transpersonal in their lifetime.
6. It is normal in North America to have no useful context in which to consider these events. People therefore may attach little meaning or spiritual significance or even pathological significance to transpersonal states of consciousness. Alternatively, these events and states are often repressed and become unavailable to memory.
7. Humans *need* spiritual stimulation regularly in the same way that we need to experience physical, mental, and emotional stimulation regularly.
8. Humans who either do not experience or repress awareness of transpersonal states lose the pleasure of the event itself and potential spiritual development.
9. Addictions are at least in part attributable to attempts (a) to anaesthetize the painful effects on mental health of a dissatisfying inner life or (b) to elicit synthetic *highs* or expanded states of consciousness in the absence in mainstream culture of scientifically validated knowledge of the farther reaches of adult development and techniques to attain those higher levels of development (Assagioli, 1976).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced the topic of this study as the *call to higher consciousness* that follows transcendental experiences. I cited North American reluctance to prepare its population for higher levels of development despite the existence of those levels and the seemingly natural direction of human evolution towards the transpersonal.

I have identified this study as a response to society's need to develop a science devoted to empirical investigations and theoretical formulations in the field of higher consciousness. Specifically, I have identified transpersonal psychology as such a science and have couched this study within that field's use of terminology as well as its precepts and empirical knowledge developed to date.

As well, this introduction stated that the purpose of the study was to explore the call to higher consciousness and expressed the added hope of helping counsellors and educators address individuals' needs either through referrals or through their own professional competency in the field of human development.

Following this, I provided definitions for several terms used in highly specific ways in this paper as well as terms with which the reader may not be familiar. The transpersonal field and humanistic fields of psychology contributed most of this terminology.

Finally, I set out boundaries beyond which the content of this study does not apply, limitations of this study and its design, and identified my pre-existing worldview, or set of assumptions, which impacted every aspect of this study from the topic itself to use of phenomenology as method of inquiry.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to this study. It begins with a section describing theoretical and empirical work by Wilber (1983) in which he correlated several of the most important Eastern and Western developmental models of the structures of human consciousness. The section following provides a useful, construction of individual human consciousness. Examples of literature that refer to the

call to higher consciousness follow and then studies that explore professional competency to assist and support human development. The chapter will end by mentioning work in the area of transpersonal counselling principles and techniques.

Chapter 3 will provide the reader with a thorough description of reasons for choosing qualitative research as the general approach, the kind of data that to be collected, and how the transcendental-phenomenological method chosen for this study fulfills the principles of mandalic science, the epistemological basis of this science, and how the particular procedures of transcendental phenomenology were applied.

Chapter 4 contains an extensive thematic analysis of the interviews and other data provided by the four main participants to this study.

Chapter 5 then provides a composite structural description of participants' experiences, which is followed by a composite textural-structural synthesis of the phenomenon. These descriptions are respectively intended to give a stripped-down view of the capacity of consciousness to bear the phenomenon and a general sense of how the phenomenon translates into lived experience, removing individualized context. The chapter discusses whether these results fulfilled the overall purpose of the study as well as the limitations of this research as a whole. I then discuss the findings of chapter 4 as they relate to and distinguish themselves from the literature reviewed in chapter 2. The discussion continues with implications for counsellors and educators, suggestions for future research, and an exploration of the relevance of these findings to me personally and professionally. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarizing the entire study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of chapter 2 is to review literature relating to transpersonal psychology, particularly the development of human consciousness into transpersonal stages and the felt call towards those stages that can arise from transcendent experiences. This section begins on the broad level of theory with a synthesis of Eastern and Western developmental models of human consciousness. Then one researcher's depiction will show how structures in individual consciousness relate to stages of development. In its tight connection to the first model, the latter sheds light on what may happen within as individuals develop higher and higher states of consciousness.

Next this chapter described empirical studies that refer to the call to higher consciousness. One case presented describes the destabilizing effect on personality of an overzealous response to the call and effective therapy that required an understanding of transpersonal processes. Then follows a look at the roles of authenticity, legitimacy and authority, three important concepts in evaluating contemporary contemplative disciplines and professional competence.

The last portion presents theoretical and technical writings that give glimpses of pathology and human development from a transpersonal point of view.

The purpose of this chapter, in other words, is to search the literature for previous research and theoretical formulations about the significance that transcendent events might have in stages of human development, which include and exceed the personal.

Developmental Models of Human Consciousness

Wilber's fundamental and pioneering insights have made him one of the most important theorists in transpersonal psychology. Wilber (e.g., 1983, 2000a, 2000b) used analytic techniques to pare away contextual and cultural details in many frameworks of human development. In this way, he was able to identify underlying structures of consciousness. These structures found agreement with the works of the 'perennial philosophers' over the last three thousand years, as described by Wilber (2000b):

The core of the perennial philosophy is the view that reality is composed of various levels of existence - levels of being and knowing - ranging from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Each senior dimension transcends but includes its juniors, so that this is a conception of wholes within wholes within wholes indefinitely, reaching from dirt to Divinity. (p. 5)

Wilbur (1993a) emphasized that the hierarchy of structures is not linear. The interrelations of the stages are more accurately thought of as an "increase in wholeness and integrative capacity" (p. 54). In other words, structures occur in a "ranking of orders of events according to their holistic capacity" (p. 54), reminiscent of much loved childhood sets of Russian stacking dolls, where each one stood inside of and was included in the next larger one.

Wilber (2000b) co-situated existing hierarchical streams, or lines, of consciousness according to the basic structure exhibited by their stage. The correlation of basic structures with specific streams permitted correlation of Eastern and Western, ancient and modern, psychologies to give the fullest range of human development explored to date.

Table 1 sets out Wilber's (2000b) correlations between basic structures and separate streams in the development of consciousness.

TABLE 1: Correlations between Basic Structures of Consciousness and Lines of Self Stages

<i>Basic Structures of Consciousness</i>	<i>Cook-Greuter's Line: Self-Sense and Characteristics</i>	<i>Maslow's Line: Hierarchy of Needs</i>	<i>Erikson's Line: Psychosocial Stages</i>	<i>Wilber's Line: Stages of Spirituality</i>
<i>Sensorimotor: matter to sensation</i>	Presocial: autistic	Physiological	Trust versus mistrust	Archaic
<i>Sensorimotor: perception</i>	Presocial: undifferentiated	Beginning of Safety	Autonomy versus shame and doubt	Archaic-magical
<i>Phantasmic-emotional: exocept impulse/emotion</i>	Symbiotic: confused			
<i>Phantasmic-emotional: image</i>	Symbiotic: confounded	Safety	Initiative versus guilt & anxiety	Magic-mythic
<i>Phantasmic-emotional: symbol</i>	Impulsive: rudimentary			
<i>Representational mind: endocept</i>	Impulsive: self-labelling	Belongingness	Industry versus inferiority	Mythic-literal
<i>Representational mind: concept</i>	Self-protective: basic dichotomies & concepts			
<i>Concrete operations: rule/role early</i>	Rule-oriented: early roles	Self-esteem	Identity versus role confusion	Rational-universal
<i>Concrete operations: rule/role late</i>	Conformist: simple roles			
<i>Concrete operations transition</i>	Self-conscious: introspection	Self-actualization	Intimacy versus isolation	Integral-holistic (global)
<i>Formal operations: early</i>	Goal-oriented: historical self			
<i>Formal operations: late</i>	Conscientious: many roles	Self-transcendence	Generativity versus stagnation	Nature mysticism: shamanic, yogic, gross-realm unity
<i>Formal operations: transition</i>	Individualistic: relativity of self			
<i>Postformal operations: vision-logic: early</i>	Autonomous: self as system	ego transcendence	Integrity versus despair	Deity mysticism: luminosity, saintly, subtle-realm unity
<i>Postformal operations: vision-logic middle</i>	Ego-witnessing: self as construct			
<i>Postformal operations: vision-logic late</i>	Construct-witnessing: self transparent	Formless mysticism: cessation, causal unity (Underhill: <i>dark night of the soul</i>)	versus despair	Nondual mysticism: constant consciousness (Underhill: union)
<i>Postformal operations: psychic: early & late</i>	Universal-cosmic: ego transcendence			
<i>Postformal operations: subtle: early & late</i>				
<i>Postformal operations: causal: early & late</i>				
<i>Postformal operations: nondual: early, middle, & late</i>				

Note. From Correlative Basic Structures (partial); Cook-Greuter's Self-Sense and Characteristics; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Kohlberg's Moral Judgment; Wilber's Stages of Spirituality," by K. Wilber, 2000. *Integral Psychology*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., pp. 197-211. Copyright 2000 by Ken Wilber. Reprinted with permission of the author, August, 2004.

Basic structures form the left-hand vertical column. A basic structure of consciousness is a deep psychological patterning of thought, feeling, and perspective. It is considered selfless (Wilber, 2000a), simply a developmental space, a potential, until a self “appropriates these rungs, or *identifies* with them” (Wilber, 1983, p. 277) and expresses its needs and interests through them. In other words, from the platform of a structure in consciousness, I make sense of events and create value systems in each context of my life. Stage theorists hold that levels are non-reversible and development occurs in the direction of ever-higher degrees of inclusivity and complexity of understanding.

Streams of consciousness on the other hand refer to stages of development that occur as the self undertakes specific functions. Wilber (2000b) stated that there are:

...some two dozen relatively independent developmental *lines* or streams. These different developmental lines include morals, affects, self-identity, psychosexuality, cognition, ideas of the good, role taking, socio-emotional capacity, creativity, altruism, several lines that can be called ‘spiritual’ (care, openness, concern, religious faith, meditative stages), joy, communicative competence, modes of space and time, death-seizure, needs, worldviews, logico-mathematical competence, kinaesthetic skills, gender identity, and empathy - to name a few of the more prominent developmental lines for which we have some empirical evidence. (p. 28)

The charts from which Table 1 has been drawn delineate stages derived from more than 84 individual and research teams both academic and traditional (such as, yogic *tantra* and *mahamudra*) hierarchies. The sample of four streams shown in Figure 1 demonstrates that streams take on different, more inclusive, and complex character as they evolve through the basic structures of consciousness. Developmental stages, whether of structures and streams, have certain characteristics in common. For example, they describe discontinuous rather than incremental change. Developmental psychologist John Flavell (1971, as cited in Cole & Cole, 1993) suggested that the emergence of a new stage involves “qualitatively new patterns development” (p. 9). He also suggested that the

transition from one stage to the next is rapid and “marked by simultaneous changes in a great many...aspects of behaviour” (p. 10). Cook-Greuter (in Miller, M.E., & Cook-Greuter, S.R. (Eds.). (1994)), speaking about the ego development stream, shown in the second column of Table 1, commented that vertical change is rare but, when it does occur, “the whole previous meaning system is transformed and restructured into a new, more expansive and inclusive self-theory” (p. 121). Stages in streams supplant previous stages whereas stages in structure envelope and include previous stages. Cook-Greuter’s research provided an example of self-concept in the Autonomous stage: “I am a well-balanced professional human being, definitely on the path of self-actualization and self-fulfillment.” In the next two higher stages of this stream, collectively known as “Construct Aware,” self-concept became very different, “I am simple and complex. Medium and small (oh yeah? what does that mean?). Everything, if I believe I create my reality.” Whereas focus in the Autonomous stage was on rationality and being the most one can be,” in the Construct Aware stages, the focus has changed to exploration of consciousness and how experience is constructed and the goal is “to be aware” (p. 136). In other words, the higher perspective yielded a less definite, and more questioned concept of self, a radically altered and more inclusive self-conception.

As Wilber (2000b) pointed out, stages cannot be skipped. Each level is important and provides a stable base for expansion to the stage that follows. This means that transformational events inserting themselves at the mythic level will likely provoke development into the rational (formal operations) level but not beyond that until the rational is well integrated into the personality. Integration of a stage requires thorough understanding, acceptance of, and ability to verbalize its precepts in lived experience, and implies complete identification with that stage before outgrowing it. Once the identification process is complete, the person becomes able to see that they are not their current worldview. In other words, the individual becomes able to differentiate between self and behaviour. Differentiation leads to reintegration and re-identification at the next

higher level. And the process continues: identification, integration, awareness, differentiation, and re-identification at the next level of expansion.

In non-pathological conditions (specifically, in the absence of Alzheimer's disease), holarchies are non-reversible. For example, a person who perceives the world at a rational level will not suddenly revert to magical reasoning. In my practice as an addictions counsellor, and in my personal life, I have seen Twelve-Step programs provide crucial support and developmental opportunities to members. Further, understanding the principles of these programs will expand or contract in congruence with various stages of development. For example, a person with fairly concrete operations or thinking might understand and accept concepts literally and uncritically, without questioning how their individual life experience affects their interpretations. People in post-formal stages approach Twelve-Step concepts with more complex, perceptive mental operations. Carnes (1993, p. v) cited Step One: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable." A concrete understanding of powerlessness would have a literal, less reflective aspect, perhaps akin to the idea that the problem is the alcohol itself, the problem was in the bottle, a belief belonging to a stage of development, incidentally, which gave rise to prohibition. At post-formal stages, there is wider scope. This step can be understood multi-dimensionally and self-reflexively; for example, multi-dimensionality led to a broader understanding that dozens of factors lead to powerlessness and unmanageability including biological (e.g., altered brain chemistry), psychological (social, environmental, and emotional issues), and spiritual (e.g., loss of existential meaning and connection). Self-reflection gives insight into the role every individual takes in constructing the most relevant meaning of powerlessness and unmanageability for themselves. In fact, step guides are specifically set out to guide an exploration of issues through self-reflection on a multi-dimensional plane; as such, the Twelve Steps are effective developmentally.

At the stage of formal mental operations, a cause-and-effect, reductionist, rational-empirical condition of being, many people have difficulty with Twelve Step programs, even though people operating out of stages both less and more developed more often benefit enormously. Intense irritation has met any suggestion I have made of attending Twelve-Step programs. The benefits of the program seem to be outweighed by their frustration. One client expressed irritation with AA's "superstition" (any mention of a Higher Power or God) and said that, "People just wallow in self-pity. It brings me down and makes me want to drink." The latter comment addresses the incomparable opportunity that Twelve Step members have to share their experience, strength, and hope, in other words, their personal struggles and meaningful realizations, and receive understanding and respect for their personal recovery and growth. This process can also be seen as a remarkable opportunity to accomplish developmental tasks. So true is this phenomenon that an organization called "Rational Recovery" seems to speak directly to the formal operations stage of development. It states emphatically "...that the Twelve-Step program is entirely bogus, devised by irresolute drunks who translated their own character defects into an ersatz religion ... a facade of pious, self-righteous..." (www.rationalrecovery.com). The group accepts causes and cures for addiction that are based on cognitive and physical models alone. A striking feature, moreover, is a propensity for angry emotions as demonstrated above rather than the coolness usually associated with rationality.

This reaction finds at least partial explanation in Wilber (2000):

All first-tier memes [pre-personal and personal levels] resist the emergence of second-tier consciousness [transpersonal levels – into which the trajectory of development leads]. Scientific materialism [formal operations, Rational Recovery, etc.]...is aggressively reductionistic towards second-tier constructs, attempting to reduce all interior stages to objectivistic neuronal fireworks. (p. 230)

In jumping to second-tier (transpersonal) thinking, Wilber (2000b) explained, “One can, for the first time, vividly grasp the entire spectrum of interior development” (p. 51). Not inconsequentially considering the foregoing description of first-tier structures, traversing into second-tier structures brings people into contact with a presence that, “as Aquinas would have said, ‘All men and women would call God’” (Wilber, 1983, p. 94). At most, direct experience of deity occurs only in momentary peak states until the dominant structure of consciousness is high into transpersonal realms. However, such peaks, momentary may they be, are often sufficient to provoke, to motivate, forward movement.

In the present study, such developmental understanding was intended to contribute to a fuller understanding of the impact and role that peak experiences can have on individuals. An example might be a young person who has a peak experience while in Erikson’s stage of “identity versus role confusion” (Wilber, 2000b, p. 203). This stream correlates with the late Formal Operations structure of development. He or she might seek to identify with strong organizational authority, perhaps benign, perhaps not, in order to end their confusion. Being aware of the youth’s stage of consciousness and the various streams of consciousness would assist in understanding the youth’s choices.

As well, Wilber (2000b) emphasized:

It should be remembered that virtually all of these stage conceptions - from Abraham Maslow to Jane Loevinger to Robert Kegan to Clare Graves - are based on extensive amounts of research and data. These are not simply conceptual ideas and pet theories, but are grounded at every point in a considerable amount of carefully checked evidence...in First, Second, and Third World countries. (p. 40)

In summary, the basic structures of consciousness framework provided a means for Wilber (2000b) to organize both Eastern developmental psychologies (e.g., Buddhist Theravedan, Zen, and Mahayana and Vedantic psychologies) and Western developmental psychologies as set out in Table 1: Cook-Greuter’s Self-Sense (p. 205), Maslow’s

Hierarchy of Needs (p. 212), Erikson's Developmental Dilemmas (203), and Wilber's Stages of Spirituality (p. 209).

Independent validation of Wilber's (2000b) correlative scheme has been attempted, although more work needs to be done. Thomas, Brewer, Kraus and Rosen (1993) conducted a rigorous study with a criterion samples comprising elderly people from India England *recognized as spiritually mature by their communities*. They collected finely-detailed data through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Hermeneutic analyses revealed that half of each sample had attained transpersonal levels of development. The authors noted, "...the qualitative similarity in the interview protocols of the respondents from both samples who were at the higher spiritual levels" (p. 80). The authors appear to be warranted in their conclusion that, "Such [cross-cultural] similarities argue powerfully for the claims of perennial philosophy of the deep mystical unity of the world's spiritual traditions" (p.80).

In another study investigating human development of consciousness, its nature, direction, and the effectiveness of transpersonal techniques, Tori (1999) of the California School of Professional Psychology conducted a controlled study of 306 teenaged girls (average age 16.2 years). The girls were divided into three equal groups such that demographics were equivalent among the groups. The groups attended a Roman Catholic three-day retreat, a Buddhist three-day retreat, or no retreat. The Roman Catholic program comprised liturgical sermons, prayer, sermons, and discussion groups. The Buddhist retreat consisted of complete silence with alternating periods of sitting and walking meditation, a sermon and paying respect to (in contrast to worshipping) the Buddha. Tori did a factor analysis from Gough's Adjective Checklist. Significant effects on all three dimensions resulted:

1. *Emotional maturity* - the retreat groups' positive change was significantly greater than that of the control group and the Buddhist group improved significantly more than the Roman Catholic group;

2. *Achievement* - again, both retreat groups improved over the control group (which declined somewhat) and here the Roman Catholic group's scores were marginally higher than those of the Buddhist group;
3. *Sympathetic warmth* - both retreat groups improved significantly over the control group with the Buddhist group improving significantly over the Roman Catholic group.

I have included this study because significant increases in emotional maturity, achievement, and sympathetic warmth in adolescents attending retreats indicate structural development. Tori (1999) made the point that the non-theistic aspect of the Buddhist retreat makes its results applicable to secular (psychological) settings and “for those who find faith in unknown entities unsatisfying” (p. 126).

While Western mystics (Underhill, 1930) have long been known to attain higher, transpersonal levels of development, the scientific method upon which the field of psychology stands has only recently begun to theorize and study higher areas of human development and adult maturation.

Walsh (1993) also commented on the fact that human potential extends far beyond common knowledge. He referred to *normality* as being “not the peak of human development but rather a form of developmental arrest” (p. 130). Likewise, Maslow (1968, as cited in Walsh, 1993) stated: “Certainly it seems more and more clear that what we call ‘normal’ in psychology is really a psychopathology of the average, so undramatic and so widely spread that we don’t even notice it ordinarily” (p. 130). Normal psychology lies in the range of structures of consciousness where most of us explore ourselves and life; these are stages that will one day be transcended - provided we do not exterminate ourselves in the meantime precisely due to the normalcy of the stage we occupy.

Structures of Individual Consciousness

Assagioli (1976) attempted a definition of the individual structures of consciousness topographically. He created a conceptual map of the patterns of mind that shape our lived experience. His reason in using such a map was, similar to using a road map, was to locate features of consciousness including present location and future destinations.

In Figure 2, both diagrams (popularly known as *eggs*) depict the lower unconscious (1) containing the psychological elements that keep the body functioning, fundamental drives and urges, “many complexes charged with intense emotion” (Assagioli, 1976, p. 17), dreams and imaginations of a primary kind, lower, uncontrolled parapsychological process, including pathological manifestations such as phobias, obsessions, compulsive urges, and paranoid delusions.

The middle unconscious (2) contains psychological parts that resemble normal waking consciousness. Daily activities, thoughts, and emotions stay in this area of the unconscious until they are ready to appear, or circumstances trigger their appearance, to the conscious mind.

The higher unconscious (3) is the structure that contains elements of higher intuitions and inspirations (artistic, philosophic, or scientific), ethical understanding, and urges to humanitarian and heroic action. Higher feelings such as love, gratitude, and generosity as well as qualities of genius and capacities for contemplation, illumination, and transcendence reside here. Assagioli (1976) distinguished the term *higher unconscious* in the theory of psychosynthesis from the Freudian term *superconscious*, as Freud’s drive theory suggested the latter to be formed by psychosexual dynamics in the personality to aid in physical survival. In contrast, Assagioli’s *higher unconscious* corresponds to a developmental space, or structure, is available to all humans, and

represents expanded structures of consciousness towards which our average level of consciousness is evolving.

The field of consciousness (4) represents parts of the personality of which we are aware. The Conscious Self or “I” (5) represents the point of pure self-awareness. This is the centre of consciousness, whereas the field of consciousness is the content - the flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations.

Assagioli (1976) depicted the Higher Self (6), the true or noumenal Self and stated that usually people are inundated with such a flood of mind material in the form of thoughts, feelings, and sensations that we are unaware of the true Self. Generally it requires a contemplative practice, particularly meditation, to quieten the noisy chatter in the field of consciousness enough to permit contact with the true Self.

The diagram also illustrates the Collective Unconscious (7), which surrounds the personality. This structure contains *higher* archetypal patterns in contrast to the *archaic* archetypal patterns residing in the lower unconscious.

Assagioli (1976) stated, “Humans may at times feel subjectively isolated, but the extreme existentialistic conception is not true, either psychologically or spiritually. The outer line of the diagram should be regarded as “delimiting” but not as “dividing” (p. 19). It is for that reason the outer line is broken rather than solid. Assagioli compared the outer line to the membrane of a cell in permitting a constant and interactive exchange of contents. In an osmotic manner, the human personality influences and is influenced by the collective unconscious.

Assagioli (1976) emphasized that, although he depicted two selves, he in no way was implying duality, and stated:

1. *The seeming duality*...Indeed, it is *as if* there were two selves, because the personal self [5] is generally unaware of the other, even to the point of denying its existence; whereas the other, the true Self [6], is latent and does not reveal itself directly to our consciousness.

2. *The real unity and uniqueness of the Self.* The Self is one; it manifests in different degrees of awareness and self-realization. The reflection appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality. It is...but a projection of its luminous source. (p. 20)

Both of these structural diagrams relate to and extend Wilber's (1993b) *Spectrum of Consciousness*. Wilber's model shows the vertical range of consciousness and shows how stream hierarchies express through structures. Assagioli's (1976) model allows a snapshot view of an individual structure of consciousness at one point in time. Assagioli's model answers such questions as, "What's happening inside as a person expands (for example) from *vision-logic* to *subtle mind*?" Assagioli's model is developmental in that sequential versions of it (e.g., Diagrams 1 and 2) portray the ascent of the field of consciousness and the personal self towards the true Self. Thus the reflected self can be portrayed as it becomes more similar to and integrated with the true Self. This depicts, in the individual psyche, the developmental process of Self-realization.

Diagram 1: Ordinary Consciousness

1. Lower Unconscious
2. Middle Unconscious
3. Higher Unconscious
4. Field of Consciousness
5. Conscious Self or "I"
6. Higher Self
7. Collective Unconscious
8. Ray

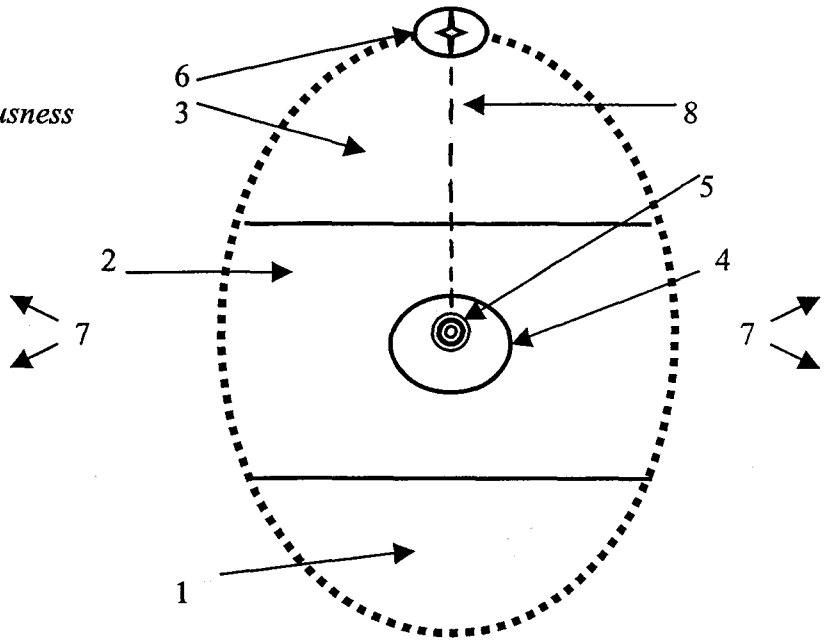


Diagram 2: Ascending Consciousness

1. Lower Unconscious
2. Middle Unconscious
3. Higher Unconscious
4. Field of Consciousness
5. Conscious Self or "I"
6. Higher Self
7. Collective Unconscious
8. Ray

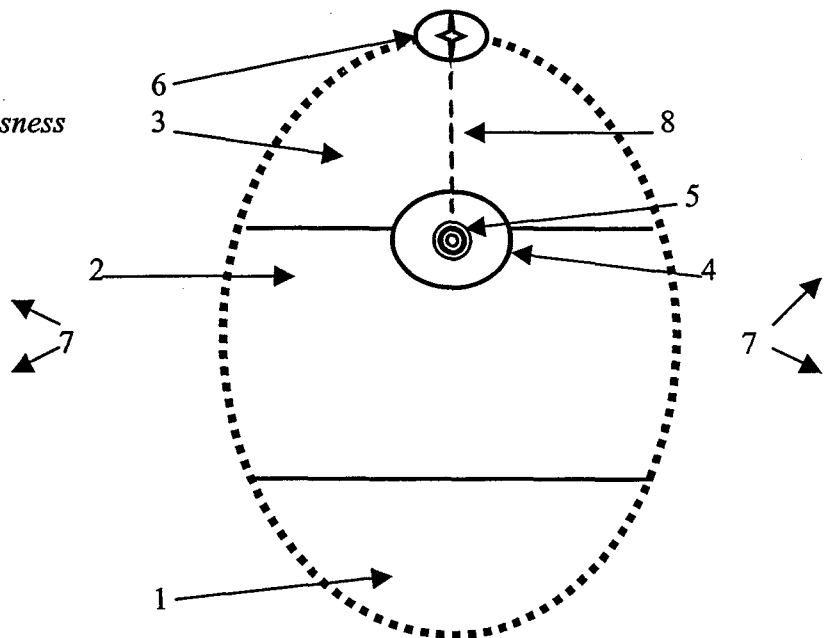


FIGURE 2. Structures of ordinary and ascending consciousness.

NOTE. Diagram 1, c. I, and Diagram 1, c. V, by R. Assagioli, 1986, *Psychosynthesis*, pp. 17 and 200. Copyright 1965 by Psychosynthesis Research Foundation.. Reprinted with permission of the publisher (pending).

Aspects of the Felt Call to Higher Consciousness

Structure

The previous section briefly discussed Assagioli's (1976) theory of personality and revealed a little of the explanatory power of his model. This paper will make a final point with regard to his theory of psychosynthesis. The point is key to the purpose of this study.

To begin, notice that a line connects the true Self with the reflected self. Assagioli (1976) described this feature as follows:

On the basis of what we have said about the nature and power of the Self, it is not difficult to point out *theoretically* how to reach this aim [Self-realization]. What has to be achieved is to expand the personal consciousness into that of the Self; to reach up, following the thread or ray to the star; to unite the lower with the higher Self. (p. 24)

He continued by describing how to accomplish this goal of personal and spiritual psychosynthesis and his work is well worth the effort of study and application. Indeed, one aspect of his statement clarifies, in structural terms, the focus of this study. The psychological *ray* connecting the personal self with the true Self is a visual representation of the felt call to higher consciousness! In fact, my questions asked participants to describe how the true Self appeared in consciousness and how did the ray (that is, the call) feel, sound, or otherwise make itself known; what did the participant do in responding to the call of the Self and travelling along that ray. The ray is the structure of individual consciousness itself the nature and effects of which this research explored.

Motivation

Like Holden (2000), cited in the introduction to chapter 1, Maslow (1973, pp. 275-276) suggested that self-actualization may not only result from but in part be caused by peak or transpersonal experiences. Lukoff et al. (1998) reported statistics

showing that increasing numbers of people engage in some spiritual practice and listed “prayer, meditation, martial arts, tai chi, chanting, and yoga techniques...as well as participation in sweat lodges, goddess circles, and the rituals of many small new spiritual schools... Twelve Step programs and psychospiritually oriented cancer support groups.” Along with this “explosion” of interest in spiritual practices, they cited Gallup (1987) polls showing increases in percentages of people who report mystical experiences of various kinds. Lukoff et al. further drew the points that: (a) as people increasingly engage in spiritual practices, the incidence of spiritual experiences is increasing; and (b) as the incidence of spiritual experiences increases, the numbers of spiritual problems seen in psychotherapy will also grow. Lukoff et al. quoted the Benedictine monk, Brother David Steindl-Rast (as cited in Lukoff et al., p. 16), who described the intensity of experiencing a call of the Self, as a birth pang:

Spiritual emergence is a kind of birth pang in which you yourself go through to a fuller life, a deeper life, in which some areas in your life that were not yet encompassed by this fullness of life are now integrated or called to be integrated or challenged to be integrated. (p. 16)

Brother Steindl-Rast (1993, as cited in Lukoff et al., 1998) referred to the process as *spiritual emergence*. In fact, the call can be much more disruptive in people’s lives than the term spiritual emergence suggests. Grof and Grof acknowledged the disruptive effects of transpersonal experience in terming the upheaval “spiritual emergency” (1989, as cited in Lukoff et al., p. 6).

These authors described a case reported by the well-known psychologist and teacher of meditation, Kornfield (1993, as cited in Lukoff et al., 1998):

An “overzealous young karate student” decided to meditate and not move for a full day and night. When he got up, he was filled with explosive energy. He strode into the middle of the dining hall filled with 100 silent retreatants and began to yell and practice his karate manoeuvres at triple speed. Then he screamed, “When I look at each of you, I see behind you a whole trail of bodies showing your past

lives!” As an experienced meditation teacher, Kornfield recognized that the symptoms were related to the meditation practice rather than signs of a manic episode (for which they also meet all the diagnostic criteria except duration). The meditation community handled the situation by stopping his meditation practice and starting him on jogging 10 miles in the morning and afternoon. His diet was changed to include red meat, which is thought to have a grounding effect. They got him to take frequent hot baths and showers and to dig in the garden [also grounding]. One person was with him all the time. After 3 days, he was able to sleep again and was allowed to start meditating again, slowly and carefully. (p. 11)

What compelled this man to engage in such intense practice? What was his inner experience? What call did he hear that moved him to respond so relentlessly?

Wuthnow (1978, as cited in Alexander et al., 1991) surveyed a random sample of 1000 people in the San Francisco Bay area and explicitly assessed the enduring impact of peak experiences. He found that people who encountered their peak experiences in a “deep and lasting way” (p. 195) reported significantly more often that they led meaningful lives, thought about and knew the purpose of life, and considered themselves to be intelligent, organized and self-confident. As well, “...they also were more likely to engage in some form of meditative practice” (p. 195). The last sentence may support the idea that participants who felt deeply positive about their peak experiences probably also experienced some sort of call to higher consciousness.

Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Authority

The issue of authenticity most directly speaks to the heart of a call to transcend. The reason is this: mainstream North American society through its institutions (educational, legal, etc.) pushes people fairly effectively to mythic and rational levels. See Wilber’s (2000b) *Stages of Spirituality* (Table 1). Up to these levels, society can be deemed an authentic pacer of transformation. For example, society invalidates people whose development arrests at the Wilber’s magic level. People are generally viewed as unintelligent or uneducated when they identify supernatural causes for events that a

person in the rational stage would understand to have physical explanations. However, beyond levels of development in the personal range, society drops out. Development of consciousness through institutional authenticity beyond the formal operations-rational and vision-logic horizon has to be found either on one's own or "in microcommunities of the higher- and like-minded" (Wilber, 1983, p. 253).

Those seeking greater than average transformation must find and demand *authenticity* in programs and institutions. *Legitimacy* and benign *authority* are also important as will be described later.

Microcommunities that offer transcendence can be found in the major religions such as Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Sufi, Hindu, in newer religions such as Scientology and the Branch Davidians (a branch of the 7th Day Adventists) led by David Koresh, psychosocial groups (Synanon), and independent groups such as the Unification Church (Moonies)! How does a participant choose wisely?

Wilber (1983) systematized a method to evaluate psychosocial institutions by analyzing how they deal with the issues of authenticity, legitimacy and authority, as explained in the following paragraphs.

Authenticity

Authenticity measures institutions' degree of and power to effect transformation using a developmental structural analysis which questions what is the highest structural level of mind that this institution can deliver to people who adhere to its practices? Wilber (1983) pointed out that if, for example, the institution's goal level is psychic, subtle, or even causal, its program will entail intensive study and practice: "They [such programs] explicitly rest on a moral foundation...and are at least as difficult to master and complete as is, say, a doctorate" (p. 263). He credited some new (to the West) religions with being "explicitly and structurally in search of that authentic, not merely legitimate, dimension (e.g., Zen, Vedanta, Raja Yoga, Vajrayana, etc.)."

Legitimacy

Legitimacy measures to what degree the institution offers its adherents “a legitimate and legitimizing world view, one that is capable of validating existence on the average expectable level of structural development reached by its members” (Wilber, 1983, p. 252). Legitimacy refers to validation of one’s existence. It is holistic. It applies to adherents and to the institution itself. The purpose of legitimacy is to offer a psychological safety net to stabilize and protect adherents as they pursue higher states.

Authority

Authority is generally found to be benign to the degree that it (a) effects development, and (b) is phase-temporary or phase specific. A teacher is usually a good example of a benign use of authority. The teacher’s purpose is to assist the student’s development or transformation and once that has occurred, the teacher’s role with that student is finished. As Wilber (1983) pointed out, the student is then free to concur with and even teach what he or she has learned from the teacher or to contradict the teacher’s opinion. In benign situations, teacher and student resume equal social status once the lessons are over.

Belonging to the subject matter of authenticity, legitimacy, and authority, the following issue is also of critical importance: those who have had a profound transpersonal experience often rely on intuition and feelings for guidance rather than informed analysis. Doing so is potentially confusing and dangerous. Wilber’s (1983) emphasis on the three components described above seems prudent as it gives participants objective means to measure both effectiveness and safety.

Other than a general description of the social inequities and harmful effects of such extreme cults such as the Moonies and Branch Davidians, there is no independent research that subjects organizations to this kind of rational structural analysis. The

present study intends to examine these concepts with participants. How have the institutions and programs from which they sought solace and development served them? What could be improved in their service?

Transpersonal Counselling

Boorstein (2000) is one of many psychotherapists who describe themselves as transpersonal psychotherapists (e.g., Assagioli, 1976; Clark, 1998; Holden, 2000; Lukoff et al., 1998; O'Connell, 1991). His personal evolution took him from being a traditional psychoanalyst to a transpersonal or spiritual psychotherapist.

Boorstein (2000) agreed with Wilber's (2000b) assertion that spiritual and emotional dimensions of personality are separate streams of development. He explained that dealing with emotional and spiritual development independently freed him to treat emotional problems with therapy designed specifically for that purpose while concurrently assisting the patient's spiritual development with different techniques. However, Boorstein commented that often techniques he uses on the spiritual side relieve emotional symptoms as well. For example, he assigned *A Course in Miracles* as a bibliotherapeutic spiritual intervention for a man suffering a lifetime of severe paranoid schizophrenia. Although this patient would likely always need antipsychotic medication, reading *A Course in Miracles* and practising its exercises enabled him to organize his psychotic thinking in a more kindly and understanding way.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this section expounded on the problem, which is the focus of this research. Wilbur's (2000b) Spectrum of Consciousness clearly depicted developmental levels of the structures of human consciousness. He correlated the evolution of these basic structures with developmental lines or streams formulated by many leading theorists in Western psychology. Table 1 shows the structures as Wilber

correlated them with Cook-Greuter's Self-Sense, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Erikson's Developmental Dilemmas, and Wilber's own Stages of Spirituality. Wilber's diagram highlighted that Western psychological thinking has extended little beyond the personal level. Transpersonal psychology was introduced as the fourth force in psychology.

Structures of consciousness as Assagioli (1976) displayed them gave a visual representation showing internal differences between personal and transpersonal levels of development as a closer connection of the conscious self to the true Self. Assagioli's work also illustrated the focus of this inquiry. His diagram conceptualized the psychological structure of a felt call to higher consciousness as a ray connecting the personal self with the Higher Self. Lukoff et al. (1998) assisted by describing the intensity with which a person might respond to the call to transcend.

Wilber's (1983) theories on the issues of authenticity, legitimacy, and authority illustrated another avenue to explore in participants' responses to the call to higher consciousness.

Finally, I mentioned the work of Kornfield (1993, as cited in Lukoff et al., 1998) and Boorstein (2000) as examples of transpersonal psychotherapy.

The present research differs from previous research by investigating the psychological structure and its lived experience that moves people to pursue paths to transcendence. Other research has described the external evidence of this motivation; the present research, phenomenologically, bracketed the internal experience and looked at its structural form and contextual meanings.

Chapter 3 will describe how the qualitative approach and specifically phenomenology began with Descartes (as cited in Moustakas, 1994). It also describes advances that Wilber (1983) brought to the epistemological ground upon which psychological and all other dimensions of research stand.

Chapter 3 will then discuss how this study's general approach, which is qualitative, and its research design, transcendental phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994), fulfill the requirements of a mandalic science. The chapter then describes sampling procedures, data collection, instrumentation, the pilot study, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 4 will introduce each of the four participants to the research and present results derived from their interviews and written materials in the form of eight major themes. Examples of the metaphors participants used to understand and explain their spiritual experiences and process follow.

Chapter 5 serves to discuss the findings of chapter 4 and their implications in relation to the research question. Then follows a composite description of the structure of the phenomenon and a descriptive synthesis of both the composite contexts and structures of the phenomenon of responding to a felt call to transcend. How the findings relate to the literature reviewed in chapter 2, limitations of this research, and implications for educators, counsellors, and future research follow. I then discuss the relevance of this research to my professional and personal values and close by summarizing the study.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Chapter 3 begins by identifying and clarifying the rationale for choosing qualitative research as the general approach to investigate the phenomenon of feeling called to higher consciousness.

Description of my personal epistemology furthers the line of reasoning for choosing the qualitative approach. The explanation telescopes from historical and general to present and specific. It begins by taking the reader back to Descartes' (as cited in Cottingham, 1986) original inspiration regarding what constitutes knowledge and how to gather knowledge. I point to the specific focus of Cartesian dualism as methodological and distinct from ontological. I demonstrate how Cartesian thought authenticates qualitative approaches to research.

Focussing then on the application of Cartesian thought, I describe Wilber's work, identifying universal principles for the systematic gathering and verifying of data in physical, intellectual, and spiritual investigations. Wilber's delineation of three categories of science follows to show that each dimension of human experience can be explored by defining how such universal principles of data acquisition and verification apply to that dimension. I attempt to elucidate the categories of science through explanation, diagram, and example. The explanation shows that the research design chosen for this study had to be effective within the domain of *mandalic science*.

My personal epistemology continues by providing reasons for choosing transcendental phenomenology, formulated by Moustakas (1994), as the specific design of this study, and discussing how this design meets the demands of mandalic science.

The chapter then focuses on describing participant selection using a *criterion sampling* method described by Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) and recruitment of the pilot participant and four main participants to this research.

A description of the materials comprising the data collection ensues along with a description of the equipment used to obtain some of the data.

Next I describe the instruments used to collect data, comprising the questionnaire and list of questions in the general interview guide. I demonstrate how the general interview guide permitted individually planned protocols to be created for each participant.

Describing the pilot study proceeds, along with details of what I learned in the pilot study that helped to decide where my application of the design needed modification.

The chapter culminates with a comprehensive description of how transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) helped to analyse the large amount of data gathered from the pilot participant and four main participants. The steps introduced are epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, communalization for the purpose of internal validity, and creation of descriptions of the phenomenon through a composite structural and a composite textural-structural synthesis. Steps informed by Anderson and Arsenault (1998) follow: triangulation of the various sources of data for the purpose of further internal validity, and leaving an audit trail of documents and chain-of-evidence record of how decisions were made, both of which contribute to interrater reliability.

General Approach

The general approach taken to explore the problem on which this research focussed is termed *qualitative*. As defined by Anderson and Arsenault (1998), “This is a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain, and bring meaning to them” (p. 255).

Anderson and Arsenault (1998) pointed out as well that the qualitative researcher tries to “understand phenomena and interpret the social reality from two perspectives, *emic* and *etic*” (p. 125).

Etically, it is vital for the researcher to understand the worldview of each co-researcher or co-participant as if standing in his or her shoes; that is, to have an analogous experience by empathic joining. Emically, it is vital for the researcher to understand the lived experience of each participant “within the theoretical and conceptual framework of the phenomena” (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998, p. 125), then “reconsider the participant’s perspective with the goal of trying to define, unravel, reveal, or explain their world” (p. 125).

Why qualitative research? Two benefits substantiating my rationale are: (a) it permits deep exploration and description of the lived experience of a phenomenon, and (b) it reveals what is significant to those who experience the phenomenon. As well, after numerous qualitative forays into an area, a meaningful role for quantifying research may arise and that role will be most usefully based on the discoveries of qualitative research.

Considerations of external validity are not within the purview of qualitative research.

Personal Epistemology

Like most schoolchildren, I was first introduced to Descartes (as cited in Cottingham, 1986) as the *Continental Rationalist* and the *Father of Western Science*. His *cogito ergo sum* constituted a flash of self-recognition (literally knowing himself again). He used a rational method to arrive at that point: he doubted the existence of everything whose existence could in any way be doubted. He saw that intuition, insight, was the prime locus for obtaining knowledge and that it did not however occur stepwise as he applied his method; it occurred in a flash.

Assagioli (1976) stated that “the direct experience of the self, of pure *self-awareness* - independent of any “content” of the field of consciousness and of any situation in which the individual may find himself - is a true, “phenomenological” experience” (p. 5). Using a rational method, and, “like Augustine, some twelve centuries

earlier, Descartes found evidence of God in human consciousness: even doubt proved the existence of the doubter” (Armstrong, 1994, p. 300). Descartes (as cited in Cottingham, 1986) explained:

By ‘intuition’ I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses, or the deceptive judgement of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding...the indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason. (p. 26)

As to obtaining knowledge from external objects he stated in his First Meditation (as cited in Heffernan, 1990), “Therefore we will perhaps well conclude from these things that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all the other disciplines that depend on the consideration of composite things are indeed dubious” (p. 93).

Descartes asserted that the prime focus of reality and knowledge is insight, the individual’s ability to recognize experience.

Cartesian duality therefore indicates that a singular reality is manifested in different ways, that two basic fields emanate from the one cause that Descartes defined as God. In the Third Meditation, he stated (as cited in Heffernan, 1990):

By the term God I understand a substance: a substance infinite, independent, most highly intelligent, most highly powerful, and by which both I myself and everything else that is extant—if something else is extant—have been created. (p. 137)

and:

...until it would finally come down to the ultimate cause: which will be God. (p. 145)

and, as to human nature:

I, that is, a mind—which alone I now accept as me—am. (p. 147)

This profound knowledge – of the existence of God and of the personal self – came not from evidence of the senses but from a phenomenological event held as proof by the actions of rationality: “And therefore it remains that this idea [God] would be innate in me, just as the idea of me myself is also innate in me” (as cited in Heffernan, 1990, p. 147).

How Descartes described his concept of God and that all things come from God is reminiscent of the Hindu concept of the human soul as a drop in the ocean of Infinity. His phrase “if something else is extant” (as cited in Heffernan, 1990, p. 137) expresses a similar supposition of the unity of being.

Descartes’ (as cited in Heffernan, 1990) epistemology defined two very different methods to obtain knowledge: intuition to investigate objects of the mind and scientific measurements to investigate external objects. The necessity Descartes saw for obtaining knowledge through these distinctly different procedures arose not because of a dualistic division in reality. The necessity arose because objects extended in space are too complex for our fallible senses, especially since they may not exist at all but be a space-time trick of the senses. The best we can do with external objects is to measure them and maintain doubt about our measurements. Descartes held that only clear and direct cognition and mathematics can be trusted as real.

The important point is that Descartes (as cited in Heffernan, 1990) advocated a methodological duality not an ontological duality! The methodological duality was simply a pragmatic response to the fact that objects are (or may be) extended in space. In other words, increasingly mediated ways of acquiring knowledge are required when objects appear extended in space. Conversely, the prime method of acquiring knowledge is by direct experience, which Descartes said is its own proof.

I have examined Descartes’ (as cited in Heffernan, 1990) realization of the necessity for two different methods of obtaining knowledge, namely, intuition for objects of the mind and scientific measurement for physical objects. Now, I wish to point to the

fact that Cartesian epistemology is directly reflected in and expanded upon by Wilber (1983). Wilber, doubly and extensively trained in the art and science of contemplation as well as Cartesian scientific methodology, realized the necessity for three methods to obtain knowledge. An important realization here is that neither Descartes nor Wilber proposed an ontological division. Rather, they proposed methodological dualism (Descartes) or triadism (Wilber) to elicit, recognize, and verify different categories of data (which Wilber termed *sensibilia*, *intelligibilia*, and *transcendelia*) that emerge from different fields of experience (Spirit, Mind, and Matter, respectively). This framework is discussed and illustrated more fully below.

Wilber's (1983), premise is that data is "*any directly apprehended experience* (using *experience* in the broad sense, as prehension or awareness)" (p. 39). From there, he explained that to collect and verify data in any field of knowledge, we must comply with three universal principles of data verification: (a) *Instrumental injunction*. In order to know something in a particular field, you must use methods to acquire that knowledge that are appropriate for that field; (b) *Intuitive apprehension*. Having followed the instrumental injunction, we must be cognitively open to or apprehend the immediate experience of objects in that field. As Wilber (1983) stated, "...it is the defining nature of data (in any realm) that, when they present themselves to awareness, they do so in an immediate, intuitive, and apparently self-validating fashion..." (p. 45). The caveat expressed by the word "apparently" necessitates the next principle, that of verification or confirmation; (c) *Communal confirmation*. Having completed the injunctive and apprehensive "strands," we confirm the objects apprehended, that is our data, with others who have also completed the injunctive and apprehensive "strands" for that field. However, 'confirmation' is a judgement, a concept, and, like any concept, it is inseparable from its opposite. Thus, disconfirmation may result if either of the first two steps were carried out in a faulty manner.

Assagioli (1976) proposed an epistemology similar to Wilber's (1983) when he asserted that a true phenomenological experience is an inner reality, which can be "empirically verified and deliberately produced through appropriate techniques" (p. 5). His statement bears striking relevance to the three universal principles of data acquisition and verification delineated above by Wilber.

Moreover, Polkinghorne (1989) stated that phenomenological philosophy:

...holds that experience [in this study, a felt call to higher consciousness] involves the operation of active processes that encompass and constitute the various contents that become present to awareness. These contents include not only the objects of perception but also those of memory, imagination, and feeling. (p. 41)

Wilber (1983) posited that these universal principles of data acquisition and verification adapt in characteristic ways to each of the three dimensions of space-time in which we operate. As a result, it is useful to delineate three separate modes of knowing. Stated another way, there are three methods of acquiring and proving data that correspond to and reveal each of three domains of experience - Matter, Mind, and Spirit. Further, it is thus clear that these three methods of acquiring and proving data arise from and must conform to the universal principles listed above.

Data acquired in the domain of Matter, Wilber (1983) posited could be referred to as *sensibilia*, given that such data arise in consciousness through direct apprehension of the physical senses. Data acquired in the domain of Mind, he referred to as *intelligibilia*, given that they arise in consciousness through direct apprehension of mental faculties or intelligence. Data acquired in the domain of Spirit, he referred to as *transcendelia*, to identify that they are given into consciousness through direct spiritual apprehension.

Following is an illustration of these principles in the material world. Here, we gain knowledge of the cause of foot and mouth disease in cattle, pigs, and sheep by: (a)

Instrumental injunction: we use our physical senses to observe: with our eyes, we observe mouth and foot blisters; with eyes and microscopes, we identify seven types of virus; (b) Intuitive apprehension: we open to the immediate and intuitive awareness of seeing blisters and viruses in the tissues; and (c) Communal confirmation: having used our eyes and microscope and having seen what was there, we confirm the blisters and viruses apprehended—our data which we can categorize as sensibilia—with others who have also used their eyes and microscopes and have also seen the blisters and viruses. With these other researchers, we can confirm or prove our data. If, however, our microscope had no lens and we used our eyes to look at healthy instead of infected animals, we would have collected data that said there was no evidence of the disease in that herd. Others who followed the injunctions diligently, and apprehended the blister and viral data, would disconfirm our data and should then seek confirmation from yet other researchers willing to apply the principles of data verification. (This is an example of strand #5 in Figure 3.)

Wilber (1983) discussed at length three domains of knowing and illustrated these domains and their interconnections in epistemology with the diagram on the following page.

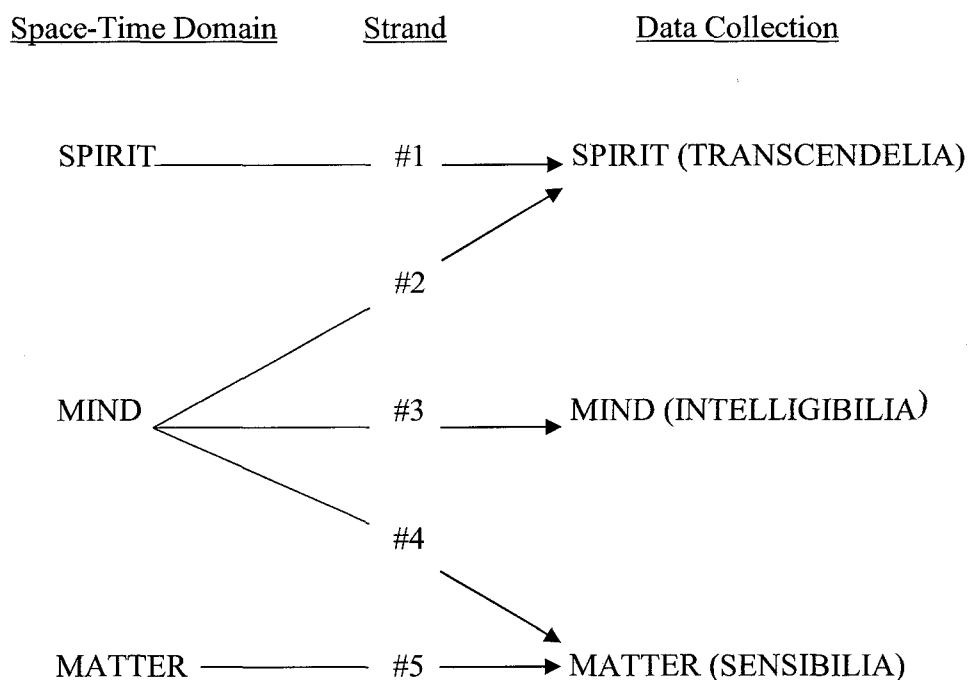


FIGURE 2. Three categories of science.

Note: From “Three Categories of Science” by K. Wilber, 1983, *Eye to Eye*, p. 67. Copyright 1983 by Anchor Books. Reprinted with permission of the author, August, 2004.

Proof in each space-time domain requires application of the universal principles of data acquisition and verification. Descartes’ (as cited in Cottingham, 1986) sudden realization of his own existence described previously can now be understood with finer precision. Descartes saw his experience in the domain of mind as opposed to Matter. However, Mind has been further discriminated by Wilber (1983). Descartes’ experience now appears to be an example of a datum gathered by using an instrumental injunction common to the gathering of knowledge in the domain of Spirit (meditation). As well, he became cognitively open to the immediacy of his experience, which he described arriving as a “flash” (intuitive apprehension). In writing about his discovery, he provided to others

willing to apply these principles the opportunity to confirm or disconfirm this datum, this transcendelium, for themselves (communal confirmation).

Relating to the particular branch of science used in this study, Wilber (1983) pointed to the unique capacity of Mind to perform cognitive operations with the use of such tools as categories, symbols, and words. Thus we can look at all data types, transcendelia, intelligibilia, and sensibilia, and apply the powerful tool that is the rational mind to count, categorize, conceptualize, and represent them and we can rely on the many uses of these manipulations. Rational manipulations depicted in modes #2 and #4 he asserted do not constitute proof in the fields of Matter or Spirit themselves. Proof flows only through operation of the three universal principles described earlier and depicted as modes #1, #3 and #5; in other words, proof is characterized by an immediate experience of apprehension in the field.

The data in this study arise in the space-time domain of Spirit, as shown above and as defined below:

A datum may be a single spiritual intuition, a mass illumination, a particular Gnostic insight, or overall satori – all such transcendental data are directly perceived or intuited...not complexity but immediacy or givenness most defines a datum. (Wilber, 1983, p. 41)

It is important to note for now that the data collected and analyzed in this study are transcendelia, given that they are directly apprehended experiences in the space-time domain of spirit rather than mind or matter.

Wilber (1983) pleaded for a systematic and more comprehensive scientific methodology. Applying the universal principles of data verification outlined above — instrumental injunction, intuitive apprehension, and communal confirmation—to the three space-time domains of knowing, he suggested the following epistemological framework and terminology:

1. By “science,” let us explicitly mean any discipline that conscientiously follows the three strands of data accumulation and verification, whether in the realm of *sensibilia*, *intelligibilia*, or *transcendelia*.

2. When the data comes from, or is grounded in, the object domain of *sensibilia*, let us speak of empiric-analytic...sciences. Modes #4 and #5 in Figure 3.

3. When the data comes from, or is grounded in, the object domain of *intelligibilia*, let us speak of mental-phenomenological, rational, hermeneutical, semiotic, or dialogical (dialogue) sciences. Mode #3 in Figure 3.

4. When the data comes from, or is grounded in, the object domain of *transcendelia*, let us speak of translogical, transcendental, transpersonal, or contemplative sciences. And let us carefully and decisively divide these into two classes:

a. Mandalic¹ sciences - the attempt by the mind to arrange or categorize, however inadequately, the data of *transcendelia*. Mode #2 in Figure 3.

b. Noumenological or gnostic sciences - the methodologies and injunctions for the *direct* apprehension of *transcendelia* as *transcendelia*; direct and intuitive apprehension of spirit, noumenon, *dharmakaya*. Mode #1 in Figure 3. (pp. 72-73)

For the purposes of this study, then, the object domain is Spirit and the data are *transcendelia*. The participants in this study described *transcendelia*, their directly apprehended experiences within the domain of Spirit. Their methods of gathering *transcendelia* constituted noumenological or gnostic science, as above.

For this research, however, I employed the other branch of transpersonal science – mandalic science. To do so, I applied my mind to the data (*transcendelia*) in an attempt to arrange, to categorize, and to discover if any patterns in the consciousness of humanity would reveal themselves.

¹ mandala – 1 a symbolic circular figure representing the universe in various religions. 2 *psychol.* such a symbol in a dream, representing the dreamer’s search for completeness and self-unity. [Sanskrit *mandala* ‘disc’] (Thompson, D. (Ed.). (1995). *The concise Oxford dictionary* (9th ed.). p. 827.)

Specifically, I followed the steps of Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology research design as the instrumental injunction for both data collection and analysis. Description of this method follows shortly. Intuitive apprehension involved an immediate and direct experience of the thought symbols representing participants' stories and interpreted meanings pertaining to those stories. Communal confirmation meant that each step in the injunctions set out in the research design and every apprehended symbol of thought pertaining to data and interpretation became open to evaluation and replication by others. This open process is intended to invite others either to confirm or disconfirm this study's validity.

Given that the work of Descartes (as cited in Cottingham, 1986, and Heffernan, 1990), Wilber (1983), Assagioli (1976), and Polkinghorne (1989) is supportive of the qualitative approach and mandalic science, this chapter will proceed to discuss the research design, sampling of participants, data collection, instrumentation, pilot study, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

As mentioned above, the research design of this qualitative study is transcendental phenomenology, formulated by Moustakas (1994).

Transcendental phenomenology is a term that Moustakas (1994) borrowed from Husserl. Its purpose is "to emphasize subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and provide a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge" (p. 45).

Moustakas' (1994) use of the word transcendental must be distinguished from the phenomenon of spiritual transcendence also important to this study. The latter refers to the development of the structures of consciousness from personal/egoic levels to levels

transpersonal/transegoic. Moustakas however used the word *transcendental* because “it moves beyond everyday understanding to the pure ego in which everything is perceived freshly” (p. 34) and the word *phenomenology* because “it utilizes only the data available to consciousness - the appearance of objects” (p. 45). More particularly, a phenomenon is “what shows up in consciousness” (p. 26).

He emphasized that *transcendental phenomenology* is science because “it affords knowledge that has effectively disposed of all the elements that could render its grasp contingent” (p. 45) and it is logical in its assertion that the only thing we know for certain is that which appears before us in consciousness, and that very fact is a guarantee of its objectivity (p. 45).

And so, in this elucidation of *transcendental phenomenology*, Moustakas (1994) paraphrased the inspiration that underlay Descartes’ (as cited in Heffernan, 1990) formulation of the scientific method itself.

Moreover, *transcendental phenomenology* fulfills the requirements of *mandalic science* (Mode #2 in Figure 3) as outlined above by Wilber (1983) given that the data collected arose from first-hand transcendent experiences. In other words, the data collected is *transcendelia*. And the analysis is an “attempt by the mind to arrange or categorize, however inadequately, the data of *transcendelia*.”

Transcendental phenomenology directly addresses the problem (p. 2) put forth in this study by permitting a deep exploration of the nature and lived experience of a call to higher levels of consciousness both structurally and in context, that is, physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually.

The nature of the phenomenon is its essence or structural meaning and the “lived experience,” its textural meaning.

It seemed likely that both meanings of the phenomenon, its structure and its context, could be explored deeply through this particular design. However, it also seemed possible that participants might be hindered by the effects of *state dependent memory*.

This refers to events occurring in one state of consciousness being difficult to remember in another state of consciousness (Davison & Neale, 1996). It also occurred to me that participants might have difficulty finding words to express their experience. This subject lies outside the range of practised social conversation. I chose Moustakas' (1994) design as it permits depth of inquiry and reflection that seemed sufficient to overcome these limitations in some measure.

Sampling of Participants

Criterion sampling (Gall et al., 1996) was the method used in this study to select the single pilot study participant (hereinafter referred to as the "pilot participant") and four main study participants (hereinafter referred to as "participant," "participants," "main participant," or "main participants"). Responses to a brief questionnaire by each of the selected individuals matched important criteria. Criteria essential to this study were: (a) experience of and ability to describe a transpersonal event, and (b) awareness of and ability to describe an inner call to expand consciousness.

Operational definitions of terminology preceded the items on the questionnaire to assist in semantic consistency.

At the advice of my committee, I limited my recruitment of participants to the student body, faculty, and researchers on campus at a Pacific Northwest university.

After receiving university administration permission to post advertisements for participants, I pinned posters on bulletin boards in several buildings on campus and, as well, provided several posters to office administration staff at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society who then placed them in individual mailboxes at the Centre. Each of the first three individuals responding to the advertisement was conducting research at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society. They contacted me within the first week

of receiving the advertisement. Just over a week later the fourth participant sent me an e-mail message to say that she had seen the poster on a bulletin board in the main building of the Department of Educational Psychology, where she was at that time enrolled in a Masters program.

I thanked four other individuals who had applied and let them know, supportively, that they have not been selected and the reason for this decision. Two had experienced profound life-altering events, which, however, were not mystical by nature. Two people met all criteria but responded to the advertisement after the pilot and core sample had been chosen. One other individual applied and we corresponded several times. It seemed possible that she would meet the criteria but communication stopped and I have not heard from her since.

After initial e-mail contact with each of the individuals who did in fact participate in the study, we arranged where and when I would deliver a manila envelope prepared for each person that contained a letter, two copies of a participant consent form, and the questionnaire. The letter explained that I would be encrypting names to protect anonymity. I asked each person to choose a name and suggested that, if preferred, I would be willing to choose a name that would be subject to his or her approval. Two chose their own names and two approved names that I selected. The letter also requested that participants first read and sign one copy of the participant consent form, keep one for their records, then respond in writing to the questionnaire. In each instance, we arranged by e-mail where on campus I could pick up the completed documents. This procedure worked smoothly without exception.

The participant consent form advised participants that their consent would involve (a) responding in writing to a questionnaire (b) providing, to the extent they were willing, copies of journal entries, letters, poetry, art, or other personal materials to help explain their experiences, (c) taking part in an individual, audiotaped interview at a site of their

choice, where I would ask questions to help them elaborate on their responses to the questionnaire, (d) reviewing my thematic analysis and interpretation of their experiences, and (e) if they chose, based on the outcome of the thematic analysis, providing written or telephoned feedback to correct my understanding.

The only difficulty with the documents provided in the package concerned the amount of time allotted for the interview. One participant suggested that an hour would be insufficient and suggested 1.5 hours. I agreed, by e-mail, and, in fact, this was fortunate. As it turned out every interview required fully 1.5 hours.

Data Collection

Data collected from the pilot participant and the four main participants consisted of (a) five sets of written responses to a questionnaire; (b) personal and other written work – the pilot participant and two main participants submitted poetry and prose to further express their struggle on the journey and concepts awakened by their transcendent experiences; two main participants referred me to peer-reviewed research (Watson, 1994; France & Rodriguez, 2004), which assisted my greater understanding through a model of developmental change from spiritual emergence to spiritual emergency and describing the therapeutic value of directed nature activities, respectively; (c) verification data, that is, explanations that either confirmed, corrected, or expanded upon my thematic analysis of the original data, provided by the pilot participant and three main participants; this data was in the form of e-mail messages, telephone calls, and letters; and (d) transcripts of five guided interviews, which took place in private, on-campus rooms. The pilot participant and I interviewed in a room reserved at the main Library, two participants and I interviewed in a room reserved on the top floor of the Education building, and two

participants and I interviewed, at their wish, in their offices at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society. I recorded the interviews on a Harris Lanier Dictaphone transcriber (120V, 60H, 0.3-Amp, Model P-129), with foot pedal (to control play-back when transcribing) and microphone, both hard-wired. I rented the transcriber from an office equipment store. I simultaneously recorded the interviews on my own small *Optimus BBS Stereo Radio Cassette Player*, with built-in microphone, to provide backup in case the main equipment failed. As it turned out, Harris Lanier Dictaphone gave excellent audio reproduction and the back-up cassette player was not needed, although the extra effort was worth it for peace of mind. I transcribed both sides of an audiotape for each of the five interviews plus a little more than a quarter of a tape more for two of the interviews. This produced verbatim transcriptions that totalled 207 pages of transcript for the pilot participant and four main participants.

Instrumentation

This section will describe both the questionnaire and the interview protocol referred to under *Data Collection* above. My hope is to provide sufficient detail to enable replication of this study, whether in whole or in part. Replication studies are valuable as they extend the collection of data and provide either confirmation or disconfirmation of previous studies, all of which enriches the knowledge base in any field.

To state the above in line with Wilber's (1983) third universal principle of data verification, *communal confirmation* (or disconfirmation) can occur when researchers apply the first two principles of data verification (see page 40 above). Providing details is intended to empower others to follow the specific steps of this research and thus recreate how I carried out the first principle of data verification, *instrumental injunction*, for this

field. Those other researchers will then be able to apply the next principle, *intuitive apprehension*, and then proceed to the third principle, a communal comparison and consideration of results for the purpose of increasing knowledge.

To proceed, I first list the topical questions on the questionnaire and describe briefly the procedure by which they were presented to potential participants. I then describe the *general interview guide* (Patton, 1990, as cited in Gall et al., 1996) and what I hope to discover by asking the questions in the questionnaire and in the guided interview protocol. To more specifically address my intentions, I then shed some light on sources of these questions; that is, what are a few of the literary sources that inspired my intentions. This is followed by a list of the questions in the general interview guide. I explain how the responses to the questionnaire assisted me to prepare a general interview protocol for each participant. The process protocol follows describing not the interview *content* (the questions) but how the interview itself was done. The process includes considering possible reactions to the interview and information about next steps in which participants would be involved.

The questionnaire asked participants to provide brief written answers to four questions (name, age, contact information, and whether or not they required special consideration at time of interview for reasons of physical health) and descriptive written answers to four open-ended topic questions. The topic questions asked respondents to describe:

1. A vividly remembered transpersonal event.
2. An inner longing for further transcendent experience or to develop a higher level of consciousness.

3. Any changes they made in response to this longing or call to transcend including organizations or individuals with whom they connected, and how their efforts worked or did not work to help them respond to their call.
4. Anything they could say that might be helpful for others who also are called.

After receiving questionnaire responses, I screened each for criteria required for inclusion in the study, as described earlier. I contacted and thanked each person and together we scheduled interview times and dates. The pilot participant and main participants were each invited to choose or ask me to choose a code name to protect their anonymity. Thus was established the criterion body of pilot and main participants (Renegade, Anna-Brita, Mark, David, and Ayla).

The interview itself complied with the principles of the “general interview guide” described by Patton (1990, as cited in Gall et al., 1996), who stated that the goal of qualitative procedures in general is to “help respondents express their view of a phenomenon in their own terms” (p. 309). The goal is to capture deep elements of all that is real and true for each participant. Depth of truth, and heuristic detail, that is, detail that guides present and future research, are gifts of qualitative procedures generally.

The “general interview guide” (Patton, 1990, as cited in Gall et al., 1996, p. 309) specifies topics to be explored with each respondent. The procedure, however, predetermines neither the order nor the wording of the topics. The flow of questions is intended to assist in the telling of the experience. Shaping the interview language makes it possible to join empathically with participants to have an analogous experience.

Through topics covered in this research in both the open-ended portion of the questionnaire (above) and the general interview guide (below), I attempted to discover, in general, the issues that participants faced as they responded to the call to higher consciousness. More particularly, I intended the topics to explore (a) the nature of the transcendent experience(s); (b) the nature of the felt sense or inner call; (c) how participants responded to the call; (d) physical, psychological, spiritual, financial, and

social impact on participants' of hearing the call; and (e) the nature of support participants received or would like to have received.

These topics arose from two sources: literature that has guided and expanded my understanding of the phenomenon and experience of the phenomenon occurring for other people in my life and for myself (both of which sources are beyond the scope of this research). While it is not realistic to list all the literature that informed each of these questions, as my interest and readings have occurred over many years, some of the more important sources warrant mention.

The first question in the questionnaire asked for a description of a transcendent event personally experienced by the participant. This question was informed, *inter alia*, by an excellent translation of *Siddhartha: An Indian Tale* (Hesse, 1999), which provided an in-depth description of the phenomenon and specifically reflected the author's knowledge of the Upanishads, the ancient commentary on the Vedic scriptures (Hesse, p. xvii). It was equally inspired by first-hand descriptions of transcendence contained in *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Yogananda, 1998). These sources were especially helpful for interviewing participants as they expanded my ability to verbalize inquiries about transcendency and to approach the topic objectively.

As far as the first seven questions of the general interview guide are concerned, descriptions of spiritual calls occur throughout Hesse (1999), Underhill (1974), and Yogananda (1998). For example, Hesse referred to it as a "thirst" (p. 7) and, when the hero deviated from an accurate path, "deep in his breast, a soft and dying voice" (p. 63). Underhill spoke of the same in reference to the psyche, "Urged therefore by the cravings of feeling or of thought, consciousness is always trying to run out to the encounter of the Absolute, and always being forced to return" (p. 45). And again the call is referred to as a craving in Yogananda, who, after describing an experience of cosmic consciousness bestowed upon him by his master, said, "The divine experience comes with a natural inevitability to the sincere devotee. His intense craving begins to pull at God with an

irresistible force” (p. 170). These literary sources inspired the questions 1-7 in an attempt to explore how these particular people felt and what they thought about their experiences. Participants’ responses to these questions provided rich descriptive detail as well as informing me what terminology and perspectives would assist our interpersonal connection during and after the interview.

The tenor of questions 8-20 was intended, in part, to explore what it is like to live on this physical/social/psychological plane and deal with all that a spiritual call does to a person. Watson (1994) delineated well the continuum of effect such inner experiences may have on the central nervous system, producing activation varying from “fluid, mild, easy to integrate” to “dynamic, jarring, difficult to integrate” (p. 16). Boorstein (2000) spoke frankly about psychological effects, saying, “These other dimensions can present an enticing escape to avoid doing the psychological and/or physical work of mastering the problems of existence in our space-time world.” Questions 10 through 17 specifically explore the ways in which participants have managed to live multi-dimensionally; that is, how have they continued to build mastery in, or even just deal with, this space-time continuum while being triggered transcendently.

Further, questions 9-20, help to explore Grof and Grof’s (1989, in Lukoff et al., 1998) assertion that, due to transcendent events, individuals may “feel tremendous anxiety, have difficulty coping with their daily lives, jobs, and relationships, and may even fear for their own sanity” (p. 7). These questions were intended to bring these issues to the ground of personal reality.

Following then are the questions on the general interview guide that I posed in semi-structured in-depth interviews to the five adults whose questionnaire responses met the criteria:

1. Please describe in your own words the experience of feeling called to higher consciousness.

2. When did you first become conscious of such a call?
3. Do you still hear this call? Where are you or what are you generally doing, if anything, when you most feel this call?
4. How did the call make itself known to you? Do you hear or see or feel it?
5. From whom does this call come?
6. How do you think this call to higher consciousness is connected to the transcendent experience you wrote about in the questionnaire?
7. Has it peaked and tapered off or is it stronger now? How do you account for this?
8. What actions have you taken as a result of this yearning to transcend? What are some of the ways you have responded to it? How do you intend to continue to respond?
9. What do you think is being asked of you?
10. Has experiencing and responding to the call affected your physical health in any way?
11. What do you feel emotionally when you are most aware of feeling called and when it is less present in your life?
12. What effect has this call had on your family life, and socially?
13. What has it been like to share your experiences with others?
14. Have you experienced any financial costs or benefits as a result of how you have responded to the call? How do you feel about and make sense of what has happened in your life financially?
15. Have you moved geographically for any reason connected to feeling this call?
16. What about your choice of career? Has it in any way been affected by your devotion to this experience?
17. What are some of the pastimes you enjoy? How do you relax and care for yourself?
18. Given all that you have experienced as a result of this call, how could counsellors or educators have helped the most?
19. What kinds of assistance would most help you now?
20. Is there anything that we have not talked about that you wish to tell me?

I posed these questions in different ways for each participant based on my reading of their responses to the questionnaire. From each participant, I learned specific terms and expressions that had not formerly been part of my lexicon. Each interview reflected the participants' own language and experiences. This new language benefited my ability to interview participants with an empathic sense of their experience.

For Anna-Brita, for example, I gained valuable information by focussing specifically on her words that something "moved" when she smelled the First Nations sacraments at the Art Gallery. As well, when Anna-Brita stated that what she knew was "not enough yet," I asked, "What will you be like when it is enough?" Her response gave me a sense of how she is changing and the direction of her journey. This information is specific to Questions 8, 9, 14, 16, and 18.

From Mark's questionnaire responses, I learned that "higher consciousness" might not universally express developmental expansion and growth. For him, "lower and deeper" held the meaning of expansion, integration, and growth. As well, the word "seeking" in terms of spirituality did not work at all. It connoted very business-like, product-oriented activity. As a result, I was prepared to spend extra time exploring the concepts of seeking and goals with Mark and the effort yielded valuable information about spiritual journeying.

With David, responses to the questionnaire revealed intense childhood experiences of transcendency and serious medical issues in adulthood. Preparation of the guided interview involved focussing on early developmental struggles attendant on transcendent experience (Questions 2 and 7), and how to inquire into any perception he might have of a relationship between his journey and his medical condition (especially Questions 10, 16, and 17).

In Ayla's responses to the questionnaire, I noticed a nearly complete absence of religious terms. Preparing the guided interview protocol involved using Ayla's own psychospiritual terminology, such as "love," "truth," "beauty," "flow," "joy," "Presence,"

and “all-pervading depth underneath form.” Specifically, I asked her to expound on how her experiences related to the “existential questions of maturity” and the “ego-traps” to which she referred. Her replies provided information especially relevant to Questions 7, 8, 9, and 11. As well, asking her to describe “her hidden potential” elicited information in Ayla’s own language for Question 9.

Following the interviews, I debriefed supportively with participants and expressed willingness to assist if they felt a need for professional help for issues arising from this research by making available a list of registered clinical counsellors. I offered to pay half the cost of the first session with a counsellor selected from the referral list. None of the participants requested this support.

In addition, participants were reminded that I would: (a) mail an analysis and interpretation of their data to them, and (b) contact them to verify the data analysis.

Pilot Study

Anderson and Arsenault (1998) emphasized the importance of “testing a questionnaire to ensure that the wording will be understood” (p. 188). They further emphasized, “It is doubly important to validate an interview protocol” (p. 188) for the flow of topics as well as to ensure that the physical set-up and recording arrangements do not distract attention from the interview itself. The pilot study conducted prior to the main portion of this study fulfilled all of these purposes, although conducting a pilot had not been my original intention.

In the summer of 2002, prior to posting the campus advertisement to recruit participants, a close friend (code name *Renegade*) listened as I described the intended research. He stated emphatically he wanted to participate. He was not a university student at the time, so I could not include him in the main sample. Fortunately, however, my

committee and Renegade both agreed to his inclusion as a pilot participant. I followed the procedures of data collection, analysis, and verification with Renegade in the same manner as I did with the main participants. This became a golden opportunity to practise and refine my methodology and analysis.

Procedurally, I became more alert and sensitive to how participants experienced the data-gathering and analysing procedures. Specifically, I became more aware of the emotional and intellectual impact in how I worded the questionnaire, the interview protocols, and the thematic analyses. Thanks to Renegade's willingness to describe his reactions, in writing, at each stage, I was better able to empathize with participants' process. I became aware of how each question I posed and the participant consent form affected him. Extrapolating from Renegade to the main participants helped me to see that, although each one could have different reactions, some sort of reaction could be present nevertheless. And it became clear to me that the reactions might not be mild. I was, after all, being granted access into intimate subject matters.

The document Renegade wrote to express his reactions to each page of the questionnaire was entitled *First Impressions*. As I indicated above, this document sensitized me to the impact of my statements and questions on participants. *First Impressions* resulted in changes not to the content of the questionnaire but to the interview itself.

In that regard, Renegade described how it felt to read the questionnaire's introductory page, "My sense of being honoured is so keen right now that I'm hesitant to open the questions. There is a sense of sacred trust and treasure in this opportunity."

Amusingly, Renegade proceeded to describe his sense of "comical disappointment" when he eventually did open the first page of the questionnaire and found only "mundane definitions" and the set of questions asking for name, age, and contact information.

From there, he described his reaction to the first topic question wherein I asked participants to describe a personal experience of mystical, divine, or transcendent nature and its personal meaning. His words were, “Head on!!! Boom!!! You only want the Universe in a nutshell, right?” He at first thought it would take a week to describe his experience. As well, he said, “The experience was and is so precious to me that to encapsulate it in written words is to risk offence, betrayal of trust and having the sacred made trivial.” At that point, I began second guessing myself and wondering if I had badly underestimated what I was asking my participants to do. However, Renegade later stated that once he had begun to write the experience, he realized it would not take long to complete:

It was after all a finite experience though of the infinite. The experience itself was of limited scope and of very brief duration. A surprising volume of information (both head and heart information) was covered in that brief time but it was nevertheless singularly focused on imprinting a new (to me) and specific pattern, of perception and therefore direction.

I experienced relief at this point as well as deeper appreciation of how challenging it could be for participants even to think about describing their experience. I was relieved also that what could be expressed, that is, not the inexpressible aspects, could be expressed more or less within the estimated time frames.

He proceeded to say that over the past 30 years I was the sixth who had asked about his spiritual experience. “Such things are so remote from everyday life that they present an element of risk both to the teller and to the hearer.” As a result, I added to the general interview guide a question, listed as #13 above, asking what it was like to share these experiences with other people. This and the challenge of describing the infinite as if it were finite, described above, led to an important component in the sixth theme,

spiritual process, and the sub-theme, “How Participants Journey,” regarding the role of sharing spiritual concepts and experiences with others.

Renegade’s reaction to the second question surprised me. This question asks participants if they “experience an intense inward longing for further transcendent experience, or to become more constant at a higher level of consciousness.” His first impression was that the question “trivializes the experience” and he explained how much larger his experience was than simply a longing for more transcendent events or personal development. Renegade’s reaction was the only one I received of that kind to that question. I considered dropping or re-wording it but ended up keeping the question because it was central to gathering information about the call itself. However, his reaction prepared me for the adverse reaction I received from Mark to a similar concept, that of “attaining spiritual goals” (Question 3).

The pilot study in this case taught me that I would need insight and great attention to nuance and individual history when investigating the call, and also what subtle meanings could attach to the call’s motivational power and that these subtleties might reveal important elements in spiritual process.

The last two questions posed little problem for Renegade and, in fact, he indicated that he enjoyed answering them.

For this, and the fact his story is rich and relevant, and for much more, I am very thankful that Renegade joined as co-researcher in this study.

Data Analysis

The steps that formed the analytical backbone of this research were informed by both Moustakas (1994) and Anderson and Arsenault (1998) and include epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, communalization, composite

structural description, composite textural-structural description, triangulation, and generating both an audit trail and chain of evidence.

Moustakas (1994) described *epoche* as a necessary first step in phenomenology. It requires the researcher to put aside judgements and ordinary, everyday ways of seeing the world. The purpose of doing this is to enter into the participant's world as truly as possible in order to discover the phenomenon as he or she experienced it. To accomplish this, I put aside my own theories and experiences and others' theories to the extent I was able. This allowed me to step into each participant's world and discover what was both meaningful (noemic/textural) and of essence (noetic/structural) to that person. I gained a sense of joining each participant and attaining an empathic sense of their experiences. In other words, the practice of *epoche* empowered this research with an understanding of data as it arose within each participant's own worldview.

Epoche cleared the way for the second step Moustakas (1994) recommended, phenomenological reduction. The purpose of this step is to "derive a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon; the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness" (p. 34). In this study, phenomenological reduction took place in four steps, namely, bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering the horizons into themes, and organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textural description.

I bracketed the research in my own consciousness in order to focus on the phenomenon itself and not on my perceiving experience. For example, as far as possible, my attention rested on the transcendelia, the data, presented by the participant, that is, the feelings, actions, and thoughts of the participant. As far as possible, I removed my attention from any feelings and thoughts I might have about interacting with that person, such as feeling shy or unsure, or the exciting possibilities I saw in what they were describing.

In order to assist the bracketing procedure during analysis, when I noticed myself having a personal reaction to the data, I would journal those thoughts and feelings under a

code number. This turned out to be a simple step with three-fold result: (a) it ensured I could retrieve my thoughts and feelings, (b) it effectively relieved my mind of having to retain these thoughts and feelings in memory, and (c) it permitted me to pay clear attention to the phenomenon I had enclosed safely within attentional brackets.

To horizontalize, I treated every statement as having equal value and then deleted statements irrelevant to the topic and statements that were repetitive or overlapping. Thus only the *horizons*, “the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon” remained (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). To accomplish this, I reviewed each transcript the first time simply to read it. I then reviewed it and circled pertinent statements, phrases, and paragraphs.

At the height of this horizontalizing activity, a list developed consisting of 44 equivalent, coded themes of textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon.

Clustering the horizons into themes began to occur on the next review as I read only the marked portions of the transcript to get a sense how the content related to the topic. This yielded a strong sense of patterns and themes. On next reviewing and giving empathic attention to each marked section, I was able to assign a number to each marked section to correspond to a tentatively identified theme or label. On yet another review, I still treated all marked sections as equal in value, that is, horizontal, but checked for good correspondence between the passage itself and my assignment of a thematic code number.

From this step, I was able to move towards discovering which themes were not in fact horizontal but rather formed subcategories under more general themes. By proceeding in this manner, eliminating redundancies and realizing how themes interrelated, I eventually distilled eight major themes, each of which had one or two layers of pertinent sub-themes. For example, one of the 44 horizons was “how to engage and stay on a spiritual path” and another was “types and descriptions of invitations to

spiritual journeying as distinct from episodic spiritual events.” Eventually, it became apparent that the data collected under these items belonged in one category. I had thought the latter would be more concrete and specific, but it became apparent that these participants lived with heightened awareness of their actions and attitudes; their behaviour was imbued with meaning and purpose that in effect consciously invited the journey. I was then able to eliminate redundancy in having named two separate themes and amalgamate the data under the theme, “How to Journey.”

Organizing the themes into a coherent textural description entailed returning to transcript material in order to create a succinct summary for each participant such that their textural descriptions, that is, contextual details, organized themselves thematically. Under one theme, for example, text could be excerpted from the beginning of the interview, 20 pages later, and 5 pages after that, as well as from the questionnaire and any other writings they may have submitted. This process can be seen to override how the material originally occurred in order to retrieve and display the essence of the phenomenon in a coherent and meaningful way.

Moustakas (1994) described imaginative variation as systematically varying reports as to *what* occurred (textural meanings) in order to determine *how* the phenomenon occurred (structural meanings). In other words, the purpose of this step was to discover more clearly which universal structures (time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self and others) must be present for the phenomenon to elicit the same feelings and thoughts in the participant. The *essential* features of the experience could then emerge from features of the experience that were merely *contextual*.

As an example of imaginative variation, a participant might report feeling uncharacteristic frustration and inability to concentrate when co-workers talk about the previous night’s hockey game. By asking if the essence of the experience would remain the same if, instead of a hockey game, the topic was completion costs for a project or

what to have for dinner, a researcher will realize that this noetic or essential feature of feeling called to higher consciousness in this instance is a sudden lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on *any* ordinary life event. The noemic or textural features are that they were co-workers speaking as it could have been others speaking in an ordinary manner, they were talking about a hockey game as it could also have been another activity of ordinary consciousness, and the fact the game was played last night as the same thing could happen at another time and it would also raise frustration.

In this way, I discovered essential aspects of feeling called or pulled in the direction of transcendency, those aspects which must be retained in order for the event to exemplify the phenomenon.

A well-known example of invariant structure was vividly described by Moody (2001) in his investigation of near-death experiences:

Despite the wide variation in the circumstances surrounding close calls with death and in the types of persons undergoing them [that is, textural meanings or *noema*], it remains true that there is a striking similarity among the accounts of the experiences themselves. In fact, the similarities among various reports are so great that one can easily pick out about fifteen separate elements which recur again and again in the mass of narratives that I have collected (pp. 11-12).

In this excerpt, Moody identified 15 elements that constituted the structural meanings or noesis of the phenomenon under investigation. These 15 elements occurred “again and again” regardless of the “wide variation in the circumstances” surrounding them, that is, the textural meanings or noema.

Moustakas (1994) said the communalization step is where, “We check with others regarding what they perceive, feel, and think. In the process...we may revisit the phenomenon and discover something new that alters our knowledge of the thing” (p. 95). Further, Husserl (as cited in Moustakas) described communalization as a step towards internal validity through reciprocal correction. Communalization occurred within the

interviews themselves as I checked my understanding directly and immediately with the participant. Communalization occurred as well when participants reviewed the transcript of their interview and at least one version of the analysis. From four of the participants, I received two or more replies supplying verification and correction of my understanding reflected in the analysis. For example, Ayla emphasized that she disagreed with my depiction of her parents as the good father and bad mother. From her feedback, I learned that, although her mother tended towards criticism and her father towards support, her mother was present and involved in her life whereas her father was often absent and she often felt neglected by him. I would not have discovered these textural dynamics without the communalization step.

In the step where the composite structural description is developed, I induced and described, in general terms, the bare phenomenon, its essence, stripped of non-essential or contextual detail. This became the purest description of the structural components in human consciousness capable of delivering the experience of hearing and following a spiritual call. Thus, the closest this investigation could come to actually seeing the structural component in consciousness was by revealing their action.

The composite textural-structural synthesis was achieved by integrating the *textural or noemic* aspects, that is the variety of unique circumstances (people, places, situations, and their meanings, with the *invariant or noetic structure* of the experience, which constituted the eight themes and their sub-themes. The result was a unified general statement of both aspects. This synthesized statement culminated what Moustakas (1994) called “an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p. 100).

Triangulation meant that I verified interpretations of one set of data with evidence from separate sources of data (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). The several sources comprised written narratives, interview transcripts, psychological theories, as well as additions and corrections obtained by returning to participants for verification of interpretations (Moustakas, 1994).

As recommended by Anderson and Arsenault (1998), I kept an audit trail of copious records in order that they be available for evaluation by other researchers. The records include written narrative responses to a questionnaire sent to all participants, poetry, and prose given to me by several participants, interview transcriptions, and my own marginalia, and field notes of communications and reflective activities. As explained by Anderson and Arsenault, this step opens the door to interrater reliability.

I have also retained a chain-of-evidence record of steps and decisions concerning aspects of the research process as they have unfolded over the past three years. Chain-of-evidence records demonstrate the cognitive links between the data and analysis that led to decisions, such as the organization of themes and sub-themes (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998).

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described qualitative research as the general approach taken in this research and my personal epistemology citing the supportive work of Descartes (as in Heffernan, 1990). I discussed the common misunderstanding that Descartes proposed a dualistic reality by showing that, rather, he proposed dual methods of knowing a unitary reality: one method for that which we experience directly in consciousness and another to gather knowledge about objects extended in space.

Wilber's (1983) contributions followed. His methods of verification outlined scientific methodology for physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of inquiry. Having set the stage, this chapter then described the branch of science, mandalic, used to investigate the phenomenon of a call to higher consciousness kindled by transcendent experience. Both the qualitative general approach and the research design, transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), were described. Consideration of the historical and methodological rationale for using transcendental phenomenology to explore the topic ensued.

Explanations about procedures for participant enlistment, data collection and instrumentation followed. I then described the pilot study that tested these procedures and produced refinements to my understanding of the effect of this research on participants as well as refinements in the general interview guide. I described procedures for data analysis, verification, and elucidation. Description of these steps anchored the research design in the concrete and specific details of the study. Through these steps, I anticipated that this exploration of consciousness would elucidate why and how people responded to spiritual calls and what helped them to do so.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 have paved the way for this research by introducing the call to higher consciousness that arises from transcendent experience as its focus, by exploring how the research question relates to a gap in transpersonal knowledge, and by giving philosophical and pragmatic consideration to the methodology selected to conduct the investigation.

CHAPTER 4

Results

To begin, I shall briefly describe each participant in order to lend a sense of demographic diversity, of personal individuality, and of unique life context.

A series of eight themes heading 44 sub-themes or horizons emerged from the data: (a) participants invited transcendent experience, intentionally and unintentionally, through conditions that overwhelmed their ability to cope accompanied by attitudes such as openness and self-honesty; (b) purposes in transcendent events for healing, integration, instruction, personal development, and inspiration, confirmation, and affirmation; (c) description of transcendent events in form, power, immediacy, sensory aspects, memorableness, and emotion; (d) description of immanence as a special type of transcendent event perceived within the material world; (e) concepts about transcendent events considering early conceptual influences with specific focus on a presence in these experiences of which all participants were aware; (f) spiritual process, its characteristics, motivation, methods developed by participants, and a sense of mission in the world; (g) changes in development in respect of self, the world, and life itself; (h) professional help in responding to the call, focussing on the issues of authenticity, legitimacy, and authority. These horizons show the noetic meanings, that is, the structure in consciousness of the experience.

Within each broad thematic section, I describe related sub-themes and then portray the noetic character and noemic detail of each participant's lived experience. The latter are the very personal ways in which this experience occurs in the mosaic of life circumstances and issues each person calls their own. By this point, the reader will have a

full sense of the individual and overall structure of the experience as well as how these structures appear in different contexts.

In addition, although not listed as a theme, participants used original metaphors and similes and I have included these.

Let's begin then with a picture of the participants who generously gave of their time to share significant and highly personal states of consciousness.

The Participants

Anna-Brita

Anna-Brita, age 52 years at the time of interview, described her mother's nurturance of her intellectual and emotional development. She was taught to value and respect both First Nations and mainstream cultures. From ages 7 to 11 years, she enjoyed United Church Sunday school. She and her family then moved to beautiful, remote mining area on a mountain river in the Pacific Northwest. The family was isolated and Anna-Brita described a close connection to her mother and family. She developed spiritually, read the Bible, and loved reading and playing with church teaching materials.

When Anna-Brita was 12 years old, her mother disclosed knowledge to her of important First Nations ancestors, a secret guarded for generations to protect the family from racism. With that disclosure, Anna-Brita lost any sense of belonging in either culture. She suffers from this loss and has experienced it as dangerous to her self-esteem. Her brother succumbed. He is chronically and seriously at risk mentally and physically and she worries about him.

Shortly after learning the family secret, Anna-Brita had her first transcendent dream. Her spiritual awareness increased dramatically although not to the point of journeying spiritually in a conscious way.

Anna-Brita spent 23 years in an abusive marriage. She lived in denial about the danger of staying but was terrified she would be injured or killed if she tried to leave. During that time, meaning in life came in the form of self-education, a transcendent vision when she was 32 years old, powerful nature images, and raising, loving, teaching, and learning from her four sons.

The death of Anna-Brita's mother set in motion a series of realizations. Her mother's mortality helped her to realize her own mortality, which led to the realization that if she were to remain married, she would die without realizing her hopes and dreams. She remembers how it felt as her strength, courage, and healing increased to the point that, at 41 years of age, she was finally able to leave her husband. Seven years ago, her healing increased again as she relocated to another city, still protecting her identity. She believes repression was the defence that stalled her emotional development while she was married.

Anna-Brita is now able to value what her married life taught her about feelings and human nature. Enrolment in graduate studies and working in transition houses satisfy Anna-Brita's drive to be productive and contribute to society; Anna-Brita seems to be in Erikson's psychosocial stage of "generativity versus stagnation." She appears to be resolving the tasks of this stage, one that is age-appropriate, while simultaneously experiencing spiritual development with an expanded perspective and profound empathy for the suffering of others, one of the transpersonal stages of spirituality.

Anna-Brita herself has stated that, in the past ten years, she has caught up, approximately, to her appropriate emotional age through knowledge and skills of how to be in the world. She perceives how life events have gradually interconnected in ways that brought her into spiritual awareness and catalyzed a conscious, spiritual journey.

Mark

Mark, age 64 years at the time of interview, was born and raised in the United States mid-west in “traditional Roman Catholic surroundings.” His mother died when he was 8 years old. This loss became a permanent feature in his life, seeing himself as burdened by grief and emptiness of heart. Mark lived in a religious order from 18 to 33 years of age. He taught high school and planned to be a physicist in the early years. At 28 years, he experienced a major spiritual transformation and, instead, earned a degree in theology and taught in seminaries.

Up to the age of transformation, Mark said he was habitually blind to what makes life worth living due to his “obsessively masculine religious identity.” The subversive power of this identity did not seem connected to the circumstance of losing his mother, as friends of his youth had not lost their mothers and were also seduced by the illusion of control. His life and relationships were rational, logical, and designed for clearly-defined ends. With this conscious control, he jumped from achievement to achievement, receiving awards and applause from peers. He described his life as living unconsciously, on the surface, with ideals that were theoretical and unimportant. His ideals obstructed and deadened his soul by rendering him progressively more immune to his own experience of life. On a subtle level, he felt needy and full of self-doubt.

On the other hand, Mark recognized that he has always been unlike his friends in ways that he appreciates to this day. He was doggedly curious in trying to make sense of the world. Physics excited him when his professor engaged in speculations that were “off the far end, pushing the boundaries of what can be known.” He loved theology, then and now, with that same passion for discovery. He has lately described this searching and curious aspect of himself as “Wolf.”

At 28 years of age, he encountered Christian Science and a presenter whose explanation of Christian Science “shattered” his complacency. It was then that he realized the futility of his identity, ideals, and purpose in life. His transformation was non-linear, arriving as a sudden shattering of his past identity and an immediate start to his present identity; his religious experience altered from soul-deadening to soul-enlightening. This identity has continued to evolve such that he can now see his mother’s death as a gift instead of a burden.

Mark’s theological research and writing focuses predominantly on organizing and explaining how he makes sense of, or integrates, his life experience, his religion, and thoughts about his social milieu. These activities are indicative of Erikson’s psychosocial stage of “integrity versus despair,” a stage appropriate to Mark’s age. Mark appears to be resolving the tasks of this psychosocial stage boldly, with the immense courage it takes to express radical differences of religious opinion. His views are based on spiritual experience and extensive lifetime scholarship; he describes his theology as “not normal.” In the interview, he declared in an animated tone of voice, that his book is “a ticking time bomb.”

Mark retired from teaching four years ago, and says he now has “a kind of wild freedom” to yield himself entirely to his call.

David

David, age 46 years at time of interview, was born and raised in eastern Canada into a Christian Reform family. He has experienced transcendent events since early childhood and stated his spiritual hunger was at its strongest as a child. He wrote poetry and “always wanted to talk about God.” Although terrified of the dark and uncontrollable psychic forces, David’s family ridiculed his fears and he felt emotionally abandoned by them. He tried but could not identify with his father and suffered in the effort.

A beatific vision during a charismatic Catholic worship service gave him faith that he is not ever alone, that he has resources, and can always effect meaningful change in his life.

As a young adult David followed his call by entering the Christian Reform ministry. His seminary years trained him to deal rationally and logically with spiritual matters. He developed the ability to word-craft powerful messages and sermons and developed into an intelligent evangelist. Eventually, he began to feel he was less a conduit for God and more his own show and his “own worst enemy.”

But David also tried to be a good and helpful pastor. He played a major role in creating church policy to prevent female members of the congregation from being sexually victimized and educationally deprived. He saw himself as “a warrior” in this area, suffered secondary trauma, and had a nervous breakdown. Attempting a return to work within two weeks of the breakdown, he succumbed to a heart attack and stroke. The

stroke left him with speech aphasia. Accompanying the aphasia, he fell into a deep depression stemming from the sensation that he was cut off from God. He felt helpless and pushed out of the ministry by forces he could not control.

This crisis precipitated a significant change in David's focus as he realized that the tools he learned in the seminary were inadequate for his own spiritual growth and assisting the spiritual growth of members of his congregation. The crisis catalyzed his journey on a new level of integration that included deeper self-knowledge as well as research, and education unfettered by religious proscription. David's intentions are healing for himself and "to be effective, or a blessing, for other people." These intentions are indicative of Erikson's psychosocial task of "generativity versus stagnation." For David, as for the other participants, resolution of these tasks are, in part, reminiscent of the "sudden jump across every area of the personality" spoken about by Flavell (1971, as cited in Cole & Cole, 1993, p. 9). In other words, generativity for David involves congruence with the basic structure of consciousness, which allows postformal operations, as well as other lines of development such as spiritual, self-sense, and needs.

Ayla

Ayla was the youngest participant at age 24 years. She was born and raised in a northern European village. English is a second language for her; she speaks with a gentle accent and struck me as deliberate and pensively articulate.

The only child of moderately affluent parents, Ayla described her parents' unequivocal materialism and atheism and stated she was raised without religion. As she was growing up, both parents expressed negative views of idealism and religion, although

each saw life differently. Ayla said her father was “hedonist.” Although responsible when he needed to be, he taught Ayla, “Life is there to enjoy.” Ayla said her mother on the other hand had a strong work ethic, was a successful businesswoman, and often admonished Ayla not to be like her brother, Ayla’s uncle. This uncle was devoted to political ideals and Ayla’s mother referred to his idealism as “stupid.” Ayla considered her parents’ beliefs to be poorly thought out, and from puberty on found them deficient as guiding principles in her attempts to make sense of the world.

Ayla traced her interest in self-discovery to 9 years of age when she was “fairly happy and carefree” but also fascinated by magazine articles relating to psychology. By the age of 14, however, her struggle with “the existential questions of maturity” was becoming intense, especially an inner conflict over “the feeling that life has no meaning.” In contrast, she felt “immensely driven” with the belief that “I can be better” and “life can be better than this!”

Over the past year, her struggle has softened and she is learning to be kinder to herself. She attributed this to “a lot of inner work,” support and discussions with her group of spiritual friends, combined with a period of peaceful inactivity in leaving her friends behind and coming to Canada on an educational scholarship. Ayla’s spiritual activities with groups and friends and her tumultuous relationships with boyfriends, indicate that she is at an age-appropriate psychosocial stage Erikson termed “intimacy versus isolation.” Ayla’s efforts to resolve the tasks of this stage are interesting in that intimacy for her includes extensive psychospiritual practices that elicit transcendent experience as well as insight meditation that provokes her characterological analysis,

both of which then become topic for rapt discussion with peers, and resolution of the intimacy versus isolation dilemma.

Ayla provides a glimpse into the world of a participant who is as spiritually active as the other participants, at an earlier psychosocial stage of development than the other participants. I described how Mark provides a glimpse into the world of a participant following spiritual process at a much later psychosocial stage of development. And I have previously shown that Anna-Brita and David demonstrate spiritual process while resolving the tasks of the stage intermediate to Ayla and Mark.

Shortly after our interview, Ayla sent me an e-mail saying that she had returned to her home country and continues to work on her master's thesis in the field of spiritual ecology.

Invitations to Transcendent Experience

Inviting spiritual experience was done both intentionally and unintentionally. Successful invitations involved an overwhelming condition, combination of conditions, or event, that is, conditions or events that overwhelmed the participant's ordinary ability to cope. David theorized that spiritual events occurred when "my ordinary understanding is tested, sharpened, or even made to fail."

Contributing conditions for the participants, whether intentional or unintentional, included extreme inactivity such as convalescence or meditation, extreme activity such as mountain climbing and dance, isolation and/or disorientation, presence of spiritual people, a spiritual environment, art or ritual that stimulated visual, olfactory, auditory, kinaesthetic senses, contemplation through reading or thinking, being in Nature,

substance use, an overwhelming event, and spiritual attitudes, especially openness, receptivity, willingness, honesty, trust, and curiosity.

Anna-Brita

Many of these conditions existed for Anna-Brita in her childhood, when she lived “at the head of a beautiful middle of nowhere inlet” with her parents and brother. They were “isolated from other children” and “my mother surrounded us lovingly in Christian and Native teachings.” An overwhelming event occurred at age 12 years when:

My mother told me that I had the First Nations connection to Chief Seattle. That was all secret before that. She had all my life for years before that been teaching me things about First Nations people so that when she did tell me that, I already valued and respected them and knew a lot about them.

That night she had her first transcendent experience, a transformational dream.

Anna-Brita provided an example of scent as a triggering condition:

There was a display [in the art gallery] called *The Four Sacraments*. It was four glass containers. Sage, tobacco, cedar needles, and sweet grass were in them. I realized that they were gifts from the Creator to different North American First Nations peoples (groups). The containers were open so visitors could *smell* the four sacraments. I was very interested and even moved emotionally and deeply by the spiritual concepts this display brought forth in me...and kept thinking about it.

That night as well she had a transcendent dream, which gave her information for and confirmation of her journey.

Anna-Brita intentionally invited transcendence while attending a Christian Cursillo retreat. She stated, “Many gifts have come during Cursillo for me including a major transcendent vision during a guided meditation.”

Anna-Brita unintentionally provoked a transcendent event as an adult through quiet, inactivity, and the presence of a spiritual person. At age 32 years she was recuperating with a broken leg:

My mother was visiting to help with the household and children. As a patient, I had a lot of enforced inactivity. One quiet day, I was sitting on the couch. The children were not around. The quiet, the long hours of inactivity, and the presence of my mother engendered an important transcendent vision.

Contemplation through thinking and reading promoted spiritual experience for Anna-Brita as well:

Contemplating the pattern of events of my life has assisted me to realize profoundly that Spirit is continually working in my life, even when I have not become aware until later. And that the events of my life and my spiritual experiences are inter-wound.

Being in Nature is an important contributing condition to transcendent events of the immanent type for Anna-Brita:

There's being right in the moment - I guess that's immanence....Noticing the details of where you are - the sun shining on the leaves, the dandelions starting to grow, feeling it on your skin. Being alive in the moment. Because really cognitive-behavioural is re-focussing. And it's all these technical terms but it's also nature, using nature to heal us.

Mark

Disorientation and contemplation, and the overwhelming presence of a spiritual person, contributed to an unintentional, transformative event. Mark was sailing eight days from New York to Europe when he had a series of encounters with a young woman who was presenting an evening series to introduce passengers to Christian Science. Following heart-felt curiosity and openness to new perspectives, he and the young woman talked for hours on several evenings, leaving Mark in a radically expanded structure of consciousness.

Mark has since then intentionally provoked spiritual experiences by participating in ritual using many of the conditions described above as well as earth elements and totemic animals, such as the Firebird, She-Bear, and his Newt spirit guide. He stated, “My whole body began moving,” as he “danced out his dance” to the beat of drums that paced and intensified the experience. Thus was the use of auditory sensation and extreme activity as well as kinaesthetic sensation in feeling the heat of the fire on his skin. He was in the presence of 25 spiritually-minded men who were helping to create these conditions. The conditions sufficiently overwhelmed Mark’s ordinary understanding to lead him into important transcendent realizations and transformation.

David

David unintentionally invited spiritual experience in childhood through isolation and emotional abandonment, which overwhelmed his ability to cope. Although transcendent events were themselves overwhelming, they counterbalanced his suffering with love and assurance.

As an adult, an unintentional set of conditions that engendered transcendent experiences was contemplation combined with overwhelming events such as ordination to serve a community as pastor and the break-up of his long-term marriage.

Invitational attitudes accompanied David from childhood. His openness to spirituality was a lasting gift from his early experiences. Fortunately, it survived seminary training, which was intended to develop and limit students to rational and logical avenues of religious experience. His willingness to focus on spiritual matters came from an enduring sense of isolation and a need “to know something bigger than my world.”

David has intentionally provoked profound mystical experiences through ritual while worshipping with a charismatic Christian community. Here he was in the company of other spiritual people, amid gentle soothing music, and he found no sense of coercion on the part of the lay leaders. He stated it was “while singing in tongues” that he entered what he later learned was a “beatific vision.”

He has intentionally engaged the above conditions through aboriginal sweat lodge rituals, African earth, water, and fire rituals, extreme activity in the form of emotional aerobics - “getting my body going” - and a “closed-eye imaginative meditation” during the personal development seminar. Transcendent experiences have accompanied each.

In addition, David has found that “depriving myself purposely of “ordinary comforts and other pleasures” leads to more experiences and a stronger relationship with Spirit.

Ayla

Ayla’s invitations to transcendent experience have been “successful in engendering quite a few of them, ranging in depth and content.” Significantly, throughout her interview, I noticed Ayla’s spiritual attitudes of willingness and open-mindedness as well as trust.

Her practices include meditation, art (auditory, kinaesthetic), and extreme activity such as “becoming one with the music while dancing, being touched by the music and doing meditative exercises while dancing,” and “trekking in Nepal, days of hiking, breathing in the utterly fresh mountain air, continuously facing the stunning beauty of nature and getting ‘high’ on the altitude.”

Ayla has a daily meditation practice, does spiritually focussed “bodywork,” spiritually focussed dance retreats of 5 or so days “and that’s a guarantee...” “Also being out in nature can work really strong.” A three-day retreat in Italy is connected to her strongest experience of joy. She qualified that by saying the particular meditation method used is “not always the easiest one” and “I felt all my tension, all my physical tensions, and feeling confronted with myself.” “But...I get more insight and along the way I get glimpses or even really strong experiences which sometimes go on for days. So, not constantly, but different than the dance has worked on me.”

Ayla also intentionally elicits transcendent events by staying in touch with meditative, contemplative, and spiritual people and environments, working with a ‘being-oriented’ therapist, and selecting teachers “who resonate with my experience, intuition and logic.”

Nature and Description of Transcendence

Participants each gave a short descriptor, a felt sense rather than a concept, of transcendent experience. For Anna-Brita, these experiences were a “gift,” for Mark, “grace,” for David, “a vivid encounter with Spirit,” and for Ayla, “an awakening in Beingness” and “flow.”

Transcendent Purposes

Participants described the importance of transcendent events to the extent that their purpose was evident, specific, personal, and highly meaningful. Some of the purposes were:

Healing and integrating through paradoxical understanding. All participants mentioned healing and psychic integration as a purpose of these events.

Anna-Brita's mother had taught her to revere images and rituals in both Christian and First Nations spirituality but synthesis of the seemingly paradoxical cultures of worship eluded her until this dream:

It was both! That really mystified me afterward because I was looking for clear answers like, "Should I leave the Christian church?" And I don't think I ever could but, "Should I find something absolutely different?" But in the dream it seemed to be that they both were one. So that was a...a liveable answer for me too! That there must be ways where you can find it where both are one.

She was amazed by the capacity of a transcendent dream to rise above human understanding and allegiances in a way that integrated opposites – made the paradox of her bicultural influences understandable.

Mark's need to heal the wounds left by the death of his mother has been an important focus of transcendent events:

At the end, the experience named in #1 [rites] was profoundly healing. By accessing deep, mysterious layers of my own soul and laying them open, my spiritual integration leapt forward. As for my mother, it was a life and loss embraced. My whole life has been marked with this loss and, after the experience, I can say that my whole life has been GIFTED by this loss.

He resolved the paradox that the early death of his mother was the catalyst for spirituality to an extent he could hardly believe was occurring and that he revered beyond all else.

David well understood from traumatic personal experiences the paradox of healing: "Sometimes feeling good is the worst thing. You...you have to feel ill sometimes to be able to come to some truth about yourself or some wholeness about yourself."

Ayla gave an insightful psycho-spiritual description of the process that transcendent events deliver to the participant:

They not only assist psychological integration, but also bring up psychological issues (which were hidden, well-buried before). I guess part of the suffering I have been going through, especially at the beginning of 'the journey,' can be ascribed to that....States of Being often provoke our ego-structure.

These words reveal proactive use of paradoxical understanding for spiritual growth. Ayla regularly engages in exercises specifically designed to reveal and transform inner conflict that is to empower psycho-spiritual integration.

Instruction. These events provided clear and meaningful instructions to all participants.

Anna-Brita described how a transcendent vision she had during a religious, guided meditation illustrated and confirmed her role in life:

And I one time had a really healing image. It told me what I'm supposed to do in life or confirmed it I guess. And in that image, Christ came to this hill that I was on and He's been journeying through the roads of the world or something. And He looked really exhausted and really grieving and drained and then I passed the sacramental things to Him. Only it wasn't bread and wine, it was, like, water and herbs!...and He never said a word and He had those things and then He went on. And the message wasn't that I'm God or higher than Him. The message was teaching me my role in the future and I didn't even have to go out on the road - people are always going to show up and come in my life. And I will help them refresh and encourage and renew and they'll be able to go on back out and keep trying to do the things they're trying to do. And I really knew it after that!

Anna-Brita's sensitive interpretation yielded clear instruction about the portion of her purpose in life that has to do with community.

Sometimes instructions came in the form of warnings. For example, Mark attained a sudden transcendent realization as a warning when, unable to sleep, he

tried to expend his excess energy by running along a beach near his home. He came across a dead seagull in the sand, and felt drawn to kneel beside it:

In just a flash of recognition, I felt the real possibility of being dead. And I just called out, "God, keep me free!" And it was with real passion. Because it actually was a struggle to sustain the, for the lack of a better word, the quest for the feminine. The sense of it was that the weight of the everydayness was actually killing it!

The dead bird symbolized to him the soul-death of the years prior to his transformation. He suddenly realized how his obsession with controlling life goals and outcomes produced spiritual stagnation. This translated to an important instruction about how to progress along his spiritual path.

David received a terrifying warning through a transcendent dream:

But I've understood that dream to be a warning to me because I think...some of the ways in which I've been trained in to deal with problems...sometimes better things can be done.

In the dream he argued strenuously with an old woman who embodied his own doubts and fears about the existence of God. He applied all his rational skill but to no avail with her. The purpose of the transcendent dream was to help him see the error of relying solely on rationality and logic in the spiritual domain. The instructive quality of this dream motivated him to question the seminary training to which he had devoted himself.

Ayla had suffered for years with existential meaninglessness. She was suddenly impacted with a transcendent experience and transcendent knowledge:

They [transcendent events] awakened a whole 'body of knowledge,' or wisdom, which has always been inside me, but which I more or less had forgotten about. This was happiness. This was truth. This was love, this was ME, this was what I wanted in life. This was endlessly better than everything I ever experienced before. This was what I naturally seemed to gravitate towards. This was *meaning*, this was what life is all about.

This uninvited transcendent event gave her psycho-spiritual instruction as to meaning in her life and more comprehensive answers to her existential questions than she had ever received before.

Sometimes instructions simply provided answers to life's questions as it did for Ayla. Other times, as for Anna-Brita, instructions confirmed purposes already glimpsed and suspected. However, instructions also broke through defences, revealed a path as problematic, and laid bare the costs of continuing along that path, as it did for both Mark and David.

Personal development. All participants appreciated transcendent events for pointing to personality areas needing development and providing the power to motivate such development.

Anna-Brita spoke of heightened awareness and self-confidence when she said simply, "The change is increased awareness," and, "As the years go by, I find I do that I stand up [for herself and others] every time! (laughs) And I'm getting more confident about doing it!"

Given that Mark's transformation occurred at a later stage of development, well into adulthood:

It threw everything up in the air. Everything! I felt that, effectively, I had to begin my life over again. It totally shocked the whole kind of self-identity, purpose in life, ideals, attainments; all of this just simply fell apart.

Mark's description showed how personal growth through transcendent events can disrupt an adult personality structure that has achieved developmental stability. Mark had

achieved such stability and had considerable personal investment in his self-identity, an identity had been well rewarded psychosocially.

David's beatific vision, as warm and inclusive as it felt, clarified areas needing personal growth:

Because of these experiences, I am motivated to be a sensitive facilitator to worship, more understanding the frailty of the human condition and more inclusive of people whose experiences and life situations keep them at the fringe of things.

The inclusivity and warmth left their mark by powerfully demonstrating to him how to be in relationship with other beings. The impression was strong enough that it became David's conscious intention to learn how to make these attributes part of his personal development.

Ayla described her process of personal development in terms of both heightening awareness and maturity:

I feel that my search and path has immensely supported me in ripening as a person - with respect to emotions, relationships, priorities, the way in life, et cetera.

Ayla revealed in this statement her appreciation for the benefits of maturation as well as awareness that maturity occurs in a variety of areas. Her comment is reminiscent of Wilber's (2000b) assertion that development occurs in separate lines of personality. For example, Wilber listed spiritual stages, which corresponds to Ayla's comment about "priorities" and "way in life" and developmental dilemmas (for Ayla, the stage of *intimacy versus isolation*) reflected by Ayla's comment about "emotions, relationships."

Inspiration, confirmation, affirmation. Without exception, participants said that they know that one important purpose of transcendent events, as opposed to being just a consequence, has been to inspire, confirm, and affirm the value of their individual soul.

Anna-Brita has long valued the supportive role that transcendent events have played in her life: “I’ve had meaningful, like, visions or dreams - mostly dreams - ever since I was 12...And they have come along every few years and told me something about the meaning of life.” This support, over many years, helped her to build confidence and trust in her expanded perspective and transcendent wisdom.

Mark expressed amazement at the lasting significance of those days aboard ship, “This meeting with [her], something was unleashed that allowed me to see that ‘the really important thing’ had never even been said or, better yet, experienced.” His life took an abrupt turn towards personal meaningfulness arising from inner authority and he has remained dedicated to this inspiration for the past 40 years.

David felt loved on a deeply personal level and greatly comforted by the experiences occurring during worship in the charismatic services

At that time, I believed this experience was a special gift from the Creator to support me and heal me when I felt inconsolable...These mystical experiences during worship in the basement of [names church] seemed to give me respite and a new perspective on my personal situation.

The transcendent event, in a few short hours, left a memorable imprint that has continued to inspire David’s path and affirm his existence.

Ayla talked frequently to me about the role confirmatory experiences have played for her:

So these experiences have been, and still are, immensely important to me, confirming and awakening the direction in life that I feel my soul wants to take - towards *being*, self-discovery and self-realization.

The inspiration Ayla received from these events has led, in her short period of adulthood, to an active spiritual practice that has resulted in further inspiration, confirmation, and affirmation.

Transcendent Dimensions

Participants talked about six dimensions of transcendent events aside from purpose.

Form. How did the transcendent event appear to consciousness? Anna-Brita described transcendent visions and dreams. Mark experienced sudden realizations of spiritual understanding. David talked about divine visitations, visions, and dreams. Ayla experienced transcendence in accessing expanded dimensions of her true Self.

Power. The power of transcendent events was an inescapable feature for all participants. They expressed this in tones of astonishment, still startling.

Anna-Brita lent a sense of the power of these events through her tone of surprise, awe, and reverence. The message in the vision she had at 32 years of age also engendered reverence for its power as she realized she had received symbols of welcoming from her First Nations ancestors. No amount of rational argument or assertiveness training courses could have equalled the transformative power of this transcendent event.

Mark explained the power of transcendent events in reference to his own difficulty with control issues. Mark described the deadening effect that over-control of goals and outcomes has had for him and that he had an intense struggle in giving up obsessive control. It seemed significant that Mark encountered with reverence a power within transcendent events that he could not control, a power that was far greater than his own.

David gave a dramatic sense of how potentially traumatic this power could be:

A sense of this dread or awe or the numinous or whatever it was! something sort of came up from the floorboards [David's voice has a tremor here] and began to seize me and to throttle me so that, uh, I couldn't speak!...I woke up. And every hair on my body was standing up. And I was just terrified! And I was choking!

Memory of this power has remained with David to this day and is equivalent to the devastating power that "hooked" him out of his career in the ministry through nervous exhaustion, heart attack, and stroke.

Ayla saw a change in this potential over time:

The experiences described here were among my first experiences, and I think for that reason, they were more 'shocking' and provoking. They were more unexpected and unknown and therefore stronger in their impact.

A question as to whether the power itself changed or the participant's readiness through personal growth changed should be noted as an important consideration, despite being beyond the scope of this study.

Immediacy. Another inescapable feature of transcendent events, induced intentionally or not, was their quality of being sudden, primary, immediate. These events dominated attention. No one mentioned multi-tasking during their occurrence!

Throughout her description of transcendent events, Anna-Brita spoke of their profound effect and her direct participation in the event. She was never a bystander; rather, she directly engaged with spiritual beings in these visions and dreams.

Mark noted the immediacy of the more profound transcendent events he has experienced: “It is never a question of seeking such experiences, they come to me unbidden. In fact, the disruption....” “Unbidden” and “disruption” refer to the primary nature of these occurrences; in other words, imagination and other conscious cognitive processes do not account for their occurrence.

David described numerous transcendent events endowed with the quality of immediacy. The beatific vision for instance was so present and all-encompassing as to be both “motivating” and “respite” at the same time. He used adjectives in describing this experience such as “vivid” and “tangible” and said he felt “transported” and “bathed in light.” During his retelling of the event, I strongly sensed he had fully been present and, in fact, would like to return.

Ayla commented on an experience of profound immediacy while trekking in Nepal. The immediacy of transcendent sight broke through habitual ways of seeing: “I hardly could believe my eyes. I blinked. I checked myself. More amazement.” She described an awareness that was more present, more immediate than ordinary awareness.

Possibly the power of transcendent events mentioned above comes in part because of their immediacy. Literally, there is no mediating process, no buffer, between the participant and participation in the transcendent event.

Sensory. Participants described visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic sensory aspects of transcendent events.

Anna-Brita saw clear details in a vision where she was visiting with First Nations ancestors:

We sat there and the woman came back out and she brought this wooden plank and it had this salmon on it. The whole salmon, cut open, spread open. And we sat there and we ate this salmon. And it wasn't the white kind of salmon.

Visual and kinaesthetic senses (taste and tactile stimulation of eating) were present for Anna-Brita in this vision.

Mark described visual sensation in transcendent events which were aside from any sensations stirred by the ritual itself. He described transcendent realization and illumination arriving as "a blinding flash;" he saw a firebird circling that set him free.

David, for example, talked about sensorial aspects of childhood experiences where he was visited by the one he identified as Jesus:

I'd have this sense that just on the other side of this blanket, where, if I just turned this way, there was someone right there; and streaming, this light streaming out of, so that the light didn't just hit you, it just went right through to you, right through the blankets, through everything.

This describes the presence with possibly a kinaesthetic sense arising from an energy source, that is, the presence. Also, he described seeing a powerful kind of light.

Ayla also described immanence on her trek through Nepal in terms of deeper sight, sensory input that revealed more than the mundane levels of perception:

Through all these forms and shapes and structures, I saw something amazing. Amazing because it was so obvious, so present—how could I never have seen this before? Everything, literally everything, seemed to be permeated with a sense of presence—another word I can't find. The trees and the stones and the mountains and the rocks and the rivers, they were just present, firmly grounded in the truth of existence, just being there. And this sense of presence, of realness, of truly existing, gave everything a thrilling beauty, a shine, and an inherent value and meaning.

This presence, this source of heightened awareness was visible within and as form; and Ayla saw “beauty” and “shine” in it, and seemed to gain a heightened sense of sight.

As discussed, the power of these events is partially due to their immediacy. Immediacy in turn relates at least in part to their sensory nature, especially visual, auditory, and at times kinaesthetic appeal.

Memorableness. Transcendent experiences seemed to occur continuously for these participants and retain strongly in memory.

Anna-Brita commented on their periodicity: “They [transcendent visions and dreams] have come along very few years.” She remembered them, held them as precious, in fact, among the events of her life.

Mark referred at one point to the “string of experiences” and later described this dimension more fully, saying: “The *life-changing* experiences, the *big* experiences, are comparatively rare...[and in] a typical month, there would be smaller experiences occasioned by different events.” Mark was clear that these experiences, especially the

rarer “big” ones, changed his life. He not only remembered them but worked for years to integrate each one psychospiritually.

David indicated the indelibility of Divine visitations in childhood, “Wasn’t like it happened a lot. Only happened a couple of times but it was very memorable when that happened!”

Ayla referred to many transcendent types of experience “ranging in depth and content.” She referred to them as “immensely important” and “strong,” and stated they “leave a lasting impression in memory.”

These comments as well as the fact that participants found transcendent events to be life-changing and powerful, give some indication as to why participants found them memorable.

Emotion. Transcendent events aroused an enormous range of emotions in participants.

Anna-Brita, referring to the transcendent vision when she was recuperating with a broken leg said, “Ahhh! I felt like it was a *real gift!* And really I was so happy that it happened and amazed. Mom was there...and she was astounded, too.”

And to the paradoxical answer she received to an ‘impossible’ dilemma: “That really mystified me afterward...” Anna-Brita, in fact, took time to ponder this dream and allowed it to instruct and transform her, which produced more profound emotions such as awe, gratitude, and relief over the resolution of her lifelong inner conflict.

Mark’s initial transformation contained strong mixed and confusing emotions, such as:

My transformation shocked the whole of my self-identity...I found that realizations arising from my transformation were disorienting and scary! I felt shattered.

And after 40 intervening years, Mark still vibrated with emotion as he related those moments of transcendency to me. The impact of the shock was still upon him. Perhaps this can be seen as a traumatic effect on his nervous system that is still not fully integrated. This may result from the infrequency of any opportunity Mark has had to share such experiences. While certainly not pathological, but rather I observed joy in Mark's memory of these events, I am left wondering what would happen if he, and other participants, get an opportunity to fully integrate transcendency. Mark continued by expressing his gratitude for these events:

I can talk with comparative calmness now about my transformation because this experience is so personally integrated. But the mood that remains is a sense of reverence and gratitude. It's tremendously humbling [voice strained, moved with emotion]. And I have to kind of ask myself, "Why me? Why me?"

Further, Mark acknowledged his emotional limits when he said, "I felt disrupted and would be overwhelmed if the big transcendent experiences came with greater regularity." In this statement, Mark demonstrated a mature appreciation for developmental stability; unlike the other participants, Mark's transformation occurred late enough in adult development that he knew what adult stability was and considered it worthwhile re-establishing after each major episode of transcendency.

David described mixed emotions in childhood regarding the visitations of the presence he identified as Jesus:

When you're a kid, you can be just frightened by things that even though they might be overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly loving and good, they're just huge things! So, you want to cover yourself. I think that's even human nature.

And intensely positive emotions in adulthood, such as those experienced during the beatific vision:

The worship of this huge gathering of people and the angels was very tangible and seemed to be the way to touch God. And God bathed the circle of worshipers with this warm, comforting light. I didn't want to leave that circle; it felt so encouraging and healing.

A vision induced positive emotions for David during a personal growth seminar:

All of a sudden, "Boom!" It was like that picture was not just me. There was, in that picture, there was that Presence. And the Presence was saying, "Yes. You're being formed. You're being shaped. You're being reserved or preserved or guided for a purpose." And, boy! It was all kinds of love and, "I love you so much and it's going to be okay! But that's what I've called you into being for." And I'll never, I'll never forget it!

But negative emotions in his transcendent dream experience:

Yeah, it's, you know, everybody has dreams and even nightmares. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they're transcendent kinds of experiences. It's just that I sensed that this was completely different. And I had that sense immediately that this was given to me like a gift! It was a terrible gift because it was frightening. It was terribly frightening but now, I'm starting to see it now as a gift. And it was a, just a disturbing thing that sort of knocked me off my centre when I was starting in my ministry.

David's experience with comforting and discomfoting emotions revealed his patience with spiritual process; that it is not about sentimental happiness but rather the courage to be with whatever emotional state arises and learn from it and integrate it as part of the larger psychospiritual self.

Ayla described emotions she had after weeks of emotional turmoil with her boyfriend: "I sank into myself, and I felt this enormous flow of trust and love and value and clarity and ease and humour and much more...such a wonderful feeling. It is like being totally in love..."

This description of emotions arising in transcendence reveals a personality expanding into a transpersonal structure of consciousness; it also reveals a personality that was ready for the expansion. That is, Ayla's description reveals no overt defence mechanisms such as paranoia or withdrawal as might occur for someone less ready. In other words, she recognized these emotions as her own and she was not afraid of them or self-critical. Ayla's achievement of psycho-spiritual integration at this level of expansion is evidenced by inclusiveness – "being totally in love with yourself and the world." This achievement is an important goal of psychospiritual growth.

Nature and Description of Immanence

Participants described a special type of transcendence where they were impacted by the presence of spirit within the world rather than completely within their individual being, that is, immanence. They talked about immanence in both perceptual and emotional terms.

Perception

Immanent perception was characterized by a remarkable shift towards bio-psycho-social-spiritual integration and participants said it occurred through direct apprehension, an awakening, recognition of what was once known, through flow, and was lasting in memory.

Anna-Brita experienced immanence whenever she saw "the presence of God *within* the world and all living beings."

Mark described immanence in the rituals he undertook with the Brothers.

It will be enough that I am faithful to my own calling – to that reason why my Earth Mother formed me in her womb. In my tears I felt a great peace, and thought I could remain here in the embrace of my Mother for a long time.

In particular, as Mark lay on the ground he was able to be utterly absorbed into his love for the earth, physically and spiritually. He had faith rather than fear in this experience and in the direction of his embodied life towards physical death.

For David, immanence came in the form of spiritual discernment. He was attuned to spiritual depths that bypassed conventional social behaviours and allowed him to investigate depths of meaningfulness. For example, he was present one time as a member of a group of teenagers where the pastor was leading a discussion about marriage and relationship. The discussion revolved around what to wear and what kinds of customs to follow. David interrupted and expressed concern that they were fixated on roles, that the group was treating the girls like Barbie dolls and marriage as a party, rather than the spiritual commitment to growth and love that he envisioned it to be. The pastor took David aside later, impressed upon him that he had an unusual gift, and encouraged him to enter the seminary and become a pastor himself. David was 14 years old at the time.

David's experience shows that, although immanence yields spiritual perception within the physical world, it can also lead to spiritual perception among people, that is, in the social world.

Ayla expressed immanence as a direct apprehension of life, "unfiltered by ideas or beliefs. There is no 'I' left in the sense of filter or interpreter." She stated, "These experiences engender psychological integration with my environment." They bring, "...strong experiences of flow or absorption." Also:

“I am aware of a luminous, vibrating Presence as the content within all forms. Immanence seems to be a natural and direct experience of life. I see forms and an all-pervading Presence shining through them simultaneously.”

A paradox of immanence described by Ayla was the sense of “waking up to reality for the first time yet my surroundings seem strangely familiar.” This expression of immanence is revelatory of the process of development itself. Ayla expanded to a new structure of being, but each higher stage includes both the new expanded way of perceiving the world and the familiar landmarks of the stages through which the individual has already traversed. The familiar remains because all stages are subsumed in the higher one.

Emotion

Immanent experiences seemed to embed strong memories of the emotions they engendered such as deep ecstasy, love, and gratitude, as well as discomfort, as will be shown below. Emotional safety in the surroundings was occasionally mentioned but noticeable in each participant’s experience.

Anna-Brita surmised she was so moved emotionally by the museum display, with the aromatic smell of the herbal sacraments and profound spiritual realization, that it led to a transcendent dream that same night. Thus, the moving content of one spiritual experience led to a greater spiritual experience.

Mark stated that the safe environment created by the Brothers released him to the process:

I leaped in the air with joy. I howled to my She-Wolf and danced with her faster and faster. I could not tell whether I was gyrating faster and the drummers were keeping pace or whether it was the drummers who were under the influence of the fire spirits who picked up the beat. In the moment, it was all the same.

In this immanent experience, Mark transcended to a unity with his spirit animals—newt, she-wolf and she-bear—and elements—fire, water, earth and air—that lent their characteristics to Mark’s healing and growth. Spiritual significance was experienced by Mark as intense joy and excitement.

As introduced in the section above on *Perception*, immanence for David was a deep connection to the meaning or spirit of events:

It’s just a matter of not being happy with the surface of things. Always seeing something beyond it that could be a mask to some unhealthy things beneath. Or sometimes seeing something good in something that everybody else tends to dismiss.

He later said it was the ability to “see beneath the surface to the health and goodness or hurtfulness of a situation.” David continually exemplified a willingness to accept all emotions that lay in a spiritually significant direction. He did not deny his perception of the hurtfulness of a situation, or reinterpret it as something else, to avoid having to deal with what he saw. Perhaps emotions aroused spiritually within a social world, that is, emotions of immanent perception of social reality, cannot help but to be painful and disturbing. I was impressed with David’s courage in bringing to bear his compassion, immanent perception, and willingness to endure distressing emotions for the good of others.

Ayla, for whom immanence that related to the environment was the most frequent form of transcendence, gave a powerful description of immanence as the central event of her 14-day trek through Nepal:

And this sense of Presence, of realness, of truly existing, gave everything a thrilling beauty, a shine, and an inherent value and meaning. I felt ecstatic, full of bliss. I felt alive, alive in the middle of a true existing, shining, real reality. And

everything seemed to be just perfect. Good, true, and beautiful in its own way. Things fit. This was life. My heart filled with love and joy, my mind with poetry.

In contrast to Ayla's experiences of inner directed transcendency, here she gave a sense of joining with the environment as one. This description of immanence reveals blissful emotions arising from unity consciousness, a characteristic of transpersonal stages of development.

How Did Participants Conceptualize Spiritual Experiences?

Conceptualization refers to the cognitive lens through which experiences entered into consciousness for participants. Notably, main participants made no attempt to convert others but did claim ownership of their experiences and conceptions.

Each participant's perception of the event as it was occurring used images and attributions that seemed to bypass logical and ruminative cognitive functions. These perceptions occurred immediately, seemingly as an endemic part of the spiritual experience itself.

After the event, participants engaged in more elaborate cognitive processing.

Early Conceptual Influences

It seems helpful to remember what concepts were given to the participants as children and that all participants had early concepts of one kind or another instilled by their families.

Anna-Brita had triple influences marking her life from childhood on. Her mother instilled strong reverence for her Christian faith and for the beliefs and practices of her

great-grandmother, daughter of an important hereditary chief. As well, transcendent visions, dreams, and insights influenced her beginning at 12 years of age.

Mark's conceptual influences came in the form of what he referred to as a "strongly male-dominated approach to Roman Catholicism" that lasted until transformation at age 28 years.

David was brought up and remains Christian Reform in faith. Divine visitations occurred from early childhood so there has never been a time that he was not influenced by both traditional beliefs and transcendent events.

Ayla was taught that nothing survives death and that religious beliefs are simply ignorance of reality. Her strong interest in psychology arose from a need to find more meaningful and hopeful perspectives on life. Transcendent experiences increased her need to find meaning to the point of feeling "forced" into understanding.

Concepts About Transcendent Experiences and Where They Come From

All participants analyzed their experiences although in highly individual ways. Anna-Brita, David, and Mark referred to their experiences as coming from outside of or beyond themselves or at least any *conscious* sense of self.

Anna-Brita referred to transcendent events as gifts:

"...in the form of sacraments to all peoples of the earth. I experience cleansing, healing, and re-energizing power in Native and Christian sacraments. My knowledge that nature heals us, which I learned transcendentally, is another of God's gifts as is the spiritual guidance I receive in dreams and visions."

Her sense of divine sacraments, transcendentally imparted knowledge, and spiritual guidance is that they arise outside of or beyond herself and that she, along with "all

peoples of the Earth” are recipients whose task is to learn and use these gifts for the good of all.

Anna-Brita shared a waking vision with her mother, who validated its reality:

And I told her about it and she was just astounded too! And she said she felt it must have been real because this piece of Chief [names ancestor]’s life that she knew was that, when he was old, he left [names city] and went to live in a more isolated, out-of-town place. And she says it was on the edge of the water in an isolated beach-like place and it was called ‘Old Man House.’ And she knew that! She felt that it must have been real and she was really happy that that happened to me.

In her vision, Anna-Brita was told that the name of her ancestor’s home was ‘Old Man House.’ That other pieces of family history fell into place assisted her to see that her visions and dreams were connected to historical and social reality. This heightened sense of reality helped her to value her transcendent experience with a greater degree of confidence. Increased confidence led to greater self-honouring that in turn assisted Anna-Brita to overcome painful cultural conflict and a sense of alienation from both cultures.

Mark defined his transcendent experiences eloquently as “grace, that unearned, unbidden, unexpected crashing into one’s life of the chance to be re-born, grace that helped my old life die so that something new could be born.” Mark clearly described these experiences as coming from outside of his “sphere of influence.” He expresses his spirituality in terms of relationship with the Divine.

David provided a useful explanation of how transcendent events differ from ordinary ones:

It’s a different experience. When I’m imagining, for instance, a story that I’m going to write, it feels like *work*. It feels like I have to manufacture things.

Whereas when you come through an experience like that, it doesn't feel like it's any effort on you at all? It's something that is inserted into your own heart or into your mind or into your own experience. So it doesn't feel like an exertion at all. It also feels like it's an assault, in some ways, to your own sensibilities. For instance, the dream. It felt like an assault, actually.

Again, he talked about the "unbidden insertions" into his life when he said that for him "visitations seem alien; they enter and give information not manufactured from my own imagination." The way he described the beatific vision was also as beyond or outside of himself:

When I was, for instance, in the charismatic worship experiences, I was so crushed and so exhausted from my grief that these just felt like gifts. They felt like they were not from my effort at all. They just came.

It is clear that for David, as for Anna-Brita and Mark, transcendence arises external to the self. However, David fine-tuned his conceptualization as he searched for meaning in his transcendent dream; that is, he arrived at a subtler understanding of the sources of different parts of the dream. He was able to identify his own psyche as the source, not of the dream itself, but of the *quality of evil* in it. In his words:

The evil in it is just my fragmented soul. Demonic presences are psychic or mind *parts* I am not yet ready to face, such as the part that fears there is no God and the part that remains angry about childhood abandonment.

Eventually, he was able to identify how each of the three old women in the dream embodied different aspects of his psyche. The terrifying numinal power coming through the floorboards and choking him, he identified as externally generated: the power was God's but he acknowledged the terror as his own.

It is important to note that, despite a significant number and intensity of transcendent experiences and insights, David still had doubts. He gave an account of his

cognitive process around these doubts that struck me with its honesty and insightful way of conceptualizing reality:

But you still have doubts. I don't think that having those kind of experiences sort of erase every doubt. You still know that you are a creature that is fallible and you have your own senses and your own mind so you have to be aware of that. But that's the only way I can really have a sense that that's what makes it different than let's say an imagined experience. It comes like a gift. It comes with its own energy is another way of putting it. It's you're confronted with something you can't avoid and it didn't take any of your energy that you would be exhausted afterwards or anything like that. As a matter of fact, your response after going through that is that you feel new energy or a new sort of - you want to respond somehow to what's happened.

Ayla, growing up in a home where spiritual terminology and concepts were alien, generally used psycho-spiritual terms to conceptualize: "I use the word *soul* to mean the living consciousness in me, the seeker, the life, the sensitivity in me." She referred to transcendent experiences in two ways: as *grace*, *insertions*, or *gifts* on her path. As well, she talked about being transported into another state of consciousness that seemed markedly different than ordinary consciousness.

Later in the interview, Ayla asserted the need for systematic thought and methodology: "Authentic spirituality does not assume, it experiments and is supported by science, it is fairly hard but you need to think through what you are doing."

Thus it seems that Ayla saw transcendent events both as coming from beyond herself when she referred to them as "grace, insertions, or gifts" and being comfortable in referring to the Presence as "God;" and coming from herself when she talked in terms of states of consciousness and finding her true Self.

Concepts About the Sense of Presence in Experiences

Further to participants' efforts to understand their experiences, it is noteworthy that all participants encountered a powerful presence or force in their experiences they referred to as 'God.'

For Anna-Brita, God is "a distant Creator who has a blueprint for our growth." Transcendent events often included the presence of Jesus. His presence reflected Anna-Brita's close personal relationship with him and the fact that she experiences Jesus "as a bridge between God and people." Anna-Brita did not express any concern with intellectual concepts about who God or Jesus were, but, as explained previously, was more concerned about verifying her spiritual experiences through scientific knowledge and corroborating historical knowledge, and understanding how these experiences related to her personal and professional life.

Mark formed a deeply personal relationship with God through transcendent events. He had no difficulty identifying the presence in transcendent events as God. Instead he concentrated his search desperately in his earlier years on the meaning and nature of transcendent events themselves as they disrupted his entire life as it had existed up to the point of transformation.

David had "vivid encounters with the Spirit of Christ" and "vivid sensations of the presence of Jesus." He experienced God in "first-hand experiences" to be "the One who understands me when I don't understand myself," "the Transcendent," "the Ground of my being," "the Centre of my being," "beyond the material," and "the Root of my being." He also experienced "God as a communion," "a community of beings who love each other and have a wonderful partnership and communion." And, while David

experienced God as “a huge apex of reality from Whom everything comes and will return,” he emphasized that God is not “a naked singularity,” “a less-than-personal or even transpersonal kind of thing” but is “very personal,” “interpersonal,” and “the meaning of love.” The beatific vision was itself “Who God is.” David also had an experience of “God’s signature” in a transcendent dream as a “terrifying numinal power.” David’s experience of the presences in transcendent events was clearly of God and Jesus. He found no need to equivocate for himself but enjoyed the opportunity to relate to people from other faiths and cultures and gain an understanding of the unity of various perspectives.

Ayla described an immanent presence, one she saw in the physical world, as “an all-pervading luminous Presence I am comfortable referring to as ‘God’.” Her transcendent experiences deepened her personal relationship with that which she referred to as her greater Self:

Sometimes though I am just sitting, being, feeling gentle love in my heart, just sweet and fulfilling, but not directly an experience of God or ultimate fulfillment. Then, it feels more that I am not with this Presence but that I recognize this Presence in me, as the true nature of who I am, as part of my very Being - and then I indeed see it more easily all around me.

In this statement, Ayla has again expressed both experiences: that of “God” and “ultimate fulfillment” sometimes as a relationship and sometimes as her own true nature.

Participants’ experiences and views relating to the source of transcendent events and the nature of divine presences in these events bring up the question: do they arise out of self or outside of self? Some possibilities are that: (a) transcendent events arise so far beyond our habitual sense of self that the experience genuinely is from outside of or beyond the self, (b) a self that could be identified as the source of these events would

have to be a self found only in the highest stage or stages of transpersonal development, and (c) whatever self exists at those highest stages of development is so expansive, vast, and all-encompassing that it is meaningless to identify it as self at more common stages of development, even including the first few transpersonal stages. This is in fact the argument that went back and forth for several years described in Chapter 2.

Participant's Spiritual Process

Characteristics

Focus through time. Characteristics of a spiritual process were described by participants using words such as “path,” “journey,” or “quest.”

Anna-Brita, in describing her process, said, “‘Journey’ is the word I always use. So like ‘spiritual journey’ I guess you could say for me. Progression.”

For Mark, the process is “...a journey interrupted by earth-shattering and life-altering transcendent experiences that come along at about five year intervals. Partly, the journey is the process of absorbing these experiences.”

David’s process emphasized the search aspect, “And I felt like I needed to start a quest on that.”

Ayla expressed the process’ duration over time, “I think he has taught me throughout the years slowly, slowly more to deal here and in the physical space.”

Such descriptors make useful comparison of spiritual process to how a journey takes time, involves many events, and requires the successful traveller or participant to learn a great deal along the way, to become present in and wise about the world, and to search for and recognize what is meaningful and what is not; that is, to be aware of what

leads to progress and what does not. Having an analogy such as “quest” or “journey” was very helpful to participants as it permitted them to translate an invisible process into a familiar, visible process, one that has many of the same characteristics such that skills and aptitudes for the visible physical journey are usefully transferable to the invisible spiritual journey.

Outer forms of process. Participants unanimously spoke of the path or journey as being individual and flexible.

Anna-Brita has found no organization that satisfies her needs and matches her experience: “I am looking for organizations that might help, but perhaps there is no existing spiritual organization that combines what I want. Maybe I have to do it myself.”

Mark described the distinctiveness of journeys: “Although it is so personal that it leads to the sense that actually it’s my path and my path alone.” He emphasized that his path lies within Roman Catholicism, which lets him freely explore other practices, such as earth rituals, to which his journey leads him.

David, despite the rational, logical, and “traditional” nature of his faith community, found, “I’ve always had a sense that my ministry and my relationships and my path were not stuck to some sort of denomination - some sort of emblem or badge.” The administrators of his church have so far permitted him whatever freedom he has needed to heal, explore, and develop spiritually. Thus his journey follows his own muse and includes aspects that are highly individual and far off the beaten track for other church members.

Ayla explained her sense of journey as encompassing both development of the self's capacity for inner experience and development of the self in the world:

I realize, see and experience more and more that 'becoming myself', in fact, means, or implies, walking on a specific path in life (to use a metaphor) - I feel that my 'soul' realizes itself through manifesting itself in the world, through doing things in the world, through its being in the world, in my own and totally unique way.

Ayla's comment focuses on development of the self in the world. She previously explained that, for her, 'soul' is the part of her personality that operates through the senses, that is, it is sensitive, alive in the world, and is also the seeker or participant. For the soul to develop, that is to expand rather than constrict, she asserts its need to interact in the world according to what her own characteristics need in order to expand. Her story shows that her characteristics are similar enough to others that she can find like minds and groups. Her story shows as well that she has learned to find like-minded individuals and groups by valuing confirmation of her experiences and way of being in the world. Ayla is aware that she would like to seek outer confirmation less and develop her own self-confirmation more, however, I see the value in her *modus operandi* as it places her in the precise surroundings that maximally permit growth.

Again, Ayla's emphasis on the necessary uniqueness of her path matches that of the other participants. The call to growth required each of the participants to respond in accordance to their own characteristics in relationship to their perception of the world around them.

Increased spiritual attentiveness. Participants made it clear that their spiritual process brought about increased awareness in the here and now and awareness of the

process itself. Put another way, participants said that their journey led to heightened existential and spiritual awareness.

Anna-Brita described specific sensations and emotions which she learned to pay attention to as directional aids on the path:

It's in my heart. And I'm supposed to keep my eyes open so it's in my eyes, I guess. I'm supposed to keep my eyes open and watch for what this is. And now I've been told this. "Watch for it!" I'm being drawn to something but you don't know where you're drawn to. You're drawn down the road. Yeah! It's a pull down the road. But you don't know where it's going.

Physical sensations are located in Anna-Brita's heart and eyes; they impact her emotional feelings as excitement and a sense of being pulled in an unknown direction. Even cognitively, Anna-Brita is aware of what action is required of her, that she is to sharpen her awareness and notice what comes along that is meaningful and significant. This set of sensations, emotions, and cognitions cue Anna-Brita that her soul is stirring and that her increased attentiveness will lead to spiritual opportunity.

Similar physical, emotional, and cognitive stimulation alerts Mark to notice the direction his path is taking. He spoke of "a kind of restlessness, a vague sense of incompleteness" that he feels invited to follow.

David's body itself provided dramatic direction by shutting down with a heart attack and stroke when he refused to become attentive, ignored signals, and insisted on returning to work only two weeks after a nervous breakdown. Perhaps gentler signals of spiritual movement preceded these events. Certainly David has become finely-tuned to the signals and movements of his soul; he has in the past few years developed a deep appreciation for and increased his understanding and practise of spiritual attentiveness.

Ayla talked about herself as having been a “dreamy girl.” The journey has increased her physical-emotional awareness and she has become more willing, first of all, to locate herself consciously in the world:

I want to be in the world - I don't want to float around! (laughs) You know? I...I want to be here! I want to live. I want to be on earth! So... (J - It's something about being more alive?) Yeah. And being present and.... (J - So, it contributes to presence for you?) Oh, yeah! It's central!

Here Ayla spoke directly about her intention to develop spiritual presence. She indicates strong recognition of that fact that, for her, a tempting alternative has been to “float around,” in other words to live in a state of consciousness where her cognitive awareness would often be dissociated from her physical and emotional condition.

I have used the words ‘*spiritual attentiveness*’ in this discussion to denote a state of consciousness that is intentionally awake, aware, and ready to act. Specifically, each participant indicated being prepared, intentionally, to notice physical and emotional clues to spiritual activity, rather than passively waiting to be nudged (or worse!) to remember.

Guidance on the journey. Participants’ were acutely aware of being guided, that their path is overseen, and has direction.

Anna-Brita finds it reassuring that the guidance is “towards this natural growth of love, care, and compassion.” In other words, the direction of the guidance reassures her that she is safe given that her own good intentions seem to have found a home in the goodness of the guidance. Anna-Brita is further assured about the goodness of guidance along her path as it comes distantly from God and directly from Jesus, the Metis women, and First Nations ancestors.

Guidance has come in many forms for Mark. He felt strongly the guiding presence of his mother during rites to release his grief over her death. Overall, he feels guided by “the unseen hand of the Living God” and feels “guided by the spiritual power of Jesus’ mastery, His words, and actions.” And simply, “I am guided by grace. I know it’s in front of me and freedom comes from trusting it completely.” Again, for Mark, the guidance is plainly trustworthy, and he indicated that, in the first few years of his transformation, he experienced fear about what was happening and its intensity, that is he doubted the direction in which he was being guided, and had an automatic inclination to resist it. With the growth of insight, study, and meeting a few people who helped to normalize his experiences and journey, he has for many years followed a practice of trusting and being grateful for the guidance.

David spoke of guidance as a gift. He has received reassuring guidance that God is present in his life and found “that Jesus watched him lovingly during visitations, and sensed that He knew me completely, and already knew my journey.” Guidance comes for David in the form of a “visit, vision, or message,” from a felt sense of God’s presence or the visible and palpable presence of Jesus.

David was also able to give information on guidance that inspired fear and self-doubt:

I think of that dream as not only a warning but something that always is sort of nestled in my heart as a kind of, not just a rebuke, but as something that has given me pause about my ministry; made me reflect of the outcomes or the effects of my ministry and the methods that we use as pastors and the mistakes that we make sometimes as pastors. Or at least our instincts are kind of wrong when it comes to certain things. And that dream reminds me!

This was guidance by correction. It took many years for David to realize that the purpose of the guidance was not so much to frighten as to stop him abruptly in his practice. He

had been trained in seminary to use rationality and argument and to reject and discount transcendent experience. The fear (“horror”) he later realized was a product of his resistance and indicated his distance from the truth of his own existence.

Ayla also described “a strong sense of being guided by “that path or that force.” The purpose of the guidance was to “face pain, frustration, hate, anger, loneliness, confusion - all the emptiness and wounds in my being” in order to heal and “become who I am.” Ayla as well found the guidance trustworthy, relevant to who she was as a person, and the direction was towards both psychic integration for herself and service to the world.

Responding to the call, the presence, and guidance. Participants also saw their journey as a response to the call, presence, and guidance received in transcendent experiences.

Anna-Brita’s transcendent dream resolved an intense inner conflict by expanding her perspective so that her mainstream religion and First Nations reverence for Nature formed a unity. Her response to this gift has been “to seek for spirituality that directly involves Nature” and to recognize “that I am still a Christian.” In other words, Anna-Brita’s journey is in this case her specific response that she accepts having both mainstream and First Nations influences and intends to practise methods of both. This specific response is to the call that arose from the transcendent dream. That call was a call of inspiration and specific guidance, in other words the power and instruction we have already discussed. In sum, Anna-Brita’s journey is a response to the power and guidance received in a transcendent event.

Mark commented as well on a relationship between spiritual process and spiritual experiences: “The path is structured in and around these transcendental experiences. This seagull experience was a kind of corrective event, I think.” Here he has shown his suspicion that his path includes transcendent experiences and that these experiences guide him, in this case, through correction. It follows that his path is a response to that guidance and correction, especially as, in this specific instance, he took the guidance to heart and has never forgotten its message.

David stated plainly the relationship for him: “I believe my calling to give up my trade as a glazier...and to be a pastor was my way of changing my response to those mystical experiences.” David was unequivocal about the interrelationships between transcendent events, the call he heard arising from those events, his desire to respond to the call, and that what he has done in life to respond to the call forms his journey.

Ayla commented as well on how her spiritual process is both informed or guided by and a response to her spiritual experiences: “My path has led to altered states of consciousness that awaken my soul and help it to evolve.” There is an unmistakable emphasis on the importance of transcendent events when Ayla sheds light on her process. She is clear that the guidance and inspiration from these events is essential for her journey to enlightenment and growth.

The participants described how transcendent experiences and hearing a call led to a strong desire to respond. The time between hearing the call and ability to respond varied as some participants started receiving transcendent transmissions in childhood, long before they were able to act with the autonomy we have seen that a spiritual journey demands. For other participants, transcendent transmissions began later when they were

more able to respond. However, for each of the participants, a transcendent event and some form of call occurred first. At some point, intentions clarified around the call and coalesced into a conscious desire to respond. Out of this desire to respond, intention formed, first active steps were taken, and the spiritual journey began.

Emotions elicited by the call. The call and responding to it elicited many kinds of emotion for participants.

Anna-Brita's journey led to intense emotions during a church service. The minister in her church had scorned First Nations people who were suing the church for residential school abuse and impugned their intentions with comments such as, "There were only from one to three real victims of abuse and the rest were people whose lawyers told them they could get a pickup truck if they sued." Anna-Brita stated that her call is to a journey of "many healings, making whole again, learning, and being in tune with the Creator's gifts." As part of this call, she stated, "I changed my life ten years ago and I cannot sit back and let stuff like that happen." Her journey led her to stand up, before the sermon ended, and speak her truth in a "gentle confronting way."

And I said, "There were a lot more survivors of sexual abuse in the residential schools than that! And the reason they're not here today to speak out is because a lot of them have, because of what happened, drank themselves to death or committed suicide!"

This incident, intrinsic to Anna-Brita's call, elicited intense emotion: anger at the injustice spoken against herself and others, strength in choosing not to withdraw into isolation as she would have previously, pain of feeling invalidated in a church that has been vitally important to her, courage in verbally and publicly confronting injustice and an authority figure, heightened self-esteem that she did, joy that her action led to two

First Nations people standing up as well and expressing their disapproval, and yet ongoing pain in her aversion to returning to her denomination, and grief from the resulting loss of an important spiritual resource.

Mark remembered that his journey was difficult at the beginning as he tried unsuccessfully to find support and confirmation for his experiences within his church, clergy, and community. He recalled that “going it alone was very, very frightening.” His journey has also been rewarding especially in later years as his faith has grown and he finds the willingness to yield to his call and trust it completely.

David described the yearning of the call: “It [the hunger that drives the path] is an ache, or a sense, that you’ve been given a little taste of something and then you’re deprived!” This yearning or ache was described by all participants, all of whom described as very strong. This emotion seems to be the central emotion of the journey and the one that drives participants’ dedication and catalyzes change.

David described situations that intensify this central emotion from the call:

Especially now that my marriage has fallen apart and I’m spending a lot of time on my own, the hunger is deeper now...It’s still a tragedy! ... But my longing for God and for those experiences of transcendence have heightened. It’s heightened. It’s grown deeper.

He also described situations that weaken the yearning, which then weakens awareness of the call: “I think the longing is there but - it depends on the situation - but you can be distracted.” Essentially, situations he mentioned that weaken the yearning are family life, romantic love, and material success. The yearning strengthens with a simple life and solitude. What is noteworthy in David’s comments is that he intentionally prefers situations that strengthen the call, not because he likes to feel miserable but because it strengthens his path, his experience of transcendence, and his relationship with God.

David talked about the overall feeling of being on his path as opposed to more transient emotions:

There's a joy, there's a delight. I can't describe it any better than this sort of feeling a delight in your day and what you're doing. It's like a profound kind of joy. "This is right. It feels right. It feels good." And it feels right even though it might be, the kind of work, might be frustrating. But you have a sense it's meaningful. And it's pulling you through and you're accomplishing what you've been called to do as a human being.

David's description distinguishes between situationally-induced emotions and the sustained emotions of well and truly following a spiritual journey.

Ayla also described her felt sense of the path: "It's a feeling of...it is a *drive*." I asked how she would feel if she worked in a job that meant nothing to her: "I would go crazy! Then I'm fooling myself and I'm not doing what I'm good at and what I love and what I believe in and what I think I should be doing." Like the other participants, Ayla finds love and joy on her journey as well as pain, frustration, and other difficult emotions, which occurs for Ayla especially when facing psychic disharmony. The underlying drive of the journey is so great that not following the journey, she suspected, would incur the opposite, frustration to the point of madness.

Again, happy emotions were not an immediate goal on the journey for David, Anna-Brita, Mark, and Ayla. As they explained, specific work encountered in following the path may bring about emotions of frustration, loneliness, and pain. However, for them, the lasting joy underlining a journey of enlightenment outweighed the frustration of work encountered along the way and sorrow in relinquishing the pursuit of ordinary pleasure.

First Intentional Steps in Spiritual Process. Participants knew when their intentions came together consciously enough to say they were on a spiritual journey.

Anna-Brita's ties her first steps to the death of her mother and breaking away from her marriage 10 years ago. From that point on, she stated she "had a lot of catching up to do to move into trying to be the person I wanted to be." Her self-concept changed radically in those years to incorporate her spiritual understanding into all aspects of her life, transforming her personality into one she called "the New Me."

The shock of Mark's transformation was so great he pinpointed his first steps on his journey to the time he met his benefactress on board ship at age 28. These were steps requiring him to make leaps of understanding, of himself and life, to incorporate the transcendent vista.

David stated he took his first few steps on the spiritual journey in his early twenties when he left his trade as glazier. These early steps resulted from his need to respond externally as well as internally to the call he had heard in transcendent events for so long.

Ayla was also specific as to when her conscious journey began. "I probably had my first transcendent experiences when I was 15....and I've never been off the path since then." At 15 years of age, she was "listening to music and reading poetry and started to write diaries and, sometimes, when I think back on it, it feels as if, almost, as if I lost my innocence there and there my struggle started." Ayla made it clear that experiencing transcendency initiated first steps on her spiritual journey in an attempt to answer questions of self-identity, purpose, and meaning in life.

First steps, participants demonstrated, were taken as a purposeful attempt to respond to the call to higher consciousness, to its demand to organize the personality around a higher ordered view of life. Experientially, participants felt a need to find themselves—their identity and purpose—and to personalize, that is become familiar with, views of life from more expanded structures of consciousness.

Why Participants Journeyed the Call?

This theme focuses on the motivation that was self-evident, apparent, to participants as they engaged in serious spiritual work. Their dedication occurred for good cause. Each of the participants described the call as a yearning that was strong and irresistible; this section will explore what it was that participants yearned for?

A personal relationship with the transcendent. For Anna-Brita, Mark, and David, this took the form of developing a personal relationship directly with specific Divine entities.

Anna-Brita described such a relationship:

I can't let go of Christ because I believe in the words He spoke and the things He does and that He is in our lives and all that. I can't let go of that. But it really really hurts me when the church I lived in all those years and when the church does really stupid things to First Nations people!

Anna-Brita revealed here that her relationship with Christ has proven strong enough to survive separation from organized religion and that the relationship remains a vitally important source of love, purpose, and strength for her. This speaks to the fact that Anna-Brita has achieved an internal, psychospiritual locus for this resource; an internal

locus of control allowed her to weather external instability as, in this case, disagreement with the actions of a member of the clergy while maintaining internal stability.

Mark described the journey itself in reference to relationship: “There is little distinction between the faith in the journey and the faith of surrendering to the Living God.” The manner in which Mark depicted this relationship reveals both internalization in that it requires his active participation through faith and understanding and also a quality of real presence rather than a distant quality as would occur with an impersonal or objectified source of divinity.

David stated simply, “I long for Spirit.” Throughout his life, David’s relationships with God and Jesus have been real, present, and central to his well-being. A major reason David cited for his spiritual journey is to have a more experiential relationship with Spirit. This is significant in two ways: (a) for David this desire is based on an already extensive experiential history rather than theoretical ideas of what a personal relationship with transcendent might be, and (b) it reveals that David has confidence in his switch from rational approaches to spirituality to an experiential approach, and from seminary training proscribing religious experience to validating his own experience.

For Ayla, a personal relationship with the transcendent was a major purpose for the spiritual journey as well. “Waking up to myself, to who I am, to wisdom, to a whole body of knowledge that is always there but has been forgotten.” Rather than focussing on a divine entity, Ayla’s focussed on developing a relationship with transcendent levels of herself; this relates to the Higher Self depicted at the top of the diagram on page 25 (Assagioli, 1986).

Developing an already existing relationship with the transcendent was named as a purpose for the spiritual journey. Relationship building involved specific Divine entities for three participants and the Higher Self for another. Participants uniformly had internalized relationships such that continuation of the relationship was not dependent on external structure or validation. Relationships were experientially-based, engendered trust, and were highly valued by participants.

Healing for the soul. Healing for the soul was a major spiritual focus for all participants.

Anna-Brita struggled with grief arising from cultural loss, seeing herself as part of but not belonging to any of her inherited mainstream, Métis, or First Nations roots and damage from 20 years of spousal violence. She described healing by working with nature and a personal counsellor.

I want further healing for myself through Nature and its sacraments.... what I know is not enough yet.

I was also over at ‘Sessions in Spirituality’ when [the professor] told all her stories and I happen to be taking some grief and loss counselling right now about that marriage. So, I’m thinking about a lot of things. So, that all ties in together.

“What I know is not enough yet,” describes Anna-Brita’s passion to heal. Her methods of healing – “Nature and its sacraments,” communing with others on a spiritual level, and “grief and loss counselling” to cite just a few – reveal Anna-Brita’s willingness and open-mindedness about drawing from any source of wisdom to maintain or even enhance the healing process. Not only is Anna-Brita willing but also through contemplation she perceives meaningful patterns in how these healing modalities benefit her spiritual growth, and it “all ties in together.”

From the time of his initial transformation, Mark continually sought to heal his grief over his mother's death. Not only in transcendent events as described earlier but as part of ongoing spiritual process as well, he gave tribute to his wife as healer:

Within days, you revived the poetry of my life. Within two weeks, you were sharing with me the dance of fantasy more deeply than I had ever shared this with anyone before. And then you reached down and touched the painful emptiness that my mother had left behind...Inside, to my surprise, was not just the stench of death and loss, but a prisoner. This prisoner I came gradually to recognize as Wild Man who lies emaciated and chained in the cave by his bully of a brother, Dutiful Man.

In this passage, Mark has described the process of splitting or polarizing that occurs when trauma has not been processed and resolved. The psyche splits between its need to survive no matter what the sacrifice and its intense need to be nurtured. In other words, Mark described his experience over-control by the "bully of a brother, Dutiful Man" who was marvellous in helping him to survive despite his loss. Dutiful Man became so powerful that Mark not only survived he excelled academically, socially, and in his career. He described his experience of the desire for nurture as the prisoner, Wild Man, who lay "emaciated and chained in the cave." Wild Man is the metaphorical expression of Mark's passionate cry for meaning and emotional connection in life, neither of which Dutiful Man could provide. Healing for Mark was a gift he found in relating to just "a handful" of men and women over his life who understood spirituality and the healing process; in this passage he is describing the liberating and healing effect of his relationship with one of those people, his wife.

Psychic damage for David arose from emotional neglect and invalidation in childhood. This was particularly traumatic given his sensitive, spiritual nature coupled with transcendent visitations and psychic terror (for which he remembers receiving ridicule).

A spiritual director helped me find some integration after I was knocked out of my ministry with a heart attack and stroke. He helped me find new ways to connect to God through silence and hear the Spirit in my own heart after all the medical problems I experienced in 1997. More recently, [a psychologist] has been very helpful. His work with men and ritual has opened up new insights into how men connect to the creator, the spirit world, and male bodies in healing ways. Every meeting is another brush with the Spirit and the liberating effect on my life has been tremendous.

Like Mark and Anna-Brita, David's damage was compounded as he denied his own reality and strained to practise only socially sanctioned lifestyles and forms of worship. Eventually, as for his co-participants, the inner self broke through to the surface of consciousness. The breakthrough (termed "breakdown" medically) manifested as a heart attack and stroke, estrangement from his wife and children, and emotional trauma.

In this passage, David attributed his healing to spiritual counselling, which helped him to realize that his medical crises were connected to childhood abandonment and self-abandonment. Such realization was healing and led David to begin the long process of undoing the damage and growing along spiritual lines. David described spiritual healing and growth as "integration," learning to connect to God by inner listening and by embracing his humanity as male and hurt in his healing.

As well, David's healing practice is pragmatic. In this passage, he has shown that he became open and willing to use forms of healing (working with a spiritual director and taking part in men's groups and ritual) that are foreign to his own religion.

Ayla intuited the misfit between herself and her family's worldviews in childhood. In transitioning as a teenager to find her own perception of meaning in life, she fell into a period of intense anxiety and depression that was fed by existential angst and intense self-criticism. Ayla recognized these psychic wounds and her need to heal:

...seeing the path as process - throughout the process the way I work on myself changes slowly. At first, rejecting myself and saying, "I'm wrong!" and, "You should be different and you have to work on it!" Towards more [soft, kind voice] "Ohhh..." You know? And I still have that passion to discover myself and I'm still fairly critical. That's one of my struggles, but I can definitely feel that changing."

Here Ayla has commented that her first attempts to heal in fact exacerbated the problem. That is, her critical self-talk, although focussed on spiritual growth, was a damaging method. It resulted in less inner connection ("rejecting myself") and represented a right intention but wrong direction.

The surface of what Ayla said belies her apprehension of the truth of oneness of method and goal. She demonstrated by voice tone that her method is changing from self-criticism to a gentler and softer relationship with herself; this method gives Ayla the experience of giving care and compassion *to herself from herself*. This method is thus one and the same as developing a relationship with her Higher Self as the source of all care and compassion, which furthers both her healing and her goal - "that passion to discover myself."

How Participants Journeyed

By surrender. Surrender is an inner action that seemed to precede the first steps consciously taken.

For Anna-Brita, giving up hope of any acceptable future in her marriage, accepting the facts of her life as they were at the time, and facing the downhill slide of her health on all levels of being, represented her surrender of illusion: “I felt like within a few years, I’d be dead and I never would have these things I’d always hoped and dreamed for in life from a young kid.” “These things” were components of a spiritual path such as finding out who she was as a person, how strong Christian and First Nations spiritual connections could co-exist in one person, and how she could express her truth helpfully in the world. Anna-Brita saw a high-stake choice in beginning her journey: she knew there was a possibility she would die in leaving her marriage but the alternative in staying was also death. Another point Anna-Brita made was that she had to surrender illusion to realize her dreams.

Mark explained that surrender is a conscious act, a choice:

Actually, we can say “no” to it. We actually do have a great degree of control. I could have just simply stepped out of the situation and it would have stopped! But the “yes” is then the position of vulnerability to allow it to happen, to unroll. Which then is not part of my conscious making it. So, there’s the uncontrollable dimension. On the one hand, it’s very much under control and on the other hand, it’s very much transcending my conscious control.

And further: “Then once I say “Yes” to it, then where I am now, is that once...once you yield to it, it is your life. It is your life. It becomes your life.” Surrender as explained by Mark takes place in two areas. First, Mark chose to surrender his previous way of being. Second, he chose to surrender to the nature of the journey; once accepted, the nature of the journey was not his to control. Therefore, surrender to spiritual process is a surrendering of what was and surrendering to what will be, which reveals itself only as each piece plays out.

In a manner related to Mark's explication of surrender, David initiated his spiritual journey by choosing to surrender his previous life as a tradesman. Choosing to surrender to the journey meant he could neither anticipate nor control the nature of his journey. For David, surrender led to dramatic events after seminary training and as a new pastor. He met personal walls which led to further acts of surrender:

I was overwhelmed by cases of sexual abuse and then we were building or creating new policy for dealing with abuse in my own church. And, you know, I was being a good helpful pastor to people with terrible stories! And some of them were historical cases, some were current ones! And all of them were ugly, ugly, ugly stories! And in some of them, I don't know if you could call them successful but we came to some resolution about some pretty significant ones, including pastors who were eventually charged and taken out of the ministry. And cases that were in the newspaper here that were...it was horrific! And then I fell apart, I know, around Easter time. Just fell apart. Had a nervous breakdown. And then I tried to pull it back together again two weeks later. And, uh, "David?" "I'm okay. I'm okay. It was just a temporary thing. I'm okay." But I needed help really. A 'spiritual emergency.' Something like that. So, I just went right back into it and I guess my body just said, "That's enough!"

As tragic as it is, being a pastor who gets knocked out of the saddle because of his heart attack and stroke, one of the great things that's happened since it is I understand myself better. And I've been healing spiritually in the inside better. And I think eventually that'll make me a more effective person for others. But that was my pilgrimage. Was a journey to myself basically.

In fact, it seems that David's original acts of surrender in leaving behind his trade and entering seminary training, set in motion very high-stake choices where he could choose not to surrender only with intolerable personal cost. Surrender to spiritual process, personal growth as opposed to a religious career in this case, became a surrender in which there was no choice. David learned to surrender consciously and on an ongoing basis as the alternative, forcing his will and way, have had unacceptably high costs. In his surrender, David now exhibits deep faith and humour: "One of the things that's important for me is spontaneity and trusting that God is going to do something. And it's

not spelled out. But that's okay, it's going to be okay. (laughing)" Again, David has described the act of surrendering to unknowable spiritual process.

Ayla talked about surrendering impatience to a growing sense of trust in the process:

Recently I feel that this longing is becoming more soft, more embracing, more gentle. It is still there, but now it more and more learns and recognizes that it is a matter of trusting and flowing and unfolding, and that the state of Being I'm looking for can *never* be enforced. In a sense it's just grace.

Ayla here disclosed a developmental aspect of surrender. Perhaps because of her youth, or because it is characteristic of a spiritual journey in early developmental stages, or perhaps for both reasons, Ayla impatiently pushed herself towards "inner perfection" for eight years. It was emotionally extremely hard on her. In the past year, Ayla has found a new willingness to be patient with herself and spiritual process. In terms of surrender, Ayla appears to have reached a new stage in her ability to surrender to the journey and recognize this to be a more valid approach. As she pointed out, surrendering involves trust, flow, and, most importantly, the willingness to receive rather than trying to force higher consciousness to unfold.

Participants revealed the importance of surrender to a spiritual journey as well as some of what surrender has meant to them. All believed that they chose to surrender their past way of life and chose to begin the journey and sometimes the choices made were dangerous. There were also what appeared to be choiceless points of surrender in the journey. This is so given that sometimes there was no acceptable alternative to surrender and given also that the course of the journey is often unknown before it is already

underway. Finally, participants described surrender in terms of coming into faith, developing patience, and learning to receive.

By discerning goal-setting. I have juxtaposed this section with the previous section on surrendering as the one would seem to preclude the other. Indeed, participants uniformly spoke of the utter necessity of surrender and they uniformly struggled with the concept of goal-setting as well. A dilemma is expectable when a person desperately wants something but has also learned that surrender is essential to attaining it. Participants in this research, in fact, were either struggling with goal-setting, avoiding the word itself, or had found subtle resolution.

Anna-Brita found subtle resolution of this dilemma by examining goal-setting's role in her spiritual journey. For instance: "I want to have transcendent spiritual experiences that involve Nature...I want further healing for myself through Nature and its sacraments and I want to learn how to help others this way." The words "I want" indicate a goal. Anna-Brita's goal takes a general sweep in the direction of transcendency, healing, and learning to help others together with a stance in regards to Nature. I am calling Anna-Brita's goal – transcendency, healing, and learning to help others – general because she specified neither the kind nor content of transcendent event, nor the course of healing once the methods were used, nor concrete objectives of learning. I am inclined to call her goal of incorporating First Nations practices and beliefs around Nature (as outlined by her more fully in other instances) specific because of its intent to identify methods that will become even more specific. In sum, Anna-Brita identified *intentional*

goals, which leave the outcome open to spiritual flow, and process goals, which, with study and experimentation, may become specific.

Mark completely declined to think of his spiritual process in terms of goals and goal setting. His reasons were clear and understandable. As a young man, he had focused on external end products so much that he became alienated from himself. His experience is informative about this risk in spiritual goal setting, which he described from a cognitive viewpoint:

When I use the word 'goal,' it immediately suggests something I'm taking charge of, that I can plan out in advance to produce a finished product...and it actually subverts the whole thing.

The operative cognition that stands in the way seems to be a deep-rooted, or core, belief that a goal must “produce a finished product.” As that belief limits a broader understanding of the character of goals, it follows that Mark needed to, and did, find a different way to formulate language about his journey. For example, from Mark's first quotation in this section, the words “my efforts” appear to fulfill part of the function of goal-seeking, and I shall discuss that below. In the meantime, part of the value of Mark's explication lies in demonstrating how important it was for him to develop supportive language for the spiritual journey and eliminate unsupportive language.

David had no difficulty with the term “goal” in the questionnaire. However, it was evident that he had developed a keen appreciation of methodology on his journey:

I don't want to push that - the utility of my experiences right now. I think that was so me ten years ago. Everything had to be constricted to fix...and so I was forgetting all about me. And I thought I was being a conduit. I thought! But I wasn't. And it was being really external and superficial.

“Utility” and “constricted to fix” indicate an outcome-oriented goal. Such goals he eventually saw through and realized them to be “external and superficial.” Like Mark,

David described here and at other times learning the hard way that controlling outcomes is detrimental to spiritual journeying.

Likewise, David discovered that fixing his focus on an external role was an error in formulating goals:

I wanted to be an intelligent evangelist. My craft was my words. And I could do that really well. And I put together really good messages and sermons. But I don't know if I ever moved people spiritually anymore. I was becoming my own worst enemy...I mean language is a really wonderful gift. And to be able to do it well is fine actually. I think it's wonderful. But it can get in the way too.

Here the difficulty, the error, was not, as in the previous quotation, fixing a situation but rather in fixating on an identity so that a role rather than connection to Spirit became the goal. Further, the error was not failing to become role because, in that, he succeeded. Rather, the error was in making a certain identity the goal. David recognized that this controlled outcome, becoming an "intelligent evangelist," diverted him from a spiritual focus.

David spoke further about goals:

The hunger for these mystical experiences can be very intense, especially when life deprives me of ordinary comforts or when I purposely deprive myself of other pleasures. The goal of this is to gain new insights to my own being, Spirit's being, my world, and my influences within this world.

The goal in this quotation is to gain new mystical insights. It is general rather than specific; it directs itself towards a category of outcomes (new mystical insights). The underlying intention is to elicit insight through mystical experience and the direction is towards "my own being, Spirit's being, and my influences within this world." The intention and direction are the goal; they have movement, space, and possibility. This is in contrast to goals with outcomes so narrow they become end-products; once attained, they tend to be finished and complete with no further movement, spaciousness, or

possibility in and of themselves; hence, they “get in the way” of spiritual movement, spaciousness, and possibility.

Further, the above quotation identified a methodological goal in the words “purposely deprive myself of other pleasures.” The method names a specific action David consciously performs in order to carry out his intentional goal. The specific action is a process goal, that is, a goal consisting of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that advance along an intended direction. In review, David has named both a process goal and an intention goal.

For Ayla, as for Mark, the term goal-setting activated a belief that it referred to end products. The term was therefore not useful. One specific end product, or outcome, goal that Ayla focused on early in her journey was attainment of inner perfection. In studying her story, it seems likely that the search itself was not the problem; rather the problem comprised self-criticism and disappointment in falling short of perfection. By focusing on inner perfection, Ayla became acutely aware of her shortcomings and, in shock, self-loathing, and frustration, hurled hatred inward at herself. Self-criticism was not a technique or an exercise, not a method; it was an emotional reaction to an injurious comparison. Ironically, since Ayla has let go of the specificity of this outcome goal and absolved herself of blame, she has noticed progress towards the outcome goal. Might this irony yield clues as to why outcome goals (and role goals) are so problematic in spiritual practice, and anathema to enlightenment?

Ayla was able to accept the term ‘searching’ as a spiritual method and discussed her struggle to understand the nature of searching:

The first few years of my search, the struggle and suffering only became worse, or maybe was even a result of my search...[and later in her journey] it [the search]

has worked in the way that I've had experiences of depth and beauty and love and joy and self-worth/knowing that I don't think I would ever have experienced without my search and my practices, simply because I wouldn't have known where to look.

The concept of searching as an activity lends an air of openness and receptivity to what may be discovered. It is a very general term that, in Ayla's case, covered many specific exercises and practices over the years that Ayla has put into her journey. Ayla, in this quotation, credited searching and its exercises and practices with two key benefits: (a) transcendent experiences that are self-rewarding in both the pleasure they bring and further development they induce, and (b) direction ("I wouldn't have known where to look") that accords with her intention goal (higher consciousness) that lies at the base of the entire journey.

In sum, Ayla too discovered that outcome goals backfire. In contrast, she has been able to distinguish process as a different sort of goal and discovered its activities to be essential in her journey of intention.

The journey has direction and purpose yet each participant discovered that setting goals was a complex issue. Whether participants used the word goal or not, they found that dedicating themselves to the journey required wisdom and insight. All participants found that specific outcome goals and goals to fit specific roles sidetracked spiritual progress, and resulted in pain and struggle. Whether stated explicitly or by implication, all participants demonstrated an understanding that useful goals for the spiritual journey are intention, direction, and process and that these goals are open-ended and flowing as opposed to rigid and concrete.

By active practice. All participants stated that following the path requires consistent, dedicated work – active practices – and creativity.

For Anna-Brita, the body itself reminds her of spiritual practice:

I have a chronic illness. My muscles really hurt. This has just finished being the bad time of year for that. The more I stay in the house, the sicker I feel. If I get out there and walk and look at the trees and flowers...lifts my spirit, puts meaning back into life, and makes me physically and mentally feel better. When I go out there and do it, then I'm like, "Yes!" and I remember the spiritual journey more.

Anna-Brita described at length growing up in remote and beautiful mountainous areas and being taught to perceive and love Spirit in Nature. For her, practice is spiritual or, to use a word that is synonymous for her, "meaningful" if it is active and brings her into intimate connection with Nature; for Anna-Brita and active practice means walking with awareness to immerse herself in Nature and her body, also a part of Nature, often leads the way.

For Mark, the spiritual journey is mellower now than when he was younger. He is clear however that his practice is active and dedicated. It involves writing "poems, prose, journaling..." and engaging "in the rites..." described earlier. As well, he has found it helpful:

To study an epistemology and philosophy of science that makes sense to me... [my mentor] says, "You have to give yourself over to it, pour your energies into it, become obsessed with it. Try this. Try that. In the end, as you're searching, it actually transforms your way of being internally so that you're ready to receive it, the discovery, when it arrives." And this is exactly what I consider to have been my personal quest.

Thus, an active practice for Mark includes scholarship, writing that is personal and published, and practice that engages the physical body through ritual. The "wild freedom" he now feels in retirement related to his freedom to allow his spiritual practice the level of activity his soul wants.

David's spiritual work has been difficult for many years and is, like Anna-Brita's, critically important to his health on every level. He has worked with a spiritual director, takes part in spiritual groups that make use of strenuous exercise and rites, avoids distraction from his call, and processes through writing. For example, David wrote a set of poems concentrating on the transcendent dream that spoke so loudly to him about his ministry and his psyche and said: "That was me working through myself; even, in some cases, very imaginative ways like those poems would give a voice to those women in the dreams."

In regard to avoiding distraction from his call, David said:

Now that I'm sort of taken out of the world of always considering family matters and responsibilities that way, I'm spending a lot of time, I'm going in, and also thinking about God and going through experiences and rituals in which I embrace the Creator. Or the mystical. Or the spirit world. And my hunger has returned. It does feel as though things like family life and love and romantic love and all those kinds of things can be a substitute, or at least in some ways, distract you.

"Taken out of the world" is the time-honoured practice of solitude, used to engender spiritual development. In David's case, the choice was originally not his. His body shut down and his family left him. This constituted a passive spiritual practice in that it was done to him. Now, with the healing of his body, he has re-discovered his spiritual journey. What David described above is his current spiritual practice of working very actively "out of the [social] world" to continue his healing journey on physical, psychological, and spiritual levels.

David also explained active practice in working with a Spiritual Director:

The Spiritual Director seemed to get at the heart of who I was and what was the next step for me and how to come to some sort of wholeness because there were a lot of bits of information.... Well, how does it all come together? And what does

it mean in terms of the next step. What are you going to do tomorrow? And maybe this is the time not to push yourself so hard. Just relax. You know, heal.

In this excerpt, active practice occurred on the psychological level through cognition and emotion as well as the spiritual level in terms of seeing “how to come to some sort of wholeness.” ‘Wholeness’ or integration is one result of effective spiritual practice.

Ayla has worked faithfully and actively for her journey. She listed many types of spiritually focussed work, such as: “...workshops, doing retreats, and been involved in dance and in a lot of body work.” The network of organizations and individuals providing venues for an active spiritual practice in Ayla’s world impressed me. Her confidence and dedication in availing herself of these resources was an active practice I found instructive.

By encountering, accepting, and overcoming obstacles. Dedication to the call brought each of the participants face to face with obstacles and loss. Financial burden was an obstacle mentioned by two participants while loss of psychological identity and security was paramount for two.

Anna-Brita has found it necessary to decide – consciously and continuously – to forgo financial well-being. She explained her options compellingly:

My spiritual journey has affected me financially. For example, I sacrificed my financial security to attain accreditation and competency as a therapist. Also, I value my work with women in transition houses and with disabled people but wages in those areas do not correspond to worthiness of service, training, and effort. My perception of career success does not relate to ideas of financial success as my journey requires that my actions and values be congruent.

Anna-Brita described elsewhere a clear choice between a lucrative future as a human resources officer in a mining company, a future that for her would be spiritually negative, and a future of financial struggle in the social services, but one that is spiritually positive

for her. This elucidation was genuine, I thought, as Anna-Brita laughed, looked gleeful, and stated: “If there’s some ethical work out there that gives me \$80,000 a year, I’ll be happy to take it!”

Mark talked about feeling ashamed when he saw, at age 28, that he had missed the point of his life and needed to start over again. He struggled to understand and apply his altered perception of religion and purpose. Mark found the experience so critical to his future that he fought desperately against his pre-existing personality’s attempts to minimize the event:

...it was “just simply an uncanny unfortunate disruption in my life and now I’m going to get things back on track again! So I got disoriented but now I’ve got my bearings again, now that I’ve been able to think about it and bring things back in control.” See, this was the struggle that, “Was this an abiding dimension of life or was this simply a transitory fluke, nothing more?” You see, this is the thing that *I* was dealing with at the time.

This quotation speaks to the immense obstacle that Mark’s life successes up to the time of transformation constituted. His life was built upon a platform of strong religious practice, lifelong friendships that kept him stable in a strong social network, and positively rewarded career accomplishments. These factors formed a powerful association that fought against his transformation. Mark deeply valued the spiritual realizations he stumbled upon that opened the door of life itself to him; these spiritual realizations, born in his transformation, fought against the urge to ‘change-back’, an obstacle thrust at him by his previous life.

When thinking about costs his spiritual path incurred, David expressed doubt that seminary training had been worthwhile financially or psychologically. Pressures on traditional pastors to be “everything to everybody” were exhausting and debilitating. He

paid the price of attempting to live up to his role by losing connection with himself.

David described the psychospiritual toll of his heart attack and subsequent stroke:

So, it's been very painful and there have been times even now, knocking, still times when I'm knocking on the door and saying, you know, "Man, I...this is hard! This is hard work. And I...I feel abandoned."

David's course of healing cost him the ministry; he has only a modest pension left to support himself.

As well, David's ministry itself became an obstacle on his journey. The status brought respect to his family along with criticism. His children's peers taunted and teased them about their father's work and deeper pain arose as his marriage fell apart. His wife and children continue to be angry with David for perseverating in the face of declining health and the church for not stepping in to protect him and the family.

David is overcoming these obstacles and can now talk about the gift in overcoming them. He said it was merciful for him "to get hooked out of there and start healing on the inside;" to gain what he has learned about himself recently is his "sole compensation."

For Ayla, spiritual insight in her mid-teen years to early twenties led to intense existential suffering. Her struggles concerned:

Encounters with my own negative psychological structures, negative messages from my mother and confrontations with her, boredom in school, and insecurity about how my peers would react when I expressed myself through my choices in appearance and behaviour. Generally speaking my mother tended towards criticism much more than my father. In recent years, my father has been supportive of me but quite often when I was young he was not there when I needed him.

Loss in the form of paternal neglect occurred in Ayla's early developmental years although her father contributed more presence in Ayla's life and gave support and

unconditional acceptance. Obstacles included maternal criticism and disagreement and also alienation from peers as Ayla reached her teen years. She has spent the past eight years learning how to face these difficulties and overcome consequent negative self-talk. As well, she found and has maintained friendships with a subset of peers with whom she can share her spiritual journey.

Feeling alienated was an early obstacle for Anna-Brita, David, and Ayla on their spiritual journeys. Transformation occurred later for Mark but left him as well feeling “terribly alone” and unsupported. Transcendancy left each of these participants in its wake feeling disconnected from people who were key figures in their lives. The next two sections explore the issue of social connection on participants’ journeys.

By connecting with a spiritual community. Without exception, participants held spiritual community in high esteem.

Anna-Brita regretted losing her long involvement with her church and yearned for another spiritual community:

I had that dream; it was at least a year after that incident in the church where I couldn’t go to [services] anymore because of it. I just couldn’t! And so they [the sacraments symbolized by four Metis women in the dream] were saying, “Join us.” And it felt like it could be; I could again be part of a community and be part of something that involved my values, that brings nature back into spirituality again. And honour all people.

Anna-Brita provided information on the importance of community as well as the importance of her values being reflected in that community. Now that she is not a member of any spiritual community, she can identify two important values that need to be reflected in any future spiritual community she may create or join: inclusion of nature in ritual and acceptance of all people.

Mark has demonstrated lifelong appreciation of religious community: he lived in a religious order from ages 18 to 28 years. Before and after transformative experiences, he continued to enjoy his religious community. Notwithstanding that his transformation was found with the help of people outside his religion, his own religious community has proven so valuable to Mark that: “For me the calling was within my religion.” His spirituality feels at home and he has felt valued within his religious community.

David also described the importance of spiritual community in his life, both as member and pastor: “I find the greatest sense of solace is when I’m with the men in the men’s group.” He indicated here that an important aspect of spiritual community is “solace” which he found in spiritual communities outside of his original religious community. It is important to understand, however, that David remains a willing member of his original religious community. As I will explore more fully in the next sub-theme describing how participants journey, David spoke often of returning to active status as a pastor and how his own increased self-knowledge and spiritual knowledge will be a benefit to congregation members.

Ayla also emphasized the vitality and importance of spiritual community: “I’ve got quite a group of friends who do meditations together and we speak at length about our, how do you say that, our inner experiences and psychological insights and reading many, many books on it.” For Ayla, spiritual community falls outside of organized religion, and focuses on techniques that she described as effective in eliciting transcendent experience and spiritual insight. As well, from this statement and other comments to me, other valuable facets of her spiritual community are reading in common

spiritually relevant literature, attending workshops on meditation, body work, and dance, and engaging in discussions about all aspects of experiential practice.

An interesting sidelight helped to draw a picture of Ayla's connection to her spiritual community. She came to Canada to work on her master's thesis. However, she also found that the "emptiness appealed" in that she had no spiritual community here. She gained respite from a schedule filled in part with activities with her spiritual community and the pressure created by constantly working on herself. Ayla stated that this respite has benefited her in subtle ways. She has relaxed and become willing to be gentler with herself and more trusting of spiritual process.

Through community, participants found human connection, insight, solace, joy, company for active practice, and the honouring of spiritual principles. Long-standing connection to a spiritual community was described as offering many benefits, including the comfort that comes from seeing one's spiritual values reflected in others, being valued for oneself, solace in difficult times, the opportunity to be of benefit to others, and the possibility of spiritual insight and self-knowledge. For some participants, transcendent experience was elicited by techniques used in spiritual community, for others, transcendent experience was found outside of their spiritual community. This very fact highlights the fact that participants found great value in connection to a spiritual community whether or not elicitation of transcendent experience was a common focus.

It seems important to mention that three participants found spiritual community within their religion. For the other participant, spiritual community lay outside of religion. This difference accentuates spirituality as that which focuses on values that are

meaningful to the participants and pertain to higher states of consciousness; and also spirituality as including but not limited to religion.

By sharing spiritual experiences and concepts. Sharing with a spiritual focus assumed different forms and brought significant benefits.

Anna-Brita said she was thankful when others communicated spiritual concepts through art and sacramental objects. As well, she commented on the joy that it brought her mother to be present and hear about the waking vision in which Anna-Brita met and was welcomed by First Nations ancestors. An additional benefit was that her mother was able to validate the content of the vision with her extensive knowledge of family history.

Mark stated that sharing with people who also embraced spiritual experience and process has been important to him. He values the guidance such sharing provides and finds that it “legitimizes and normalizes my experience and helps me to gain balance in my approach.” Mark’s sharing with others often takes the form of writing, in which he expresses himself in scholarly, epic, archetypal, and symbolic ways to match his soul’s struggle.

David considered his method of inquiry into the meaning of the transcendent dream to be beneficial. He asked the opinions of his wife, many members of his faith community, and, years later, a spiritual director in a Christian community. “Even though many perspectives were contradictory, going through the entire process allowed me to work through myself and heal.” This open and contemplative manner of sharing yielded further benefits which “over time, were reassurance, peace, and understanding.”

David elucidated further on what spiritual sharing means in his life:

I brought some congas actually and I led in worship not too long ago and they loved it. And they were swaying and moving. But that I think came out of that experience of, "I have to get my body going if I'm going to have a sense of God..." I think it's part of my path is to help my faith community.

David's explanation demonstrates that sharing with others in spiritual communities can mean both giving as well as receiving. In particular, the course of David's healing helped him to discover much about himself as a person, re-discover the value of transcendent experience, and gain valuable knowledge about spiritual process and technique. He expressed a strong desire to benefit his faith community by sharing with them what he had learned. David has received great benefit from many spiritual communities and wishes to give some portion of that to his own community. More generally and clearly, it appears that sharing is a form of giving and receiving that can take place among distinct spiritual communities with the important result that teaching and learning cross religious boundaries.

Ayla valued reading about experiences similar to hers and "getting together with like-minded friends and acquaintances." She benefited by finding confirmation from others, "testing their integration with my own process of integration," finding support, and "so much in terms of mirroring, of becoming aware of parts of myself that are unconscious, mechanical ('automatic pilot') or hidden."

Despite these benefits, participants also recognized significant risk in sharing their spiritual experiences, efforts, and hopes with other people.

Anna-Brita was frank about her fears:

I would be really nervous to tell people this kind of stuff normally because they'd think you were crazy to have these experiences.... I only have them every few years and they are really important in my life.... Ordinarily I feel too nervous and defensive to talk to people about my spiritual experiences because I believe they would think my visions and dreams are signs of insanity. People operate too much

out of a scientific/empirical worldview. I have only seldom revealed my spiritual experiences to anyone and then only to those I know I can trust.

Her explanation emphasizes the limited appreciation she expects to find among mainstream people either socially or professionally. Spiritual experiences play such an important role in her life but the risk of being judged insane limits her influence on others and potential support she could receive from them.

Mark stated it has taken him “years to find even a few people with whom he could share.” He also did not trust the understanding of others and was not willing to risk misjudgement’s consequences.

As well, Mark described a different kind of risk: “Because the essence of experience is unspeakable, attempts to categorize and name it escape the reality of the experience. This phenomenon is significant when attempting to talk about spiritual experiences because they are sacred, rare, and precious.” Again, “I fear that reducing my experience of transformation and other spiritual experiences to words will put them into a box with other boxes, with other experiences.”

David faced significant risk in attempting to share with others his experience of secondary trauma and its medical sequelae. “My faith community was at a loss what to do with me.” Painfully, some of these risks manifested themselves; his family became impatient, resentful and eventually left him to heal on his own.

Ayla described yet another kind of risk. Having so many spiritual friends and numerous spiritual groups brings great benefit but she said, “It can also feel too intense at times.” As explained previously, coming to Canada, a country where she knew no one, permitted her to slow down and gain respite from the pace of her spiritual journey in her home country. Her experience teaches that sharing with others, even in a

non-judgemental and supportive atmosphere, needs to be balanced with peace, tranquillity, and the opportunity to gain perspective from time to time through respite.

In summary, forms of sharing for the participants comprised art, religious sacraments, written compositions in academic form, or epic, symbolic, or archetypal imagery, investigating the meaning of events by asking others' opinions, participating in rituals and counselling in spiritual communities other than one's own, and the mere presence of important others during transcendent events. Participants described important benefits which included purposely testing one's level of integration with others' integration, increasing self-awareness, support, validation of one's experiences and process, historical corroboration of visionary information, the spread of knowledge within and among spiritual communities, and helping participants to achieve balance when spiritual experiences overwhelm their ability to cope. Risks to sharing were also present for all participants. Risks about sharing spiritual experiences and process arose from apprehension about making mundane that which is sacred and in fact inexpressible. Degrees of risk arose from fear of consequences to actually experiencing consequences. Consequences feared and experienced were the misjudgement of others, being considered insane, abandonment by family and friends, and, conversely, being so involved in a spiritual community that the sharing, while rewarding and helpful, became overwhelming.

Emanation: A Sense of Mission

As the interviews proceeded, I became aware that each participant perceived movement of the feeling of being called into a feeling of being called to do something.

They felt called to a spiritual task or spiritual mission. Spiritual experience flowed into revelation and then into active participation in the world; or, from transcendence to growth to emanation. In emanation, the call transmits inner action to outer action.

Nature of a mission. Participants described the characteristics of their spiritual missions.

For Anna-Brita, synchronicity, or “chance that seems more than chance,” reveals her mission. She described how her inner call eventually included a sense of mission, and how this possibility eventually presented itself:

When I went to grad school, half-way through the first year, [my professor] started talking in class about, “Would anyone like to have meetings and talk about how to put spirituality into your thesis or your project?”

Really, I hadn’t been trying to bring it into counselling! It was there in my values, core beliefs and values, but it wasn’t there in concrete [ways]. Now I try...to find out how they [clients] like to take care of their spiritual needs and whether they’re doing it right now, when they’re really depressed, or whether they’re not and what they could do. And (laughing) whatever their way of doing it is fine with me – it doesn’t have to be my way!

As Anna-Brita stated, her spiritual focus was self-evident in her “core beliefs and values” but it was missing in “concrete” form. “Concrete” for her meant guiding clients in her counselling practice towards a spiritual perspective and practice. The link between an inner and outer manifestation of spirituality occurred suddenly for Anna-Brita with the guidance of a professor – the readiness of the student and the appearance of the teacher precisely aligned! Perhaps the mission-like quality is conveyed not by the logical connection between her core values and beliefs and the possibility of guiding others to find their own meanings. That might simply be a good idea. Rather it is in the excitement, surprise, the ‘aha,’ and the relevance to her life that gave the sense of mission. For

Anna-Brita, the possibility of supporting clients through spiritual as well as emotional and cognitive practices produced inspiration, joy, and a strong intention to act. This was a mission in that it was an illuminating event in its clarity and worthiness.

Although Mark has always seen himself as a teacher, after transformation he saw himself as a teacher who bent boundaries in how he taught, his methods. Now, in retirement, his mission is to teach in other ways and feels "...called in some way to make tangible elements of the world that I have envisioned in my spiritual journey." Here, the outer action is to communicate inner action to others through writing. I learned that Mark writes formally for theological circles and less formally to make his work accessible to the public. Thus, the nature of Mark's mission is to share directly his spiritual experience and understanding with others through writing. For him as for Anna-Brita, the sense of a spiritual mission is inspiration. He conveyed this excitement through animated tone of voice and gesture as well as dramatic descriptors of his work as "things that only I can write" and "pushing the boundaries [of theology] powerfully."

On the level of applied theology, David's experience is instructive about characteristics of a spiritual mission as his church taught on the subject. Their theological views supported David's understanding of what was occurring for him as follows:

We talk about, "There's an outward call and there's an inner call." And the outer is supposed to confirm the inner. And if you're not getting any confirmations on the outside, then maybe you ought to re-think, you know. But that kind of calling, the external, can be from friends, it can be from your church community, it could be from a number of experiences in life that point in that direction. And they confirm that inner sort of leading that way.

First, it is important to note that a spiritual mission in David's theology can be viewed as a specific type of a spiritual mission for the purposes of this research. While both inner and outer calls are necessary in David's tradition, an inner call is all that is essential for

this research. In concrete terms, David's church respected his inner call as an important factor in his admission to seminary training. In fact, David's inner call is still respected by his church despite the fact his mission has altered to include self-understanding, personal healing, and methods of worship derived from other traditions that are very different from methods traditionally used in his church. An important characteristic of a mission in David's tradition and in this research is that it originates not in the world but rather in the person.

The theological views gave David and his wife confidence to trust the calls he was receiving inwardly and outwardly.

I thought, with the kinds of things that have happened in my life, I was sort of disqualified. That I wouldn't be a pastor because of some experiences I had as a teenager. But, "No. It was all worked through. You're welcome to come." Well then that was a sort of confirmation of the inner calling. Right? Through this sort of process of listening to other people in the community and whether you're getting the sort of green light that what you're doing is something that really God is calling you to do. As a pastor. To be a leader. Or a spiritual leader anyways in the church.

David described here and elsewhere that his outer call lay in the support of community members, elders, friends, and others readying themselves to become pastors. It was a helpful characteristic of David's mission that his outer call afforded him relief and perhaps validation when community members approved his mission despite his teenage misadventures.

The decision to give up his trade as a glazier and enter college and seminary training was nevertheless courageous as David and his wife forfeited material security for the insecurity of a less familiar future. Such sacrifice is often another characteristic of being on a mission.

Ayla also described feeling called to a mission within the world:

I feel that becoming myself means that I take in a certain position in the world because I've always been very, very touched and disturbed by what is happening in the world. So, being who I am, I can't neglect what is going on in the world. And I have to take a position and I have to do whatever I can.

Her sense of mission in this case is informed by her inner call, where “what is happening in the world” runs contrary to her values and the information she has gathered from spiritual experiences. So far, her outer call has taken her along the path of completing a graduate degree and thesis in spiritual ecology. The call is actively pointing in the direction of socio-spiritual action and Ayla is in preparation stages, as yet without a specific task or mission. As missions develop, hers shows the characteristics of formation in that she hears the inner call to action and so far her outer call is to acquire education and degrees that may be useful when task becomes clear.

In addition to a specific socio- or bio-spiritual task, each of the participants has a mission, informed by the inner call, to explore paths to higher consciousness through ritual, sacraments, community, nature, meditation, and other contemplative training and exercises. While not tasks in the wider worldly context, these activities and practices fulfil the criteria of a spiritual mission in that they are tasks that answer the demands of an inner spiritual call.

On the development of missions. As it turns out, participants' mission changed and developed over time.

Anna-Brita said a message she received in a transcendental vision is becoming a reality in her mission:

When I woke up, I realized the four women were the four sacraments, and that I was being told to seek spirituality that is part of Nature....since the dream, I have tried to examine that belief (Nature heals us) in more depth, and find practical, concrete ways to use that belief.

This dream gave more definition to Anna-Brita's mission. Her mission has long been to encourage people who want to change their lives. Earlier, Anna-Brita described how her mission expanded when it was suggested to her to bring spirituality into her counselling practice. Through the message of this dream, Anna-Brita's mission underwent further development and refinement with the effect that she devotes time and energy learning methods to incorporate nature's healing power into her practice as a counsellor.

Mark described his mission as imparting knowledge, experience, and perspective in his writing:

I have no need to prove anything to anyone. Yet I have a purpose in this world. I have things that only I can do. Thoughts. Experiences. Ways of looking at things that only I can write down. So I feel called to do this. But I find no sense that somehow I have to correct, save or redeem the world.

In terms of development, Mark has reached the point of realizing that his mission is neither to prove his assertions nor to change the world in any more direct a manner than his writing alone will effect. He is clear that he must leave others to find themselves or not find themselves as they read his work, in whatever way may be meaningful to them. Upon reflection, this vigilant attitude in the development of his mission follows Mark's own development. He described earlier his need to guard against his impulse to control outcomes and narrow his focus to end products, attitudes that he has found to be anathema on the spiritual plane. Further, his mission has developed into communicating his spiritual experience and religious perspectives, no matter how radical, frightening, or sacrilegious he might be perceived within his religious community. Thus Mark's mission

has required him to develop the courage to stand alone against tradition in order to speak his truth. Although beyond the scope of this research, my sense is that Mark's interpersonal stage of development could be seen as consistent with expressing integrity and a later stage of self-actualization.

As is true for the development of other participant's missions, David's mission originated in mystical experiences that formed him along spiritual lines and eventually informed him as to his spiritual task or mission. David further described the connection between mystical events and his mission in saying that the mission was "my way of changing my response to those mystical experiences."

Since its inception, David's mission has unvaryingly been to serve and "be a benefit" to the members of his church as pastor. Now, however, development of his mission and its methods has led to the following:

The men's group has been the inspiration for my new research at the University, new and effective ways of leading worship and small groups, the importance of ritual, and new insights into human health, including my own health.... I'm being asked to heal because I didn't permit myself to be healed or to just even to be sick.... To understand myself. And to re-appropriate myself and my calling, my purpose in life. Which is a little bit different than just doing things for other people. It's just understanding why I've been called into being. And with all my foibles and with all my strengths. And they fit - how I fit in this time and place.

This passage refers to the newest aspects of development in David's mission. In this primary but often elusive aspect in the development of missions, he has become convinced of his need and right to understand himself and be of benefit to himself as well as to others. In aid of this development, David described learning and practicing new methods, first, to achieve wellness for himself and, second, to bring back to his faith community. As an example, David described the power of the charismatic worship service in his own healing and recovery. He then said that his experience in that service

has inspired him to help others more sensitively, inclusively, and with a better understanding of human frailty.

In addition, he stated, “I believe that I depend on these mystical experiences to keep me growing and learning and productive in a loving way in the planet.” This comment speaks of David developing his mission both in content (how to serve the members of his church) and in process (the importance of mystical experiences in the development of his mission).

David also made clear that his mission developed an independent character – a character that goes beyond conformity and non-conformity to an autonomy based on his inner experience and knowledge. “I’ve really felt as though an inner voice or an inner presence wanted me to go to that men’s group.... That’s ‘way out of line for a Christian Reform pastor, as traditional as we are, as conservative.” He shows clearly that he is surrendering to the inner and outer calls of his mission with its unique course of development. Again, this could possibly indicate a global holistic form of integrity and self-sense as a construct, that he is choosing to create himself along chosen lines.

Ayla described her process leading to a worldly mission:

I have to take a position. But on the other hand, I don’t believe in going out in the world and changing the world, like, impulsively. So, it’s really interrelated. It asks from me that I...it’s almost a feeling of a mission! Like I have to do that!

And, at the same time, I feel I can *only* do that when I’m completely myself and honest with myself. Because everybody who goes out and wants to change the world ends up getting in power struggles and doing things for personal gain. And that would be the last thing I wanted to do.... And I know that I somehow have to overcome limits in myself to be able to manifest what I actually want to do in life.

Two kinds of development are evident in Ayla’s assertions. First, a certain amount of inexperience seems to express itself in the generalization “everybody who goes out

there...ends up getting in powers struggles and doing things for personal gain.” A blanket statement of this nature tends to be consistent with young adult development. Second, she reveals the nature of development in the beginning a mission. Her idealism is intact and she expounded a determination to be clear about her intentions before acting, to guard against selfish intentions, and to deepen personal development before engaging in a worldly mission. True to her developmental scheme, Ayla’s mission is now focussed on activities to cultivate insight and perspective. Ayla seemed to be in appropriate interpersonal and self-sense developmental stages for a young adult and the early developmental stages of a spiritual mission and appeared to handle both streams competently.

In summary, missions evidenced such a high degree of development that they dominated participants’ lives to the point of becoming a professional career or vocation. (This is interesting in that ‘vocation’ in religious contexts is regarded as a Divine *call*.) They spoke with passion about their motivation. Missions developed through messages received through transcendent events, guidance from educators and other guides, and professional and religious groups that promote personal and spiritual growth, aided by the natural process of maturation that occurs with advancing age along various streams of development.

How Did Participants Change in Responding to the Call?

Participants’ responses when asked directly in the questionnaire to describe whether they had a desire to become more constant at a higher level of consciousness, referred to the change process itself, that is, how to effect change and whether or not it

was helpful to focus on goal-setting for change. Actual evidence of change came from other data given by participants such as the interview process and creative writing. All participants specifically revealed awareness that profound personal development had occurred, even to the point of now having a different personality, one that more truly fits who they are.

Changes seemed to occur in three basic areas of participants' lives. Examples are provided below under sub-headings describing participants' relationships with themselves, with the world, and with life itself.

To further introduce change, organized according to types of relationship, it will be useful from a psycho-spiritual standpoint to note that participants expressed these three relationships through three operations: thoughts (observations, beliefs, intentions, values), emotions, and actions. This research allowed for the possibility of collecting data on each of these operations but not determining the order of operations. In other words, emotions are often seen as coming from thoughts and actions are often thought to be the outward manifestation of both thoughts and feelings. However, for the purposes of this research, it is simply important to observe that these operations occurred and acknowledge that thoughts, emotions, and actions interacted and merged in a variety of ways. The following, then, represents participants' testimony on their relationships with self, world, and life.

Relationship With Self

Participants showed signs of proceeding from relatively external to internal loci of control.

Anna-Brita described being amazed when she found herself able to stand up to church authority in her own “gentle confronting way.” She knew from within (thoughts) and trusted (feelings) her knowledge of what needed to be said (action).

After his initial transformation, Mark reappraised his goals and achievements and realized (thoughts) that, although valued by his peers and awarded by society, they were still “deadly influences” in his “very orderly, managed existence from 18 to 25 years of age.” This reappraisal motivated (thoughts and feelings) Mark to continue listening closely to the voice of his call (action).

For David, gratitude for his experiences of divine presence (feelings) and hearing an inner call motivated (thoughts and feelings) him to leave behind his trade as a glazier and join the ministry (action).

Ayla struggled with a shift of control from parental values to the values expressed in her inner call. She gave a lucid description of what it was like and what it demanded of her to follow her inner call:

I want to become who I am. Which sounds really simple but in reality it’s like a profound thing which asks for a lot of, you know, ripeness and a lot of inner growth or inner richness to actually do that and manifest that.

Perhaps because following the call required Ayla to abandon her parents’ teachings, her statement reveals passion in her motivation (thoughts and feelings), a concentration of energy, yearning, and pain, brought about as she developed spiritual friendships, undertook spiritual practices (actions), and turned her focus inward, thereby developing an inner locus of control.

Psychological integration, which can be seen as the inner result of transformation itself, occurred in ways described in the next paragraph that became possible only as the locus of control internalized.

Psychological integration for Anna-Brita and Ayla was evidenced in their increasing awareness of breaking up patterns of dissociation and connecting psychospirituality and consciousness to the physical body and to the world. As Ayla said, “I want to be here, not floating around out there.”

For Mark, psychological integration began with learning how to respect his own psychospiritual process. He stated, “By accessing deep, mysterious layers of my own soul and laying them open, my spiritual integration leapt forward.” Some of the deep layers to which Mark was referring contained “emptiness” he felt within and unresolved grief over the early death of his mother. Mark’s inner work has centred on cultivating a receptive attitude, accessing his grief, and transforming it.

David began to value psychological integration when unrelenting circumstances turned his gaze inward: “The pilgrimage was I started to explore not God but myself, I think, in my own feelings at that time.” He found it necessary to prioritize the process of transforming his personal ego so that he could heal the psychological disintegration to which he attributed his nervous breakdown, heart attack, and stroke. As David hinted, personal egos can get in the way of transcendency and issues of the ego need to be resolved.

As Ayla’s journey became conscious, she found that psychological integration, or “inner perfection,” made demands of her: “I also started reading books, not on outer perfection but inner perfection and analysing them; and all these concepts opened my

world view, which made me look at myself in a different way.” Psychological integration, coming to know and accept one’s own mind, was a vital part of the spiritual journey for these participants.

In participants’ descriptions, promoting psychological integration included respecting and practicing insight and self-discipline through rigorous self-inquiry, self-honesty, self-responsibility, and humility.

Anna-Brita talked about the sudden insight on her mother’s death that, unless she became wholly self-responsible, she would die “silenced, threatened” without ever having given herself a chance in life. She realized through painstaking self-honesty that she “had a lot of catching up to do to move into trying to be the person I wanted to be.”

Mark spoke of his appreciation for the insight and self-knowledge that allows him to stay close to and recognize his journey. He admitted to himself, “that the ideals that I had were actually, effectively destroying and deadening me.” Through hearing, feeling, and acting upon his call, Mark has avoided that which was not transformational and has arrived at a place of joy and fulfilment on his journey.

David found that his life depended on the willingness:

...to understand myself and to re-appropriate myself and my calling, my purpose in life. Which is a little bit different than just doing things for other people. It’s just understanding why I’ve been called into being. And with all my foibles and with all my strengths. And they fit; how I fit in this time and place.

“With all my foibles and with all my strengths” speaks to accepting all of who he is, at least in the moment. This is accomplished through self-honest, humility, and becoming responsible for his thoughts, feelings, and actions.

For Ayla, insight brought years of suffering. She became, as she said, “very critical of myself, punishing myself, beating myself up...I was really harsh on myself.”

Gradually, she has become aware that she is also responsible for her own happiness and her tendency towards self-criticism is “softer now.” In fact, for all participants, insight was initially uncomfortable, revealing as it did disharmony within the self and between the self and life choices made to the point of attaining transcendent levels of self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Further, self-knowledge led participants to respect the importance of caring for the self and having patience with the process. Participants valued healing and integration so highly they found certain acts of self-sacrifice worthwhile for the sake of further transformation.

For example, Anna-Brita gave up financial security and hope that her marriage could mend itself.

Mark was willing to jeopardize his professional reputation in his openness about his transformation and call among colleagues who were not in a position to understand or support him. In retirement, he is aware that he might be relinquishing public favour with the publication of a new book he described as “potentially one of the most disturbing books Christians can read.” And yet writing the book has been his mission.

David initially sacrificed financial security as a tradesman to attend university and Seminary College and, for the past several years, has given up the security provided by the traditions of his religion and risked censure by involving himself in rituals of healing and worship from other practices. He poignantly described forgoing the pleasures of home life and an intimate relationship in order to feel more strongly the yearning for his spiritual journey.

Ayla sacrificed peer approval and acceptance by adopting a style and manner that reflected her journey and was “a little bit alternative.” Through her meditation practice, she sacrificed comfort as she became increasingly aware of and wrestled with negative psychological structures: “I started observing my own mind. And I was like, ‘Whoa!’” (laughs) I’m full with thoughts and judgements all day long.’ So, what I did was basically getting really angry with myself for the way I was. I was just thinking that I should be completely different!” Sacrificed here was the psychological ease of indulging in conventional modes of escape such as movies, work, conventional social interactions, and consumerism.

Participants helped me to understand that the journey was not complete – their evolution was ongoing.

Anna-Brita laughed gently and changed the subject when I asked her “What’s it going to be like when it’s [the journey] enough?” Later she stated flatly, “I am only in the middle of the journey yet.”

For Mark, surrender to the process is simply his life, and he did not comment on where he was in it. Surrender for him is to the process of “my old life dying so that something can be re-born” recognizing that “it’s good for our becoming.”

David explained the value of patience in the work of psycho-spiritual integration: “And sometimes feeling good is the worst thing. You have to feel ill sometimes to be able to come to some truth about yourself or some wholeness about yourself.” The patience “to feel ill” is unusual in a world where we are usually but a capsule or tablet away from changing any state of consciousness. David’s statement shows that he places

so much more value on personal truth and wholeness than comfort that he is willing to develop the necessary patience.

Ayla also talked about being somewhere in the middle of her spiritual process. Self-inquiry and self-honesty lead her at times to the disappointing insight that, “It’s a process in the sense that I still feel absent often, living on automatic pilot.” She explained that she is learning to develop patience; she emphasized that, although she maintains a daily meditation practice and is dedicated to self-discovery, her growing patience comes from relaxing more and disparaging herself less.

Participants’ insight and self-knowledge led to increasing levels of self-validation, self-acceptance, self-confidence, and self-esteem and these deeply positive qualities help participants move into farther reaches of adult maturation.

Anna-Brita stated, “I changed my life ten years ago and I cannot now sit back and let stuff like that [racial discrimination] happen even though for many years I would have been terrified to say a word and then went away and ranted and raved somewhere else!” She described her “New Me” in a way that again highlighted self-acceptance, “That’s who I am now – that is, strong and compassionate and knowledgeable about certain issues in life to do with research and with counselling – that I can *really* help people.”

Mark commented that living has become an adventure “knowing that grace is in front of me and trusting it completely.” Moreover, “The adventure of living now has a history where I’m actually relaxed into it, [where] a sense of being comfortable in my own skin in my own life is more heightened today than at any other time in my life.” Following his call for over 30 years has helped Mark to develop those deeply positive inner experiences described above, which are signs of a high level of maturity.

David achieved vital self-knowledge in his work with a 'spiritual director.' A pivotal piece of self-acceptance is revealed in his stating "that these dreams are always about me. And it's not about other things out there." This work has led to accepting one part of his personality that "fears that there is no God...it's just people and power and who has the advantage," another part that is intensely angry about childhood abandonment, and, as well, the part that "is centred in a bigger place and a better place" because it understands how to get "a sense beyond the physical." He expressed appreciation several times for his healing and expanded perspective.

As Ayla commented, "It's an evolution you can feel within yourself." She has made changes she sees as "fantastic" and appreciates that her journey has "immensely supported" her maturation as a person who is developing a sense of presence, who enjoys "feeling myself being here."

In summary, internalizing locus of control led participants to increased levels self-knowledge and insight that was often painful but revealed the inner work to be done. Participants developed patience and eventually noticed increasing levels of positive inner qualities pertaining to maturity, such as self-acceptance. All participants were aware that personal growth was taking place; their growth evidenced movement into expanded structures of consciousness. Each of the participants sounded encouraged about who they were becoming.

Relationship With the World

Participants, through their thoughts and emotions, valued attitudes of caring such as love, respect, patience, and compassion and an ethic of inclusiveness of all beings whether human, animal, plant, or the earth.

Anna-Brita stated, “‘ethical’ and ‘spiritual’ and ‘meaningful’, it’s all the same thing.... To me, spirituality has to include aspects of nature, the earth, air, water, and life-forms around us.” Anna-Brita’s respect for others, care, and compassion were evident throughout as was her deep empathy for the suffering of those in trouble.

Mark grew up in a predominantly masculine world. Transformation for him marked the inclusion not only of important females in his life but also qualities he associated with the feminine, such as receptivity and willingness to be vulnerable. These qualities he revered as they permitted him to enter into the spiritual realm. To this day, he expresses gratitude to his benefactress of 32 years ago who guided him in his transformation. Mark has developed a spiritual connection with animal guides he referred to as “She-Bear,” “She-Wolf,” and “Newt,” in healing rituals belonging to earth religions and he embraces the earth as Mother. Mark expressed reverence for the power of other beings, human, plant, animal, and the earth, and respect for their help in fostering him to have compassion for himself.

For David, caring and inclusivity have been the hallmarks of his ministry from his first post and his purpose in life from childhood. The direction of David’s journey has turned with the effect that he is now learning to include himself as one who also matters and to care for himself spiritually and practically.

That Ayla's master's thesis is in the area of spiritual ecology reveals her concern for the condition of the earth. She stated her intention to "take a position" and take action once she has determined ways that will be useful and not just self-serving.

Participants also valued the importance of courage in standing alone when necessary in order to effect positive change in the world, courage to engage in altruistic action, courage to continue learning and growing; they valued dedication to service and selflessness. As evidenced below, their selflessness was conscious and included various kinds of self-sacrifice the purpose of which was to serve more fully and allow for more meaningful service. These choices often revealed a remarkable degree of non-attachment to materiality and social norms (non-conformist).

Anna-Brita exemplified a tough-minded application of these principles in the following explanation:

I have to earn my money in an ethical way...And you know the jobs where you really help people, transition houses, second stage housing, they have to fight so hard for every cent they get. And, if I'm working in one of those places, I'm going to make \$15.00 an hour or \$10.00 an hour. If I have enough education and enough maturity and enough ability and motivation to run one of those places, I'm still - that's what I'd like to do - I'm *not* going to be making big money.

With a master's degree from a well-recognized university, having spent time, effort, and money to earn her degree, and facing a new career at 52 years of age with no financial security, it could be expected that Anna-Brita would concentrate on recouping financial losses and building towards retirement. Instead, her educational and career goals demonstrate self-sacrifice, courage, and dedication to service; her goal has long been to contribute to the benefit of others where the need is greatest and withstand the material rigours and normative judgements (it runs counter to common sense) that could be passed on her actions in doing so.

Mark struggled against himself to retain his new perspective. Mark recognized in his own struggle the very real possibility of reverting to his usual patterns of thought with its “illusions of control” that tempt him to dismiss the meaningfulness of his transformation and dub it an insignificant anomaly. He has in fact defended his transformational perspective for many years despite little support and no precedence in his religious experience or the experience of those he had counted on for knowledge of religion experience. This struggle laid the pattern for Mark’s altruistic action in the world of teaching; he described himself as a teacher who bent boundaries in his methods. Mark continues to attend retreats, learn, and explore his spirituality and explains his discoveries by writing for both scholars and the public.

David’s approach was seriously selfless, humble, and willing to rise above ego in relation to his mission “to be a benefit to my faith community” by guiding them “through deep waters” and into spiritual experience through techniques and rituals gathered outside his religion:

And I think that comes part and parcel with being rooted in that kind of experience. Because you know it’s not you. So, *you* are expendable, actually, in some ways! (laughing) You know, you’ll be translated in some other way and the work is bigger than you. [J - So then what I’m taking from that is you are consciously willing and wanting to be a conduit?] Right. Right. But then, but not to control the situation.

With his psychological and medical ordeals, and with a modest pension, David could normally be expected to retire to a calm private life, to find some pleasure and to safeguard his health. His dedication to his call is such that I found no trace of a desire to retire. In fact, my impression is that David continues to think of benefiting his faith community with every new spiritual practice he encounters.

Ayla described herself as “very idealistic” and has so far struggled successfully to defend her perspective, that is, her right to be idealistic, in face of maternal criticism.

Ayla expressed altruistic determination in formative stages appropriate to her youth in saying she was “touched and disturbed by what is happening in the world” and needed “to take a position and do whatever I can [to help]:”

It is a drive to be myself and being myself implies taking a stance in the world. But it’s also, like, I’m sort of wanting to do something in this life, having that feeling? And *knowing* that I need myself for that. That I can’t do that with my psychological limitations. Let’s call it that way. Like my psychological strictures and patterns. And I know that I somehow have to overcome limits in myself to be able to manifest what I actually want to do in life.

In fact, Ayla’s spiritual fortitude seemed similar to David’s as she talked about preparing for action in the world. She is determined to be as psycho-spiritually prepared as she can before venturing into action in the world. This expresses caution and maturity that seem beyond her years in terms of developmental stages.

Relationship With Life Itself

Participants each have developed a growth of perspective on the spiritual journey. They described expanded awareness of meaning in life, curiosity and openness to learning, awareness of their own growth, and awareness that they at times experienced life from a perspective that was beyond the personal ego. Participants’ perspectives each revealed paradoxical understanding. Anna-Brita stated simply, “The change is increased awareness.” Her understanding of paradox allowed her to transform intense pain and loss into gifts with which she can help others:

That’s my grief and loss that I have, that over the parts of me I can never get back because of my horrible experiences in my marriage. But, because of going through it...that’s who I am now - that is, strong and compassionate and

knowledgeable about certain issues in life to do with research and with counselling - that I can really help people.

Transformation of suffering is a sign that Anna-Brita has viewed her situation from an expanded perspective and gained a wider view of her life and purpose.

Participants developed a personal relationship with life itself based on faith, reverence, and gratitude and named a Divine Being, their Higher Power, or the Higher Self as the main entity with whom they were in relationship.

For instance, Anna-Brita identified a strong spiritual connection to First Nations people and her personal relationship with two ancestors. As well, she sees herself as a “non-conformist” Christian with a vital relationship with Jesus.

In speaking about his transformation, ongoing spiritual process, and his relationship with God, Mark talked of allowing “my sense of reverence and gratitude to flow; to voice it and feel it as tremendously humbling.” Mark faced a journey that was without precedent for him and contrary to his previous worldview: “It completely escapes all the manuals of theology, and what is to be believed and what is not to be believed.” His spiritual integration and broader perspectives were built on courage and faith in the process, as Mark processed his transformation for the most part on his own.

Mark’s “orderly, managed existence” underwent a “life-altering” transformation that “shattered that complacency completely” and moved him into a deep, experiential relationship with divinity. In a voice filled with quiet reverence, he illustrated to me the difference: “I am what I am today because of these events. Take them away from me and I turn out just like my dad - a good man but terribly empty.” With his transformation, he found that the religion of his youth changed from “soul-deadening” to “soul-enlightening” for which he expressed reverence and gratitude.

Mark's painful experiences prior to stepping onto his path were formative and became transformed within him, as well:

Transforming not having a mother to this gift aspect is a much later realization. For my spiritual journey it's such a powerful ingredient in terms of the kind of person that I was becoming and the kind of person that my spiritual journey had to take this into account powerfully.

Mark's self-concept is both religious and spiritual. He sees his nature as transformative. He identifies both with Wolf, as participant and hunter, and more recently with Newt, a deeper, interior aspect of himself that guides Wolf. He sees himself and his life with higher archetypal forms. His wife had felt like a burning hindrance but now is his fearless Firebird, burning away obstacles in his path. Mark has a profoundly personal relationship with God, Jesus, and with Earth as Mother. His quest has been a passionate struggle for what he calls "the feminine principle," that which will keep his soul free and he now exhibits faith and serenity: "I am relaxed into my history. I feel comfortable in my own skin, in my own life, more than at any other time in my life."

In the following passage, Mark described a deep sense of serenity, integration rather than despair:

Yielding to it, my personal quest, it becomes your life. And this is why it's wonderful to grow old. Because the adventure of living now has a history where I'm relaxed into it. A line in the hymn, "Amazing Grace" goes something like, "Grace has seen me this far" and on that experience "I know it will see me through!" And so the freedom, the freedom of growing older, is knowing that it's in front of me and trusting it completely.

Mark later expressed serenity in contemplation of death: "It will be enough that I am faithful to my own calling – to that reason why my Earth Mother originally formed me in her womb."

For David, expanded consciousness and his sense of inclusiveness shone in his elucidation of God:

I always think of God as a communion - a community of beings who love each other and who have this wonderful partnership and communion. And it's always been and everything is part of God's hospitality. It's an invitation to be part of that life. And so the world and all living things are to be treated as guests or as people who have been invited to be participating in that communion. And that's me. That's also my own animal friends and plants and everything else. And it has to be respected in that way.

The early part of David's journey, in Seminary College and the ministry, emphasized rationality and distrust of transcendent experience. He finds a truer path to spiritual experience using contemplative techniques:

And so I had a sense that it's not through discussion or arguments but through contemplation and through imagination that you can get a sense beyond these walls.

"A sense beyond these walls" is David's metaphorical method of describing expanded consciousness and his appreciation of transpersonal levels of meaning. That is, while rationality yields logically meaningful statements, David is showing a more developed sense of meaning that goes beyond the merely physical or mental, where imagination is used to help energy become observable. David is here demonstrating a literal use of the word 'imagination' as making visible otherwise invisible energy patterns by clothing them with image.

David has always perceived his role in life as spiritual leader. For several years before his breakdown, heart attack, and stroke, he focussed his attention outside of himself. His focus has since turned inward to "self-knowledge and healing my fragmented soul." He perceives himself now as generated from the inside out and is

aware of God as the ground of his being, the root of his being, and beyond the material dimension.

David also revealed growing self-acceptance along with paradoxical understanding:

I think part of my path is to help my faith community because I know it. And I think I'm starting to understand myself and, because I'm starting to understand myself, I think I'll be able to help (laughing) my faith community a little bit better in their own spiritual journey, in their own growth.

Here David explains the paradox that, not only does healing the damage in his soul allow him to help others heal their damage, but also self-understanding will allow him to assist others to understand themselves and grow.

Ayla as well brought perspectives from higher states of consciousness back to her customary stage of consciousness, permitting her to approach thought, emotion and action with remembrance of greater wholes, more information, and clearer direction. She has grown through existential angst in exploring life's meaning and her own "psychological strictures and patterns" by discovering "a vast inner body of wisdom, expanded logic, and meaning." Particularly, Ayla expressed joy in developing a greater sense of her "own Presence" and her "true Self," from being "a really dreamy girl" to being "alive and on earth and present." Emotions vacillate but at times she sees growth in her ability to "feel present, beautiful, sweet, loving, clear, generous and grateful." Evidence of growth through observable action consists of Ayla's energetic commitment to spiritual practices on her own and in company of her many spiritual friends and teaching such practices to others.

In summary, changes in participants' relationships with themselves, with the world, and with life revealed are consistent with expanding structures of consciousness. These relationships were expressed through the operation of thought, emotion, and action. Thought processes included self-honesty, open-mindedness, more meaningful perspectives, and giving themselves permission to explore consciousness without rigid adherence to organizational or ideological forms. Participants valued their development of more positive emotions including curiosity, willingness, devotion to spirit, faith, trust, compassion for others, and equanimity in the face of hardship, gratitude, and inner peace. Action was observable in participants' choices of programs and exercises for spiritual healing and growth. Pragmatically, participants demonstrated appreciation for the fact that these operations permitted them to move freely where the journey led. Not insignificantly I think, my own experience over the past few years of participants in this research has been congruent with the evidence of expanding consciousness.

Professional Help in Responding to the Call

I asked each participant, "Given all that you have experienced as a result of this call specifically and in everyday life, what could counsellors or educators have done that would have helped the most?"

Responses provided details about induction of spiritual experience (referred to as *authenticity* for the purposes of this research), psycho-spiritual support (referred to as *legitimate* or *legitimizing* practices), and the use of power in the helping relationship (captioned under the term *authority*).

Authenticity in Professional Practices

Helpful resources and practices. Participants gave details about a variety of professional practices that authentically led to spiritual experience:

Anna-Brita experienced an important transcendent vision that occurred during the 1996 Cursillo weekend retreat. She said, “Special gifts do happen to you during Cursillo.” One technique that was effective for Anna-Brita was visualizing kinds of guided meditation. Being in nature and the contemplation on Christian and First Nations sacraments often lead to transcendent experience for her as well.

Mark found a “Mary Baker-Eddy Scripture Reading” momentous; long subsequent talks with the presenter led to Mark’s initial transformative experiences.

A psychologist-led men’s weekend program consisting of various “rites conducted by 25 Brothers” in the men’s movement “is good for our becoming” and elicited spiritual experiences and healing for Mark.

David was unequivocal about professional resources that have authentically elicited mystical experience:

The charismatic Catholic worship services were the setting for some of my most vivid encounters with what I believed to be the Spirit of Christ.... The music was gentle and soothing and there was no sense of coercion on the part of the lay leaders. During the singing, especially during the “singing in tongues,” I felt transported to a great, floating community of people and angels and spirits who were directing their worship to this centre of light. I couldn’t see “God” but I sensed God was there in the centre of this light. The worship of this huge gathering of people and the angels was very tangible and seemed to be the way to touch God. And God bathed the circle of worshipers with this warm, comforting light. I didn’t want to leave that circle; it felt so encouraging and healing.

As well, he has found helpful, “A men’s support group which has adopted various rituals for healing and transformation.”

And:

The personal development seminar Choices made a difference to me, both positively and negatively. While the five-day seminar wasn't "religious", the processes and experiences I had during the seminar were profoundly personal and deeply spiritual. The seminar was designed to change self-perception and life-perspective with new tools for getting the best out of life. I believe the seminar did some of that but it was also a catalyst for deep unhappiness. A sense that I had lost my way and forgotten the point of my life.

Ayla described many authentic practices in her extensive background of transcendent experiencing. She has found effective resources in: spiritual bodywork, dance retreats, meditation retreats, daily meditation, and other psychospiritual methods and retreats which have been and still are of major importance to her process.

Unhelpful resources and practices. Two participants mentioned professional resources that they now believe ought to have but did not engender transcendent experiences.

Mark held that, until 28 years of age, he was surrounded by and involved in a community that focussed on beliefs about the source and meaning of life stereotypically attributed to masculine qualities. He learned nothing authentic in this context. Specifically, transcendent experiences were neither invited nor talked about. His transformational experience "completely escapes all the manuals of theology and what is to be believed, what is not to be believed, the scriptural programs, handbooks on spirituality." Mark indicated that after his transformation, this same denomination of religion altered. "It changed from soul-deadening to soul-enlightening," has supported his call to higher consciousness, and remained central in his life.

David found a similar problem in his religious training:

The seminary training I received impeded the power of those experiences, though I excelled in my studies. I was given an opportunity to hone my mind and understand my very rational tradition. Unfortunately, the intellect can't reproduce those experiences or pass along the strengths and insights I received from them to others. My faith tradition frowns on mystical experiences, preferring intellectual and verbal stimulation to experiential and even kinetic paths to knowledge.

With its solitary focus on rationality and explicit aversion to transcendency, David found his training inhibited transcendency and its benefits. A further loss accrued in that David could not help others with the insight and the strength he was accustomed to receiving from direct spiritual experience. Given the level of suffering he encountered in his ministry, this was a considerable loss for himself and his congregation.

Legitimacy in Professional Practices

Helpful resources and practices. Professional resources helped when participants were openly invited to talk about spirituality, when their psycho-spiritual integration, and meaningful engagement, purpose, and stability in life were supported, and when his or her existence was holistically validated. Empathic listening assisted participants to reflect on how life events were linked in a meaningful way. Suggestions about self-care and reminders about being present here and now have also helped participants to grow.

Towards the end, Anna-Brita remarked that she had found our interview to be helpful:

This conversation is really helping me to put more pieces of it [spirituality as it has manifested in her life] together, too. And to understand some of the links and what it's all about. And I've wanted to know how to use it more in the future and I am seeing how I can do that.

Anna-Brita in this statement highlighted the importance of a life review. Important aspects of the life review seem to be noticing spiritually meaningful links among events that have occurred in the past. This is like seeing the journey as it has been. As she pointed out, the meaning elicited from the past points to future possibilities. Increased self-knowledge led Anna-Brita to a better understanding of the journey yet to come.

Anna-Brita stated she found the First Nation Medicine Wheel and its equivalent in counselling psychology research, the Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual model, to be helpful counselling tools. These are frameworks for assisting the whole person.

Anna-Brita became aware of another element of support when a counsellor in the Chaplain's Office at her university provided her with an article called, "Spirituality and Maintaining Change." The counsellor taught her the importance of helping people make changes and, as well, raising awareness about maintaining change over time.

Mark gave no information on professionals who were able to offer legitimizing support, but found a number of non-professional people who, from their own direct experience, "legitimated it [transformation] for me and helped to confirm my suspicion that it was normal."

David's input regarding support was important in another direction. He explained that support needs to be patient with the duration and intensity of suffering in the struggle to overcome psycho-spiritual problems.

David found a spiritual director helpful in finding integration and new ways to connect to God through silence and hearing Spirit in his heart. David said it is important for him that supporters have inner spiritual experience and keep inviting him to be present and curious rather than judgmental about his experience.

Ayla continues to find legitimizing support working with a ‘being-oriented’ therapist and teachers who resonate with her “experience, intuition and logic.” She emphasized how helpful it has been when she has been encouraged to access her felt, lived experience rather than her ideas and interpretations. This highlights the crucial difference between spiritual support and philosophical discussion. Participants were not looking to toss around ideas or finely discuss the details of possible realities. They sought support in order to work on the impact of direct spiritual experience on their lives and they sought support from those with transpersonal experience.

Unhelpful resources and practices. Participants uniformly decried professionals who have not invited or validated spirituality or who have lacked empathy, care, and compassion, saying that such professionals have been unhelpful and at times damaging.

Anna-Brita lost trust in the intentions of the leaders of her church when a minister condemned legal actions taken by victims of residential schools. The effect of this has been distressing: “I no longer feel safe enough to participate in activities they direct even though I know those activities have been authentic spiritually.” This led to a spiritual dilemma and loss of a major psycho-social-spiritual resource:

I miss being part of a spiritual community. I could never leave Christ. I live by His words and value His influence in my life. But I will not endure clergy and congregations that negate part of my identity and qualities I value.

Anna-Brita emphasized another aspect of support when she stated, “There is very little of me that is not involved in my spiritual journey and spiritual experiences are really important in my life, have been transformative, and occur every few years.” While confident that her university counsellor helped her to recover from trauma, Anna-Brita

highlighted that the process would have been faster had she been invited to discuss what was meaningful in her life.

Mark emphasized that he felt alone in his transformation and felt ill prepared by formative influences in his life, once he saw what was truly meaningful for him.

...The religious systems that I was connect with, didn't lead you to expect things like this. Nor once they had happened, how to make a discernment with regards to them. And whether to expect more of these! It was as through I were thrown into a new world all by myself and had to make my way without any solid guidance. And it's actually not that I didn't seek guidance on this. I spoke to persons who were supposed more advanced than me, wiser than me.

The inability of the particular religious circles of Mark's youth and early adulthood to support him during his transformation constituted several important omissions: he lacked preparation through knowing that transformation could happen to him as an individual, that transformative events could be ongoing, as they are for him, and did not provide a sense of solidity, that is security that his experience was safe and healthy. The fact that "They didn't know exactly what to make of this either" left him feeling "like a pioneer" and "very scared."

Mark also found that the school system in his youth was not helpful as it did not prepare him for transformative events nor did it support him afterwards. Some of his teachers were very helpful; his mentor in physics was especially helpful for many years and bolstered him psychologically, "But he was not a master of the things of the heart; hence he had no power to cure the spirit."

Mark also found psychotherapy unhelpful. He stated clearly that he came away "with a vastly improved understanding of how broken [I was]," but he did not "have the slightest intimation of how to effect [my] own cure." In his view, "the great truth lost to psychotherapy is that one can only heal the one whom one loves." Mark's experience

with psychotherapy occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and hopefully humanism has influenced all brands of psychotherapy during the intervening years. However, Mark's comment points to the importance of working not only with pain and frustration but also with the individual's hope, strength, and inspiration.

David articulated disappointment with the psycho-spiritual support he found through pastoral counselling and seminary training available in his religion. They simply did not have the tools to help him, relying as they did solely on logic and reason.

Mainstream mental health professionals as well missed the point for David. Mystical experiences and relating to God are vital to David. This was especially so when a heart attack and stroke left him feeling disconnected from God, devoid of a Divine spark for the first time in his life. He found that most mental health professionals listened poorly, discounted the role of spirituality in his depression, and made no effort "to embrace and understand the transcendent."

Ayla, like Mark, found her school system unhelpful in preparing her for or supporting her through transformation. Ayla found that, once she had learned to read and write, the rest of the public school curriculum was meaningless and frustrating. She believes that specialized education could be designed to provide knowledge of spiritually authentic practices and validation in the process of self-discovery.

Authority in Professional Practices

As explained more fully in Chapter 2, Wilber's (1983) measures of whether authority is benign or not are the degree to which it (a) effects development, and (b) is or phase specific.

The first measure has already been analyzed under the headings of authenticity and legitimacy. What remains is to look at the second measure in professional help sought by participants.

Phase-temporary authority among professional helpers. Participants mentioned several examples of phase-temporary authority.

Mark stated that he has kept up a long a friendly relationship with the Christian Science presenter who guided Mark into his initial transformative experiences. He expressed lasting gratitude while referring to her as his friend. Friend is a term belonging to a relationship of equality, rather than a hierarchical relationship as, for example, in the case of master/disciple, teacher/student, or parent/child.

David expressed laterality in how he related to the pastor who was his mentor in youth. There was a freedom and willingness on the part of both men to discuss personal issues in their spiritual lives.

Ayla also experienced benign authority in relating to the man, 10 years her senior, who introduced her to Eastern practices and teachings, who was “a great support,” and with whom she now teaches courses. Not only does she have equal status as co-teacher, but also she stated, “He’s still actually my best friend.” These comments exemplify admirably the principle of resuming equal status once the relationship as teacher/student has ended.

Authority among professional helpers that was not phase-temporary. None of the participants mentioned difficulties with hierarchical relationships that had outlived their usefulness.

In summary, participants said relationships with professionals were helpful when they were authentic, legitimizing, and authority was benign.

Authentic contexts described by participants included spiritual retreats such as dance retreats, religious retreats, meditation retreats, and a personal development programs designed to change self-perception and life-perspective. Useful techniques were in-depth discussions with adepts in other practices, spiritual bodywork, daily meditation, visualizing kinds of guided meditation, charismatic worship services that involved gentle and soothing music, no sense of coercion, and “singing in tongues,” and other rituals for healing and transformation.

Participants found inauthentic those contexts where transcendent experiences were neither invited nor talked about, where logic and rationality were the solitary focus, or where there was an explicit aversion to transcendency.

Professionals who themselves had direct spiritual experiences were found to be helpful. These included a psychologist, a spiritual counsellor, professional and lay religious leaders, ‘being-oriented’ therapists, and spiritual teachers. These professionals were helpful when they openly invited participants to talk about spirituality, when they supported psycho-spiritual integration through meaningful engagement, purpose, and stability in life, and when they validated participants existentially. Patience with the duration and intensity of suffering in the struggle to overcome psycho-spiritual problems was mentioned to be essential. Empathic listening, suggestions about self-care, reminders about being present here and now, remaining curious rather than judgmental about experience, and raising awareness about maintaining change over time also helped participants to grow. Supportive tools were helping participants to find ways to connect

to God through silence and hearing Spirit in the heart, the First Nation Medicine Wheel and the Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual model.

Participants found some professionals unsupportive. Especially unhelpful were those psychotherapists, ministers of congregations, pastoral counsellors, seminary trainers, and public school teachers who made no effort “to embrace and understand the transcendent,” who did not invited or validate spirituality or discounted the role of spirituality in mental health issues such as depression, who lacked empathy, care, and compassion, or who valued only methods of logic and reason.

Aside from the above considerations, participants found authority itself to be most useful when the hierarchical relationship lasted only as long as it had utility for the participant at which point equal status would resume. Sometimes the participant and the other person did not see each other again, and at others times they became friends or colleagues in a professional relationship.

Participants' Spiritual Metaphors and Similes

Participants used symbolic language, metaphor, and simile to explain patterns and processes not detectable to the physical senses.

As a counsellor and for herself, Anna-Brita stated that she finds nature metaphors and exercises useful in assisting change, encouraging hope, and decreasing depression.

One she uses often comes from a school trip that impressed her when she was young:

What follows is a metaphor I use to express the pain and transformation of a spiritual journey. Once when I was visiting a gold mine, I looked into a furnace as they opened its door. And these really hot, hot, hot flames were in there! And they were a gold colour. Very hot, roaring flames. The guides said that was where they

melted the gold out of the ore. They showed us a gold brick. And I always remembered that furnace and those flames and that that was how gold was refined from ore. And the ore didn't want to get dug out of the earth in a cruel kind of way - with blasting or big machinery. It didn't want to get separated into its parts and some of its parts thrown away! We have grief and loss over parts of us that get thrown away by abuse and horrible events in life. Our innocence or dreams. But because of the refining process, gold comes out at the end. That is what helps people develop strength, compassion and knowledge about issues in life. The paradox is we would never choose to go through that hell, but because we did, and survived and learned from it, we can change for the better and help others.

Here Anna-Brita compares the intensity and violence of refining gold to the intensity, violence, and pain that leads to transformation of the soul. In the refining of gold, that which is not worthy is burned away. That which is left has intrinsic value; it is pure and beautiful and useful to others. Gold is used in dentistry and electronics to mention just two of its many values, just as a pure soul is useful in supporting others in their suffering and possible transformation. In physical and emotional suffering, the soul too has the opportunity to allow that which is unworthy or negative to burn away, leaving it purer and more useful. The metaphor also helps to demonstrate that refining for both the soul and gold often occurs in a way that seems cruel and violent, and that, in the case of the soul, we may grieve over parts of the self that die, such as loss of innocence as in the case of childhood sexual abuse, or loss of specific hopes and dreams. Yet, with cooling of the gold or healing of the soul, we find that the essence remains and has been rendered purer.

Anna-Brita narrated two metaphors she uses to illustrate adaptation or resiliency:

Nature gives us metaphors to show that adaptation can be spiritual and wonderful: Again, say you come along and you set a rock right there on a camas flower bulb. Well, the camas flower is going to go this way and that and it's still going to manage to come up. And if you had a bush there, like a rhododendron, and you put a boulder on it, it's going to grow around and come out naturally in its own way. And this is like the human spirit and its ability to find a way to blossom and thrive.

In this metaphor, a rock or boulder can symbolize the oppression and obstruction of an addiction, an abusive parent, or a physical disability. Growth requires the camas bulb, the rhododendron bush, and the soul to stop trying to defeat the oppressor, to accept powerlessness over the oppressor, and recover. Recovery requires one to go around the oppressor and develop differently. But heightened awareness of life and growth for their own sake transforms the participant and results in spiritual development.

And:

Another metaphor to illustrate that a spiritual journey is about surviving and being everything you can be: Dandelions grow sometimes in a pile of ashes and sometimes in rocky cliffs. You wouldn't think there was a spoonful of soil! And they would grow with this real bright, yellow, like they were saying, "I'm going to get out there and bloom and give all the yellow I have to the world you know! And despite if I'm on a rock face or in a pile of ashes."

Through this nature metaphor, Anna-Brita demonstrated the idea of being a clear channel for energy or being spiritually open. Some people seem to be given so little in life, as the dandelion seed was given just a spoon of soil. Yet even in poverty, both the dandelion and the soul may focus their energy with laser-like purity and affirm life, in bloom or in presence and aliveness.

Mark likened the act of inviting transcendent experience by engaging in ritual to playing a flute. Breath flows into the hollowness of the flute like energy flows into the forms of the ritual. "The sound that it will make is unknown, unexpected" much as personal experience during rituals is unknown and cannot be expected.

As well, in writing, Mark described his life, loss of his mother, and transformation using symbolic and archetypal imagery in epic poetry.

David used a powerful metaphor to explain to his doctor what he was going through after his heart attack and stroke:

It's like you know how when you pick up a phone and the phone is in working order and if someone's picked up the other side? If you've called, even if there's no conversation, you know there's a connection. In my heart I always feel like I have a connection. Now it feels like the line is dead! That's what it feels like! When I pray, I don't have a sense of God! I don't have a sense of God's being close by or available!"

This metaphor speaks to connection. The telephone receiver depends on a mechanism (largely mysterious to most people!) as does a spiritual connection. Anyone who has picked up the receiver of a telephone when it is out of order or the lines are down can relate to the sudden sense that the receiver is dead and that it is qualitatively different from having a connection and not talking. You become instantly aware that you are alone. Similarly, when there is a malfunction in spiritual connection, the soul is instantly aware that the line is dead, cut off, and the resulting sense of separation and isolation can be shocking and traumatic.

Metaphors Ayla used to converse about spirituality tended to be kinaesthetic and artistic. For example, dancing felt "like total beauty, art almost." "Fire" described the power of the call and "force," the call itself. She spoke of personal growth and maturation with the words "ripeness" as in gardening and "richness" as in epicurean or artistic creation. She talked about "constrictions," "strictures," and "traps" to describe negative emotions.

Each of these metaphors in their own way is valuable in assisting others to 'see' processes that cannot be detected by the physical senses because, even though behaviours resulting from these process may be observable, what is occurring inside, to the soul, is not. Processes such as resiliency, spiritual focus

Summary

Chapter 4 began by presenting research results organized in eight major themes, each of which contained one or two levels of sub-themes. Thematic descriptions contained both structural and textural meanings for each participant. Then followed an exposition of original metaphors and similes that participants used to describe unseen processes and events on their journey.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of the relevance of the research results to the research question and purpose. This is followed by a composite description of noetic meanings, the structure in consciousness or Assagioli's ray, that holds and organizes the experience of being called to higher consciousness for someone kindled by transcendent experiences. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this structure is an empty developmental space until filled with the lived experience. Then, to fill the structure with lived experience, there follows a composite description synthesizing participants' structural and textural meanings.

How the research results relate to the theories and practises outlined in the literature reviewed in chapter 2 follows along with a discussion of the limitations of the research. A discussion of implications for educators and counsellors points the way to implications for future research. I follow with a discussion of the impact this research has had on my own values, personally and professionally. The chapter closes with an overview summary of this study.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Implications

Chapter 5 will begin with a discussion of how research results were relevant to the research question and purpose. This is followed by an analytic description of the invariant constituents or horizons that emerged as participants received and responded to their call to higher consciousness. These horizons will be organized into eight overarching themes. This structure of the phenomenon was referred to by Moustakas (1994) as the noesis, or noetic description. What is the purpose of extracting the structure and portraying it stripped of the lived experience? As a stand-alone part of the phenomenon, it identifies the inborn capacitors of the psyche that make it possible to experience the phenomenon. Conversely stated, no structure, no phenomenon. This step is purposely bare; it will be of interest for the actuality of its existence as well as for its heuristic potential.

Portrayal of the bare structure is followed by a synthesis of the structure with lived context. The context is presented with features that are general among the participants. This puts clothing on the phenomenon's frame, although the clothing is purposely generic. This purposely generic style of contextual description allows the reader to sense how the structures translate into reality without the level of specificity that would re-disguise the phenomenon and hide it within particularities. This stage is practical as it permits readers to relate the phenomenon to friends or clients and to their own experience. This stage of the analysis is referred to as a composite textural-structural synthesis, or a noetic-noemic description (Moustakas, 1994).

These composite descriptions are followed by an examination of how these results relate to theories and practices reviewed in transpersonal literature and discussed in chapter 2. I then discuss the limitations of the research and implications for the fields of education and counselling psychology and further research. The next two sections give an account of the significance of this research to my personal and professional values. Finally, the chapter closes with a summary of the study.

Relevance of Results to the Research Question

The knowledge sought through this research was articulated in Chapter 1 with the question, “When people experience transcendent events and feel powerfully called to higher levels of consciousness, how have they responded physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually?” In other words, what is the phenomenon of feeling called to higher consciousness through transcendent experiences? Through the questions comprising the general interview guide and several stages of thematic analysis, the research results of chapter 4 provided data that successfully answered this question, within the limitations of the research approach. Approaching the research question phenomenologically allowed a fuller answer to the question. This approach isolated the structure in consciousness that permits the phenomenon to enter consciousness. Adding participants’ contextual descriptions produced a clearer understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon, its structure within context. In other words, the question was answered through participants’ rich elaborations distilled into composite descriptions that (a) identify structures in human consciousness that permit the occurrence of the

phenomenon of transcendency and spiritual process, and (b) show the confluence of structure and context.

Both structure and context of the phenomenon occurred physically as a felt sense, that is, in body states of varying intensity; in social experience regarding work, family life, sharing such experience with others, embarking on a mission, and financial repercussions; in psychological states through specific thoughts, concepts, intentions, and emotions; and through spiritual states that were seen to have specific characteristics and purposes. Targeting the fields of developmental and transpersonal psychology, the chapter 4 section “How Did Participants Change in Responding to the Call” demonstrated developmental change in participants’ relationship to the self, to the world, and to life itself.

A further purpose of this research was “to identify theoretical frameworks and techniques that benefit people facing developmental needs arising in transpersonal levels of consciousness.” Chapter 4 under the heading “Professional Help in Responding to the Call” specified participants’ experiences in this area. The composite descriptions that follow in this chapter state these findings formulated in general principles, which could eventually contribute to *best practices* for professional educators and counsellors (including those who work in religious settings). These findings were unambiguous as to attitudes, knowledge, and practices found to be effective in eliciting transcendent experience, supporting individuals who experience a spiritual call, and an understanding of benign authority.

The two sections that follow, then, answer the research question by providing a description of the phenomenon of *feeling called to higher consciousness through*

transcendent experience that is rich in meaning, psychologically precise, and therefore useful as a guide to educational and counselling practices and to further research.

Composite Structural Description

Introduction

The composite structural description as set out by Moustakas (1994) is a way of understanding *how* the participants as a group experienced *what* they experienced. In other words, numerous constituent elements of experience occurred invariably across participants. These constituents at times seemed to jump off the page. This especially occurred when the constituent was unexpected. For example, having lived much of my own life apart from others of like mind, I was not prepared for the emphasis participants placed in the importance of actively participating in a spiritual community. Yet there it was – consistent and invariable in direction.

Looking beneath textural details, clearly necessary in order to see commonalities, left 33 constituent elements at the peak of the analysis. My next task was to notice where one constituent could eventually be seen as simply a variant of another constituent or as a constituent within an overall theme. For instance, at one point a constituent emerged to show *how* a spiritual experience arises in consciousness, the quiddity of the experience; and it seemed to stand on its own as a separate theme. Upon reflection, it became more meaningful to include parts of this constituent in the theme describing how to invite transcendence (which is about how it arises in consciousness) and other parts in the theme describing the nature and characteristics of transcendence (which is more about the actual experience of its arising in consciousness).

In re-assembling constituents and eliminating redundancies, I found that remaining constituents, now organized thematically, gained richly in their relevance to the human psyche.

Another stage of development occurred as it became more and more apparent that themes tended to interrelate both chronologically and in relevance to each other. I found describing these links produced a more natural process-oriented flow. For example, the act of surrender has enormous import to participants. A constituent devoted to surrender was of essence. At first, it stood alone. But it kept attaching itself to other themes. Eventually, I saw that in reality it fit inside two broader themes: (a) as an attitudinal approach to inviting transcendent events, and (b) as an attitudinal approach to spiritual journeying as a whole.

The end result of this painstaking process reveals a set of eight themes composed of invariant constituents that form the structure or noesis in human consciousness when transcendent experiences kindle a felt call.

What follows is a composite structural description as it appeared in this research.

The Composite Structure

Transcendent experience occurs unintentionally at first and is subsequently intentionally invited. Unintentional and intentional invitations to transcendence require a condition or combination of conditions that overwhelm the person's ability to cope psychospiritually, where usual explanatory perspectives fail. Conditions conducive to transcendent experiencing are extreme inactivity or extreme activity, isolation whether emotional or physical, disorientation as to space and time, the presence of spiritual

people, being in a spiritual environment and nature, art and ritual that stimulate visual, olfactory, and auditory senses, deep contemplation through reading or thinking, and achieving an alert quiescence of mind in meditation.

The likelihood of experiencing transcendency is increased when attitudes of openness, receptivity, willingness, honesty, trust, and curiosity are present.

Transcendent experience is ineffable. It defies comprehensive or accurate description but lends itself to simple descriptions of the felt sense. Transcendent experiences invariably reveal the presence of high or divine entities.

Transcendent experience is purposeful; it warns of danger in the environment or personal weakness, leads to paradoxical healing and integrating, and provides instruction about life purpose, personal development, and inspiration, confirmation, and affirmation of one's worth, meaning, and purpose.

Transcendent experiences have other dimensions besides purpose. There are a variety of forms through which they manifest in consciousness. As well, they are intensely powerful and immediate and they stimulate internal sensory perception. They are memorable and elicit substantial emotion in the participant.

Immanence is a type of transcendency where the perceiver's attention and consciousness leave the personal self and absorb into the external environment rather than the internal environment. Immanence also has a considerable emotional impact on the participant.

Experiencing transcendent events leads to conceptualizing about their nature and meaning. Concepts stemming from childhood, particularly religious opinions and expectations of the parents, are the most influential. Effort is expended to organize

thoughts about transcendent events, where they come from, the role of the personal self, the effect on the personal self, and identifying the high or divine presence. Comparisons are made to pre-existing concepts; openness to reassessing former concepts and learning new concepts helps in the process of cognitive reorganization.

Spiritual process is conscious and begins when one or more transcendent experiences eventuate in a felt call to transcend. Spiritual process has six main characteristics aside from being conscious. It has a dedicated focus through time and so is often referred to as a journey, a quest, or a path. Observable behaviour in a spiritual process is flexible according to individual need and inspiration; the call arises from an internal locus of control. Spiritual process increases existential awareness, involves guidance from an internally perceived transcendent source, and elicits strong desire to respond to the presence, guidance, or transcendent experience. The process elicits many profound, long-lasting emotions.

The spiritual process is invariably marked by first steps that are intentional, identifiable, specific in time, and that constitute a surrender of personal will to the call and an attempt to bring inner and outer realities into congruence.

Spiritual process is clearly directed: (1) towards a personal relationship with the transcendent, (2) towards expanded consciousness, more meaningful perspectives, and self-knowledge, (3) towards healing the soul, and (4) towards farther reaches of adult maturation.

Spiritual process entails consciously engaging in a variety of active practices, encountering, accepting, and dealing with obstacles, connecting with spiritual community, and sharing spiritual concepts and experiences. Sharing with others requires

the courage to risk negative reactions from others and to risk trivializing the sacred.

Setting goals in spiritual process requires discernment. Goals help when focussed on how to engage in spiritual practices, that is, methodology; they are detrimental when focussed on controlling outcomes of spiritual process or transcendent experience.

Spiritual process flows from revelation to emanation, as awareness emerges that the call is calling towards related action in the world. This action is seen as a mission. Missions are meaningful, have specific purpose and a spiritual focus, and are unique to each individual. Missions develop into careers that involve taking a position in the world.

In responding to the call, changes take place in the structure of consciousness. Participant relationships to self, the world, and life show increased self-acceptance, and the surfacing of core values, particularly: self-honesty, open-mindedness, curiosity, willingness, non-conformity and devotion, faith, trust, compassion for others, relative courage and equanimity in the face of hardship, gratitude, and inner peace. Higher stages of consciousness are evidenced also in more internalized loci of control, and in greater psychological integration, insight, self-discipline, and wider perspectives of life.

Professional help is valued when its practices induce transcendent experience (authenticity), validate transcendent experience within a holistically supportive perspective (legitimacy), and use authority only as long as authority is useful.

Metaphors and similes are valuable tools for describing spiritual experiences and processes because they, spiritual experiences and processes, are internal rather than external and because many aspects of them are beyond the explanatory power of more literal language.

Composite Textural-Structural Synthesis

Introduction

As a final step in the explanation of this phenomenon, the textural descriptions of the thematic analysis in chapter 4 are integrated with the composite structure described above. In this way, the phenomenon comes to life as a synthesis of the essences of the experiences and their meaning as played out in participants' lives.

The Composite Textural-Structural Synthesis

Participants began conscious spiritual process by unintentionally inviting a mystical event. Mystical events occurred at a variety of ages, usually beginning in childhood. Such events occurred when conditions overwhelmed the emotional and cognitive ability to cope. Conditions, whether intentional or unintentional, included extreme inactivity, such as convalescence or meditation, extreme activity, such as mountain climbing or dancing, isolation, disorientation, the presence of spiritual people, a spiritual environment, art or ritual that stimulated visual, olfactory, auditory, or kinaesthetic senses, intense contemplation, being in Nature, traumatic life events, and spiritual attitudes, especially that of openness, receptivity, willingness, honesty, trust, and curiosity.

Transcendent experience involved withdrawing focus from the personal self to become intensely, deeply, and intimately connected to a source of higher consciousness or divinity either in a relationship or absorbed into that source as one. A form of

transcendence termed immanence involved powerfully withdrawing focus from the personal self to become consciously connected with a source of higher consciousness or divinity in the material environment.

Transcendent experiences were invariably seen as a “gift,” “grace,” or “a vivid encounter with Spirit,” even if the experience evoked fear at the time.

Transcendent events were seen as vitally important; their purposes were clear, specific, personal, and highly meaningful. Purposes of transcendence were (a) to warn: cautions or warnings provided useful information specific to the participant; (b) to promote healing and integration through paradoxical understanding: psychospiritual integration occurred as consciousness rose to a level that permitted the participant to perceive paradoxically how opposing forces were not in opposition but different aspects of the same intention; (c) inspiration, confirmation, affirmation: these events healed also by inspiring, confirming, and affirming the value of the participant’s soul (d) instruction: these events provided clear and meaningful instruction concerning the person’s role in life or the meaning of their life and this instruction built confidence, courage, and hope; personal development: transcendent events pointed to specific areas of the personality needing development, especially perspective regarding the unity of life, self-confidence, sensitivity, and compassion, and also powerfully motivated such development.

Transcendent events invariably had six other dimensions or attributes besides purpose: (a) form: they appeared to consciousness in the form of transcendent visions, dreams, sudden realizations of spiritual understanding, divine visitation, and elevation to expanded dimensions of the True or Higher Self; (b) power: transcendent events were viewed as being so powerful that participants described them in tones of astonishment

and reverence even decades after their occurrence; (c) immediacy: transcendent events were sudden, primary, and immediate and completely dominated participants' attentional resources; (d) sensory: inner vision, sound, and temperature were salient features of transcendent events; participants talked about the warmth of the light in visions, the terrifying rumble and coldness of numinal power, as well as vivid sights, speech, songs, and music; (e) stability: transcendence occurred in a continuous string of events for all participants, which had stability of character and retained strongly in memory; (f) emotion: transcendent events invariably aroused an array of powerful emotions from extremely positive ones such as love, bliss, and a sense of belonging, to mixed emotions that occurred, for example, when participants realized they are off their path, and occasionally to terror when transcendent energies were met with fear and lack of acceptance.

Although all participants experienced transcendence through internal absorption as well as external absorption (immanence), some reported mostly the former and for others most experiences were the latter.

Immanence was a conscious and overwhelming direct apprehension of Spirit within the material world, "unfiltered by ideas or beliefs" where "there is no 'I' left." Immanent experience felt like "an awakening in Beingness," "flow" and "absorption." Participants described immanence as "the presence of God *within* the world and all living beings," and saw "forms and an all-pervading Presence shining through them simultaneously."

Immanence often came with a shift towards bio-psycho-social-spiritual integration, with enhanced spiritual discernment that permitted seeing "beneath the

surface to the health and goodness or hurtfulness of a situation,” or with sudden realization of self-delusion.

Immanent experiences embedded strong emotion and memory whether of deep ecstasy and love or of fear; participants expressed gratitude for both.

Conceptualization refers to the cognitive lens through which transcendent events entered consciousness. Perception at the time of occurrence used images and attributions that bypassed logical or ruminative cognitive functions. These images and attributions occurred so quickly they seemed to be an endemic part of the spiritual experience itself.

Cognitive processes involved analysis after spiritual experiences occurred. Ideas instilled in childhood played a strong role in forming images through which these experiences occurred in consciousness. Existential or psychospiritual language helped to express experience, such as being transported into another state of consciousness markedly different than ordinary consciousness.

Sometimes participants saw these experiences as coming from beyond themselves or outside their “sphere of influence.” They seemed “unbidden” especially when “they entered and gave information not manufactured from imagination.” The concept of generation from beyond the self was evident when participants referred to “grace,” “insertions,” “assaults,” or “gifts” on the path. These terms, in different ways, convey the experience of something extraneous to the self, that is, an awareness of a whole consciousness so unusual that it bursts into the psyche from the outside and as if generated from a source other than the person.

Despite the impact and meaningfulness of these experiences, participants still found themselves dealing with doubt. Sometimes they found it helpful to recognize that

spiritual experiences were consistently helpful and meaningful. Other times, participants found it helpful to think about methods that could validate experiences, such as corroborating the images that appeared in dreams and visions with historical or physical facts, or being guided by experimentation, trial, and error.

Participants encountered a powerful presence or force in spiritual experiences that they referred to as *God*. For some, God was distant, in which case they cultivated an intimate personal relationship with the Higher Self or with an important spiritual entity. Others experienced intimate relationships with both God and the Higher Self or other important entity.

Spiritual process differed from spiritual experience because it encompassed but was not limited to episodic spiritual events. Spiritual process constituted spiritual focus and activity through time.

The character of spiritual process was usefully described with words such as “path,” “journey,” or “quest.”

The process was highly individualized and flexible. People had a sense that it was “my path and my path alone” and could not be “stuck to some sort of denomination - some sort of emblem or badge.” As well, the expanding soul or spiritual process needed to manifest itself “through doing things in the world, through its being in the world, in my own and totally unique way.”

Spiritual journeys brought about increased psychospiritual awareness, both existentially in the here and now and as a “pull down the road but you don’t know where it’s going.” Clues about how to follow the path came through sensations such as “a kind of restlessness, a vague sense of incompleteness” that invited the participant to follow.

Spiritual awareness led to “a strong sense of being guided by that ‘path’ or that ‘force’ towards this natural growth of love, care, and compassion” and transcendently guided as well to “face pain, frustration, hate, anger, loneliness, confusion - all the emptiness and wounds in my being...to become who I am.” The journey itself was consistently a way of responding to that guidance.

Like all journeys, the spiritual journey had first steps. Participants remembered when their intentions clarified into consciousness and the journey began. Taking first steps on the path was a conscious attempt to bring outer lifestyle into congruence with inner truth. It included an outward manifestation of spiritual process.

Surrender was a precursor to the first steps consciously taken. Surrender was a highly prized attitude or approach deemed necessary, not just at the beginning of a journey, but regularly. Participants saw this as surrendering the egocentric self to the spiritual process so that, “In a sense, at this point, there’s little or no distinction between faith in the journey and the faith of surrendering to the Living God.”

The call inspired inner motivation and had direction.

For many the call was to develop a personal relationship with God, a divine being, or with the higher or true Self.

Navigating a spiritual journey expanded consciousness, led to self-knowledge, and allowed the participant to gain more meaningful perspectives. It allowed participants to “recognize deadly influences” such as psychological dependence on external security or on a “managed, orderly existence.” Courage was required, along with active faith and gratitude on this path; also vital were self-inquiry, gentleness, self-care, and learning to listen to the inner voice.

Healing for the soul was a major focus of the journey for participants. Issues included grief due to loss of culture, loss of loved ones by death or misunderstanding, self-abuse or abuse by others, emotional neglect in childhood, and the existential angst of meaninglessness.

Participants were excited about their becoming. Understanding the self and “understanding why I’ve been called into being, with all my foibles and with all my strengths, and that they fit, how I fit, in this time and place” gave deep contentment.

How people journeyed had guidelines that were definite and consistent. It required participants to work internally to re-structure the personality. The real work of transformation occurred not only passively through the effects of transcendent experiencing but also actively through determined application of enlightening practices such as writing poetry or prose, journaling, studying epistemologies and philosophies to make sense of experience, working with a spiritual director, taking part in spiritual groups, rituals, strenuous exercises, and rites, and avoiding influences that distracted from the call.

Dedication to the call brought participants face to face with obstacles and loss that invited greater spiritual growth. Sometimes family and friends did not accept the vicissitudes of a participant’s path and they left or criticized, financial difficulties and losses were common, other losses were emotional, such as realizing that one had fallen away from the path, losses were medical, when self-care was overwhelmed by the tasks of the journey, and some losses were existential as transformation led to loss of self-identity, meaninglessness, and fear.

Participants held spiritual community in high esteem. Through community, they found connection, insight, solace, joy, and the honouring of and working with spiritual process.

Spiritual experiences and concepts were shared through art, processing grief and loss in safe company, spiritual conversations, spiritual guidance, and writing. Sharing allowed people to work through themselves, “to test their integration with my own process of integration,” to heal, and to gain “reassurance, peace, and understanding.” Sharing with others brought significant risks as well “because they’d think you were crazy to have these experiences.” Often it took “years to find even a few people with whom to share.”

Another risk was the “fear that reducing experiences of transformation and other spiritual experiences to words would put them into a box with other boxes, with other experiences.”

Purposely creating spiritual goals required wisdom and insight. Goal-setting around methods of inviting spiritual experiences and healing without fixating on specific outcomes was helpful. In fact, goal-setting in the form of “search and practice” was helpful simply because otherwise “I wouldn’t have known where to look.” However, goal-setting in the sense of taking charge and “producing a finished product...actually subverts the whole thing.” Focussing on “external roles...can get in the way too.”

The call transmuted in part to a sense of being assigned to a spiritual task, mission, or emanation. Participants responded to the call in part by taking a stand in the world through their spiritual mission and it became their career.

Missions were revealed by synchronicity or “chance that seemed more than chance.” Missions were paradoxical. They involved imparting knowledge, experience, and perspective to others for the purpose of assisting positive change and maintaining that change but participants were aware of no need, implied or otherwise, to change anyone or to prove anything to anyone. And, as one participant said, “I can *only* do that when I’m completely myself and honest with myself.”

The call and responding to it elicited emotions. There was fear in “going it alone,” pain in seeing abuse in the world, dismay and suffering in perceiving one’s own negative attitudes and habits of thought and behaviour that needed work, and the yearning of the call itself was “an ache or a sense that you’ve been given a little taste of something and then you’re deprived!” But, as one participant said and testimony from the others agreed, underneath these difficulties:

There’s a joy, there’s a delight. I can’t describe it any better than this sort of feeling a delight in your day and what you’re doing. It’s like a profound kind of joy. “This is right. It feels right. It feels good.” And it feels right even though it might be, the kind of work, might be frustrating. But you have a sense it’s meaningful. And it’s pulling you through and you’re accomplishing what you’ve been called to do as a human being.

Participants changed as they heard and responded to the call. They were aware that personal growth was taking place in relationship to self, the world, and life. There was evidence of moving into expanded states of consciousness and witness consciousness. “It’s an evolution you can feel within yourself.”

Participants approved of the person they were becoming and even felt whole, although evolution was ongoing. Often participants could identify that they were, for example, in the middle of their journey.

Participants developed strength, compassion, and wisdom about issues in life, educational and research goals, and helping others. Remarkable changes occurred when core values or spiritual principles – such as, self-honesty, open-mindedness, and curiosity – permitted freedom to follow the path without rigid adherence to organizational or ideological form. The surfacing of core values such as willingness and devotion to spirit, faith, trust, compassion for others, equanimity in the face of hardship and inner peace, serenity, selflessness, and rising above ego evidenced participants' evolution into higher, more inclusive states of consciousness. Internalization of locus of control, psychological integration, and increasing insight seemed to be correlated to social non-conformity.

Professional practices that helped participants respond to the call fell into three categories: (a) authenticity with regard to the capacity of professionals to induce spiritual experiences, (b) legitimacy with regard to the capacity of professionals to provide psychospiritual support and validation, and (c) authority – the degree to which the use of authority was limited to the time it took for induction of spiritual experience and/or provision of psychospiritual support.

Professional resources that proved to be authentic were religious, spiritual, and personal development retreats that incorporated guided meditation, silent meditation, dance, art, sacrament, and ritual. Other authentic resources were a scriptural reading combined with long subsequent talks with the presenter, charismatic worship services with gentle and soothing music, no sense of coercion, and “singing in tongues,” spiritually-intended bodywork, and meditation practices.

Professional resources that were found unhelpful in terms of authenticity were religious organizations that discouraged or discredited direct transcendent experience.

Professional resources were legitimate in a spiritual sense when they invited participants to talk about spirituality, when psycho-spiritual integration, meaningful engagement, purpose, and stability in life received support, and when the participant's existence was holistically validated. Empathic listening assisted participants to reflect on how life events linked significantly. Self-care and reminders about being present assisted spiritual growth. Professional helpers were valued when they were patient with the duration and intensity of suffering involved in the struggle to overcome psychospiritual problems.

Participants found legitimizing practices among personal growth, mainstream religious, and First Nations traditions, application of the Biopsychosocial Spiritual Theory, a counsellor at a university Chaplain's Office, a university professor who explicitly invited students to include spirituality in the participant's work, a spiritual director who assisted psychospiritual integration and finding new ways to connect to God through silence and hearing Spirit in the heart, and professionals who had direct spiritual experience themselves, who resonated with the participant's experience, intuition and logic, who kept inviting the participant to be present and curious rather than judgmental about their experience, and who encouraged the participant to access the felt, lived experience rather than ideas and interpretations about it.

Participants identified practices that were spiritually unhelpful such as not inviting or validating spirituality, or meaningfulness, not "knowing exactly what to make of this [transformation]." Such practices left participants feeling like pioneers and "very scared." Also unhelpful was pastoral care limited to methods of logic and reason. Mainstream mental health practitioners were often found to miss the point, listen poorly, discount the

role of spirituality in depression, and make no effort “to embrace and understand the transcendent.” In addition, participants have been disappointed by educational systems that did not prepare them for the possibility of spiritual emergence by teaching about transformational processes.

Authority was said to have been most helpful when the participant sensed a return to equal status with the teacher or counsellor when the purpose of the relationship of authority came to an end. This permitted the participant to return to exploring spirituality as an individual. Participants found many examples of benign authority among members of the clergy, lay counsellors, spiritual guides, personal growth teachers and guides, and university professors.

Finally, due to the ineffability of spiritual experience and process, participants found metaphor and simile helpful. Participants developed these forms of language to describe the intensity, violence, and pain accompanying transformation of the soul, the soul’s powers of resilience and adaptation in the face of adversity, the receptivity and openness in inviting transcendent experience through ritual, loss of spiritual connection, the power of the call, personal growth, maturation, fears, and resentments.

Relevance of Findings to Literature

Transpersonal Development

Although psychometric testing was beyond scope of this research, data strongly supported assertions of Holden (2000), Maslow (1973), and Lukoff et al. (1998) that transcendent events both facilitate and provoke development into higher stages of

consciousness and that Wilber's (2000b) correlations (Table 1) showing of the trajectory of human development into more expanded, inclusive, stages of consciousness described the movement in consciousness demonstrated by these participants.

The transcendent events experienced by these participants were sudden peaks that broke through to the perspectives and experiences of much higher structures of consciousness. For example, their visions evidenced use of the "eye of contemplation" and their transcendent experiences brought each of them into contact with deity – for Anna-Brita, "Jesus," for Mark "the Living God," for David, "God," and even Ayla said she was comfortable calling the presence or force she encountered "God." The point here is not to argue the nature of God, what name to use for God, or even what they were experiencing but rather to acknowledge that a stage was contacted, however briefly, in which "all men and women" (Aquinas, in Wilber, 1983, p. 94) would have a direct experience of deity. These sudden, transient peaks into very high consciousness provided these participants the motivational condition referred to by Holden (2000), Maslow (1973), and Lukoff et al. (1998).

To connect the provoking of development with transcendent events, data revealed participants' perception that a purpose of both transcendent events and the call was personal growth: (a) Participants found that transcendent events promoted their growth through: "heightened awareness and self-confidence" (Anna-Brita), warnings about the "illusion of control" for egocentric purposes (Mark), becoming a "sensitive facilitator to worship, more understanding the frailty of the human condition and more inclusive" (David), and "psychological integration" and existential insight (Ayla); and (b) Participants said the call itself motivated them to engage in practices to develop a

personal relationship with Deity, expand consciousness, develop meaningful perspectives, heal the soul, and travel into the farther reaches of maturation: “And so the freedom, the freedom of growing older, is knowing that it (the call as grace) is in front of me and trusting it completely” (Mark).

Did development occur?

The data showed that both transcendent events and the felt call to higher consciousness were so intense they led to emanation, taking a stand in the world through a mission. The direction of such missions was towards service to others and the world, without the need to prove anything to anyone, and knowing that the work was bigger than any individual. This evidences the shedding of ego, in itself a sign of transpersonal development: (a) In transcendent events, participants received instructions; for example, “The message was teaching me my role in the future” (Anna-Brita) and “That’s what I’ve called you into being for” (David). They received these messages with reverence, gratitude, and sometimes shame for having strayed from purpose; and (b) On the path, participants perceived the call as a constant pull in the direction of their growth and mission. The suggestion of doing something off that path was rejected along with the view it would mean “going crazy” (Ayla) or “becoming very empty” (Mark).

A developmental purpose unique to transcendent events seemed to have been to inundate the participant with divine love; for example, “It was all kinds of love and, “I love you *so* much and it’s going to be okay!” (David). The love inspired, affirmed, and confirmed the value of participants’ very souls and further encouraged higher consciousness. Such love expanded participants’ own capacity for inclusiveness and compassion, which lead to vertical development.

Data supported the idea that development proceeds towards ever more expanded or inclusive wholes (Wilber, 1993a). An example of expanded capabilities occurred when Anna-Brita—delighted with the “New Me!”— stood up in church and defended herself and others, respectfully and firmly, against racist remarks. Participant data showed expansion of life perspective, deeper understanding of purpose, and growth of core values, or spiritual principles. Inclusiveness as a core value was expressed when David said, “It’s really a healing thing for me. And it’s going to help me to be effective or to be a blessing to other people.” Structures of consciousness expand while retaining the understandings and capacities of previous structures; thus, for David, healing himself was a retained focus and capacity of personal stages, while learning to use his experience to be “a blessing to other people” was a capacity belonging to a more inclusive, transpersonal stage.

Not only did data support the occurrence of development but as well that development occurs in stages as outlined in the works of Wilber (1993a, 2000a, 2000b) and Flavell (1971, as cited in Cole & Cole, 1993). For example, Anna-Brita and Ayla talked about being in the middle of their journeys. “Middle” seemed an odd term to use since none of the participants could know where middle would be on a scale of developmental stages. “Middle” seemed to speak more being neither at the beginning nor at the end. Journeys occur over time, step by step, thus depicting the stage-like process of development.

The data provided important support for stage theory’s assertion that growth occurs as a sudden jump across every area of the personality. Flavell (1971, as cited in Cole & Cole, 1993) emphasized that the emergence of a new stage involves “qualitatively

new patterns development” (p. 9). That the rate of development was in itself non-ordinary is seen in the fact that participants were keenly aware of transformation and the call to higher consciousness and they felt it to such an extent that each of them was aware of changing direction, developing unconventional interests, such as preferring spiritual practices and thoughts to conventional pastimes, valuing the opportunity to share their experiences and understanding with people who also had spiritual experience, developing spiritual attitudes and strongly altruistic values, which translated into devoting their lives to a mission that was unique to their talents and in some way taught, guided, or supported personal growth in others.

Flavell (1971, as cited in Cole & Cole, 1993) also suggested that the transition from one stage to the next is rapid and “is marked by simultaneous changes in a great many...aspects of behaviour” (p. 9). Participant data strongly supported the rapidity and suddenness of change, to the extent that participants described their transformations in terms consistent with spiritual emergency. David, in fact, referred me to the article by Watson (1994) to explain the severity of his upheaval. Watson described the continuum between spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency. David’s description of psychological, social, and medical trauma placed his experience well into the critical zone for spiritual emergency. The upheaval experienced by all participants is consistent with the full spectrum of changes described by Flavell above.

The Call – Its Structure as Assagioli’s Ray

I was surprised at the strength of support the data lent to the existence of a structure in consciousness corresponding to the ray which connects the Higher Self to the

personal self as described by Assagioli (1976). (In chapter 2, the psychological *ray* connecting the personal self with the true Self was identified as a visual representation of the felt call to higher consciousness.) Participants powerfully described the ray, which is also referred to in this study as a call to higher consciousness. They said the ray feels like “a pull down the road but you don’t know where it’s going” (Anna-Brita), “being led by an unseen hand” and “a kind of restlessness, a vague sense of incompleteness” that he feels invited to follow (Mark), “an ache or a sense, that you’ve been given a little taste of something and then you’re deprived” (David), and “fire” (Ayla). The data described the ray in terms of physical sensations (pull/ache/restlessness), sense of being guided (led) to follow through reward or neglect (invitation/taste or incompleteness/deprivation).

In fact, the data specifically described the ray in terms of direction – towards a personal relationship with the transcendent and healing for the soul. This is consistent with Assagioli’s developmental depiction where the personal self is drawn upwards along the ray into closer and closer connection with the Higher Self. Participants identified identical approaches that satisfy the call such as surrendering to the call, using discernment in setting goals that identify useful spiritual practices and effectively schedule them but identify neither spiritual outcomes nor outcomes defining a social or spiritual role, by encountering, accepting and overcoming obstacles along the way, by connecting with a spiritual community, sharing spiritual experiences and concepts with like-minded others for support and understanding, and taking a stance in the world in a way that is spiritually, personally significant.

In summary, the ray, its characteristics and purposes as described, is directional and its direction leads to higher structures of consciousness.

The Call – Its Power

Chapter 2 explained spiritual emergency as an extreme biopsychospiritual reaction that can occur when transformational and transpersonal experiences are intense and overwhelming. The literature went on to show that increasing numbers of people experience transcendent states, and that these experiences tend to promote development in a powerfully positive way. The results of this research supported the literature. All participants reported the overwhelming power of transcendent events and the call to higher consciousness. These events produced upheaval for all participants. For David, the upheaval reached truly dangerous proportions on the physical as well as psychospiritual levels. David described and is still recovering from an extreme form of spiritual emergency and yet all participants including David gave testimony as to the positive effect of their experiences on their psychospiritual development. That any one of them could state as strongly as they did their gratitude and reverence for these experiences and their spiritual process, let alone all four, speaks strongly in support of the literature.

Professional Competence in Assisting Transpersonal Development

The rationale for considering professional competence in assisting psychospiritual development was supported in these results. As stated above, all participants underwent varying degrees of difficulty along the continuum of spiritual emergence to spiritual emergency. Each of them needed and valued psychospiritual assistance and this will be discussed more fully below under “Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Authority.”

A discussion of Tori's (1999) study (see also chapter 2 of this research) follows as it points to a methodology for evaluating developmental programs and to the care that needs to be applied when attributing change to specific factors.

Tori's (1999) study, in which he assigned girls of high school age to three conditions, a Catholic retreat, a Buddhist retreat, or no retreat, found that degree of maturity could increase through specific practices. The present research, chapter 4, "How Did Participants Change in Responding to the Call?" also found evidence of increased maturity in participants. The three major areas of development were participants' relationships with themselves, with the world, and with life itself. Some of the practices found authentic inducers of transcendent experience in this study were similar to those found effective for increasing levels of maturity in Tori's study; to this extent the present research corroborates Tori's findings.

Tori's (1999) study did not explore the subjective experiences of the girls in the retreat conditions. He used Gough's Adjective Checklist and other measures as indicators of development but these measures, although valid in terms of development, had no internal validity with regard to the subjective experiences that led to the development. Given the subjective experiences reported in the present research, it seems possible and even likely that transcendent experiences and the call to higher consciousness might have influenced these changes.

The point of this distinction is that Tori (1999) stated that the non-theistic aspect of the Buddhist retreat made its results applicable to secular (psychological) settings and "for those who find faith in unknown entities unsatisfying" (p. 126). All participants in the present study encountered, at some point, a strong presence they chose to call *God*.

Some participants encountered that presence as well as other divine presences. Tori's Buddhist retreat would have provided many of the conditions found to be successful in inducing transcendent events, such as the presence of spiritual people, extreme inactivity, spiritual instruction and guidance, and meditation itself. It is possible that girls in that group, as well as the girls in the Catholic retreat, had transcendent experiences in which they encountered a spiritual presence, and one that they knew as God or other divine entities, and it is even possible that those entities were familiar to them.

For its purpose as an outcome study of developmental techniques, Tori's (1999) study was helpful and deserves replication to evaluate organizational effectiveness. However, conclusions about the inner experience producing the outcome were not warranted since inner experience was not investigated. Tori's assumption that "faith in unknown entities" does not occur in Buddhist retreat conditions was unwarranted. In fact, a follow-up study to understand the inner experience of the girls in the Buddhist retreat is warranted especially in view of the results of the present study and the importance of this knowledge in terms of formulating support that does not assume but accurately legitimizes retreatants' experiences.

Conversely, Tori's (1999) conclusion that the Buddhist retreat conditions could be valid "for those who find faith in unknown entities unsatisfying" (p. 126) may actually work from a purely pragmatic viewpoint and assuming nothing about subjective experiences. These retreat conditions may appeal to individuals at rational/conventional morality/formal operations stage. These are the individuals described in chapter 2 some of whom have extremely negative reactions to psychospiritual programs. The Buddhist format, or a generic version of it, might be acceptable and encourage development and

resolution of personal problems. So, regardless of the subjective experiences mediating such changes, some aspects of the Buddhist program seem promising for this population.

This latest point will be explored later under the heading of “Implications for Educators and Counsellors.”

Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Authority

Wilber’s (1983) method of evaluating organizational effectiveness was supported in this research. All participants explicitly stated the critical importance of authentic professional practices and teachings and described professional situations that they found to be effective guides to transcendence. It is significant that all participants were actively engaged in authentic practices whether within an organization or privately, as they valued the transformative, developmental effects of transcendent experiences. In fact, Anna-Brita was unwilling to return to her church despite its authentic practices. She tried another church but was disappointed and commented, “Maybe I have to do it myself.” She uses methods of contemplation in nature to “create change, encourage hope, to decrease depression” for herself and her clients. Mark and David expressed disappointment and consternation when they realized that the religions in which they had been brought up and which they had chosen as adults, at least in so far as they had experienced them, lacked authentic practices. Both men sought outside their religion for authentic practices. Moreover, David was resolutely engaged in developing ways to introduce authentic practices to his faith community.

Participants expressed appreciation for professional support they found that offered “a legitimate and legitimizing world view” (Wilber, 1983, p. 252), that addressed

their being holistically, and offered a psychological safety net to stabilize and protect them as they pursued higher states. Wilber's delineation for evaluating the effectiveness of professional support was valid for these participants and found, at times, passionate agreement. Participants expressed gratitude when they found this kind of support, whether in a chaplain's office at university, with lay presenters and counselors outside of their own religious affiliation, and with spiritual teachers and guides of Eastern and earth traditions. On the other hand, participants were also unequivocal about the unhelpful, even harmful, effects when professionals attempted to help but ignored spirituality and dismissed the crucial role it played in their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Participants provided no data regarding poor use of professional authority, however several instances were mentioned of benign authority. Three participants spoke warmly about individuals who had acted in roles such as teacher (Ayla), pastor (David), or guide (Mark). These relationships, ones which necessarily have unequal power balances, came to natural closure when they were no longer needed. The relationships then acquired more equal power balances that participants continued to find useful. Again, these results validate Wilber's (1983) method of evaluating professional competency in transpersonal growth.

Limitations of Research

As qualitative research, this study's findings regarding noesis, the structure in consciousness supporting the phenomenon of being called to higher consciousness and the transcendency that triggered it, are limited to the evidence of these four participants.

Any questions raised that speak to the delimitations listed in that section of Chapter 1 are beyond the scope of this study.

A specific limitation needs to be mentioned regarding the findings of this research. All data came from self-report; these reports derived from responses to the questionnaire, interview responses, creative writing, and corrections to my understanding that participants provided in the form of revisions to the thematic analyses. The limitation in self-report is particularly important in the theme “How Did Participants Change in Responding to the Call?” Many positive changes were found. This seemed credible as other materials collected from that individual and my experience over several years with each person corroborated the positive attributes. However, the research is limited in that it does not include quantitative observations. For example, the research did not include before and after experiments to test psychological integration, personal courage, humility, etc. This limitation naturally opens the possibility of creating or using existing tests of maturity such as the ones used by Tori (1999). Such research designs, through measures of reliability and validity, and through testing greater numbers of participants, have much to offer transpersonal research.

Another limitation of this research is that the participants were healthy, mainstream, highly functioning individuals. Including wide demographic diversity and individuals with less functionality could provide valuable counterpoint for examining the structure of consciousness.

An overall limitation of this research arises from the very depth that qualitative inquiry allows. The questions raised by this research are more extensive than its design

can accommodate. It is my hope that the heuristic value of the data will promote further research, which relates to the section below regarding implications for research.

Implications for Educators and Counsellors

It is apparent from these results that authentic practices do exist and exist in contexts of benign authority. What is equally apparent is that legitimizing support may be lacking in public education and mental health fields.

It is also significant that most participants in this study were reluctant to share their transcendent experiences, their felt call to higher consciousness, or their spiritual problems unless specifically invited to do so. As a result, these subtle dimensions were processed alone and isolated from meaningful assistance, or referral.

An implication for educators is to explore how to educate schoolchildren about the full range of human development and processes of development. The purpose of such education would be to prevent pathological searches for enlightenment/entertainment (substance use, sex, violence, etc.), and promote an understanding of the naturalness and health of intentional, psychospiritual practices and their capacity to enhance the experience of living.

An implication for the mental health community is the need for increased understanding and competence with issues arising in transitional and transpersonal stages of development, transcendent experiences, calls to higher consciousness, spiritual emergence and emergency, related issues, and the potential for growth. The importance of exploring these experiences, which lie beyond purely physical, emotional, and cognitive states, is key because such experiences may be the most meaningful to the person seeking help, and these experiences are the catalyzing centre for a return to health and maturation.

Moreover, it is important for professional educators and mental health providers to understand that behaviours are functions of stages; that out of stages come the individual's overall self- and world-perspectives; and that it is important to match stage of development with therapeutic techniques to avoid 'resistance' from clients – resistance being natural given the inappropriateness of the techniques.

The developmental spectrum, its nature, possibilities and problems, such as have been explored in this research, for example, Wilber (1983, 2000a, 2000b), Cook-Greuter (1994), and other transpersonal developmental psychologists, deserves a unique place in the training of educators and mental health professionals. Clear delineation of the range of human possibility gives professionals and laypersons a detailed and spacious framework with which to assess developmental problems, choose interventions, and tailor support appropriate to client level of development within the context of their personality style and unique traits (tastes, interests, goals, etc.). It is vital that counsellors and educators become aware of the structural range of human consciousness and foster progress by tailoring programs and interventions taking into consideration the structure of consciousness.

In summary, ability and willingness to address clients' spiritual experiences and goals can be crucial to healing and development. In this discussion, I have referred to unhelpful goals as ones limited to an end product or role and helpful goals as focussing on intention, direction, and process. Educators and counsellors occupy a unique position in being able to offer a psychospiritual developmental paradigm. Such a paradigm can adhere to or be free of any particular affiliation. Drawing from any and all existing systems as well as creating new psychospiritual programs could be monitored for effectiveness, support, and safety using Wilber's (1983) framework for evaluation as considered in this study. A well-formed developmental paradigm could be designed to support clients' and students' preferred belief systems as catalytic containers for healing, joining, and transcending into maturity.

Implications for Research

Implications for research, as suggested above, relate to the limitations of this research. To recap, the tremendous depth of qualitative research leads to heuristic richness. However, the qualitative approach is limited in that it cannot provide the generalizing utility that comes from measuring probability, validity, and reliability across larger populations. However, qualitative research such as this is a ferment of possibilities from which studies that are highly relevant to the human condition can be created.

It follows then, using Wilber's (1983) epistemological framework, that research in the area of transpersonal development continue to use qualitative designs to build a groundwork of communal confirmation. This is in accordance with the third of the universal principles of data acquisition enunciated by Wilber and described on page 40, chapter 3, of the present research. Quantitative designs could play an exciting role in investigating communal confirmation. For example, conducting analyses of variance among themes such as the ones revealed by participants in this research could provide useful evidence for or against the existence of a psychological structure in consciousness. These possibilities lean on the larger question of epistemology, considered next.

Future research is needed to explore mandalic methodologies, as set out by Wilber (1983) and discussed in chapter 3. His explanation of universal principles of data acquisition and verification, applied to the dimension of spirit, led, rationally, to the concept of a mandalic science, the method used in the present research to collect and analyse transcendelia – transcendelia being the type of data provided by each of these participants. Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology was an effective design to carry out qualitative research, and well suited to mandalic science. Specifically,

Moustakas set out procedures for the “attempt by the mind to arrange or categorize...the data of transcendelia” (Wilber, 1983, p. 73). However, it needs to be remembered that the procedures used in the present research constituted only one method of data verification possible within mandalic science. As discussed above, other methods to “arrange or categorize” the “data of transcendelia” exist and others may be developed.

Additional research to be undertaken directly pertaining to the call to higher consciousness includes: (a) validation of the existence of and developmental stages of the structure in consciousness, (b) further work on validating and correlating developmental frameworks, especially ones depicting a *full* range human consciousness, and (c) better understanding about how individuals integrate events and progress into and through transpersonal stages of development.

Implications for future research loom in the field of mental health and addiction pathology and recovery. For example, the design and results of this research could be used heuristically to explore the effectiveness of Twelve Step programs, with and without the use of psychotherapeutic and psychopharmacological intervention. Anecdotal and informally-gathered observations indicate strongly that the spiritual solution in these programs warrants better understanding. The present research could guide such investigation, through its findings, its phenomenological design, and its mandalic framework of inquiry.

Relevance to Professional Values

Working in a field where I am privileged to connect in a meaningful way with people who experience both developmental issues and peak states of consciousness, my

first comment is that this research has given me a deeper confidence about addressing the impact that spiritual experiences and values can have on every level being. I have deeper appreciation as well for the efforts of other professionals and Twelve Step programs in providing spiritual ways and means for people to heal and grow.

I find myself dismayed at participants' accounts of disinterest and lack of understanding encountered in the mental health world regarding the importance of transcendent events in their lives and the motivation that arose as a call to higher consciousness. The testimony of these participants as to long-term positive effects leaves me more than ever aware that transcendent states and motivation need to be invited to explore their value and importance in health and development.

Mark and David in particular emphasized that, in their experience, psychological tools by themselves were "not very adequate for personal/spiritual growth and for helping people in their journey." All participants commented that it takes the person of the counsellor and the help of others on the same journey to grow. This research suggests that the mental health community would gain a better perspective by considering the entire spectrum of human development, its therapeutic challenges, and the hope inherent in its possibilities.

I am informed by participants' emphasis on the unpredictable and inspired nature of their paths that they cannot be tied to dogma or form. A spiritual path is non-linear and follows individual developmental imperatives. It curves and winds and proceeds along apparent detours and into apparent "no exits" but development may then occur more thoroughly. This inside knowledge, emerging from the data, supports me to know that collaborative treatment plans are vital but only with acknowledgement that

developmental issues and life events interacting with transcendent states and their call, will construct the actual route.

I also remember that Mark and Ayla were able to maintain sufficient balance in their journeys for their lives to reflect little financial strain. David and Anna-Brita's journeys however showed that income and living standards are vulnerable to spiritual upheaval and activity. I wonder if legitimizing support from educators and counsellors could increase stability in all aspects of the individual's life. Although Mark received virtually no psychospiritual support, his stability is instructive. He was much older when his transformation occurred, more solid and rewarded in his development, which seems to have provided a good platform of coping skills for his upheaval. Ayla on the other hand was young, even at the time of interview. Her experience may be instructive in another way. Her stability financially, socially, and educationally may have resulted from the fact she received legitimizing support, from her mid-teens on, from groups of like-minded peers and teachers.

Finally, this research has affected my professional values by impressing on me the strong prevalence of transformation through transcendent experiences, as discussed in chapter 1. This leads me to make a point of inviting discussion in both educational and therapeutic roles. It further leads me to consider creating an opportunity for clients and staff to join in meditative silence on a daily basis during the workweek.

Relevance to Personal Values

Although I have always understood that spiritual progress is work, conducting this research has led me to accept more completely that the work can be hard, is often painful, and that consistently applying the spiritual attitudes expressed by these five participants requires sufficient autonomy of lifestyle to do the work. The rewards are available, but not without relentless, tremendous diligence.

Through this study, I have learned what spiritual process is in a fuller, more grounded way. My values now actively embrace community and know it to be essential for my own healing and growth.

As well, using participants' vocabulary over and over has expanded my own vocabulary of spiritual experiences and principles in a way that benefits me both professionally and personally. Having the words to express concepts and dynamics seems to have a reciprocal relationship with awareness. What I notice becomes workable for me if I can express it in words, and having the words leads to heightened awareness of my experience.

Wishing to evolve to higher structures of consciousness is one thing, however, I am aware for myself that individual lines of development, for example, Erikson's psychosocial line, may lag. I have developed through this research an intuitive understanding through inner experience of that kind of imbalance and how it foils release into more expanded structures, next higher developmental spaces. For this understanding, I am grateful, and for Wilber's (1983) formulations and participants' shared experiences about issues of authenticity, legitimacy, and authority in evaluating resources.

More particularly, at the mid-point of this research, I came to know spiritual emergency with an inside perspective. Several changes in my personal life and career, while positive, were overwhelming. I found myself dealing with a spiritual emergency that fulfilled criteria outlined by Watson (1994) for several months. Through a spiritual program, I am focusing more on my own health and needs and know I have a meaningful path to wholeness. The immense benefit of knowing this was well expressed for me by David when he said, “This is a rare kind of opportunity for me. And it’s one for me! It’s really a healing thing for me. And it’s going to help me to be effective or to be a blessing to other people.”

Summary of Research

Substantial numbers of people report temporary states of transcendence at sometime in their life. The purpose of this research was to investigate the phenomenon of feeling called to higher states of consciousness among people who have experienced transcendent events. Along with this main objective, it was my hope to identify theoretical frameworks and practices that assist in the developmental tasks arising when expanding into higher levels of consciousness.

In chapter 2, I reviewed literature on the topic such as Wilber’s (2000b) correlation of basic structures of consciousness with four lines of consciousness: Cook-Greuter’s Self-Sense Stages (p. 205), Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (p. 212), Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages (p. 203), and Wilber’s Stages of Spirituality (p. 209). I illustrated the usefulness of a developmental stage framework with examples from my practice as an addictions counsellor. I proceeded with a description of Tori’s (1999) comparative study

on the developmental effectiveness of Roman Catholic and Buddhist retreats and followed with an explanation of Assagioli's (1976) concept of the structure of human consciousness at an individual level, identifying Assagioli's *ray* as the structure of individual consciousness at the centre of this research.

Chapter 2 continued with an explanation of the capability of transcendent experiences to have a positive effect on development and a description of the continuum of spiritual process from spiritual emergence to spiritual emergency, which sometimes occurs as people try to integrate such experiences.

Chapter 2 ended with a description of Wilber's (1983) framework for assessing professional competence in the field of transformation. This framework looks at authenticity as the capability of an organization to elicit transcendent experiences, legitimacy in terms of supporting and legitimizing individual experience, and safety issues in the use of authority.

Chapter 3, Methodology, followed and described the general approach as qualitative. I described my personal epistemology, based on the meditations of Descartes (as cited in Cottingham, 1986), as it grounded the qualitative approach in scientific tradition. I highlighted an error that has entered into not only my own but also popular consciousness for the past century. I described how straying from the original Cartesian perspective leaves a state of imbalance in scientific methodology and how Wilber's formulations, which categorize scientific methodology by space-time domain, serve well in restoring balance. In this light, I introduced mandalic science as the branch of transpersonal science matching the type of data acquired and analysed in this study.

Transcendental phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994) was introduced as the specific design capable of supporting this mandalic investigation. I reaffirmed that these methodologies were consistent with the Cartesian epistemological tradition as extended in Wilber (1983).

The chapter gave details about the criterion sampling method delineated by Gall et al. (1996), and data collection and instrumentation, wherein I described items in both the preliminary questionnaire and the interview itself.

Then I introduced the pilot study, undertaken in preparation for the main study, as well as a description of what I learned by undertaking the pilot process and how it assisted in conducting the main study.

Finally, I expounded in some detail on the steps undertaken to analyse the data, including such practices as epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, creating a synthesis of meanings and essences, triangulation, and preserving both an audit trail of documentation and a chain-of-evidence record of decisions.

Chapter 4 presented the results of this research, that is, the phenomenological information and materials of the four participants to the main study. I introduced each participant with demographic and historical context to give greater reality to the humans surrounding the phenomenon.

Next, I presented eight major themes with sub-themes, noting the uniformity with which participants experienced the matters referred to therein. Simultaneously, I gave many examples from the interviews and writings of the participants to depict the lived experience.

In chapter 5, I discussed the relevance of the results to the research question. This led to a description of the invariant structure of the experience presented as a composite of all participants. Thus was depicted the psychospiritual structure in consciousness, emptied of contextual content, which lies as a potential in the human psyche. These meanings, the noesis in other words, showed how the human psyche provides particular developmental spaces for transformation to occur.

I followed composite structural description with a synthesis of the structural components (noesis) and contextual (noemic) meanings, as a composite of all participants, in order to provide as complete a generalized description of the experience possible, representing this group of participants as a whole, as recommended by Moustakas (1994).

The chapter then described the relevance of the research results to the literature reviewed in chapter 2. I explored how results spoke to the nature of transpersonal development, the ray described by Assagioli as a structure within individual consciousness which depicts the call of the Self to higher consciousness. Professional competence in assisting development was discussed giving results supportive of the need for professional assistance and a description of how the data illustrated the issues of authenticity, legitimacy, and authority.

I discussed the limitations of this research and continued with implications for counsellors and educators, suggestions for future research, and an exploration of the relevance of these findings to me personally and professionally. This chapter has just summarized the study. The research closes now with a description of the voice of Siddhartha's (Hesse, 1999) call on the last stretch of his long journey:

He could have remained with Kamaswami for years, acquiring money, squandering money, fattening his belly and letting his soul go thirsty; he could have gone on living for years in that gentle, well-cushioned hell—if this had not come: the moment of utter hopelessness and helplessness, that extreme moment, when he had hung over the rushing water and had been ready to destroy himself. He had felt that despair, that deepest disgust, and he had not succumbed: the bird, the cheerful source and voice in him were still alive; and that was why he felt this joy; why he laughed, why his face beamed under his graying hair...he pondered and pondered his transformation, listened to the bird as it sang for joy...In his heart he heard the voice speaking, the newly awakened voice, and it said to him: “Love this water! Stay with it! Learn from it!” (pp. 86-87, 89)

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