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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY AND CHILDHOOD TRAUMA
AMONG FOUR ADULT SURVIVORS, FOR WHOM
SPIRITUALITY WAS SIGNIFICANT**

by

RANDY MONTFORD-HILDEBRAND 

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

Master of Social Work

**The Faculty of Social Work
Lakehead University
Thunder Bay, Ontario**



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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to explore the lived experience of spirituality and childhood trauma among four adult survivors, for whom spirituality is significant: In do so, the research explores both the influence childhood trauma had on the survivors' spirituality, as well as the role spirituality plays in the their healing process. A phenomenological model of qualitative research is used to investigate the experience from the perspective of the participants. The collective experience is described using thematic analysis of the common and unique themes that emerged from open-ended interviews with each participant.

The participants reported that the immediate impact of childhood trauma experience(s) on their spirituality was varied. One participant found that an immediate positive influence of childhood trauma involved a strengthening of her relationship with Spirit/God/Creator. Two other participants experienced unique extra-ordinary influences as a direct result of the trauma incident. All of the participants experienced at least some degree of negative influence on their spiritual self.

Spirituality played an extremely important part in the healing processes of all of the participants: influencing their mental, physical and emotional self; their relationships with other people; their relationships with Spirit/God/Creator. The participants were able to identify specific spiritual practices and processes that they used to support their healing process.

The findings of this exploratory study suggest the following: spirituality may be a critical resource for the survivor in the healing process; the influence of childhood trauma and spirituality are dynamic and changing over time; there may be a reciprocal relationship between spirituality and childhood trauma where in, each has the capacity to influence the other; spirituality may provide the survivor with a framework of meaning; spirituality may be an integral part of the whole person; spirituality may be developed and nurtured in a multiplicity of ways. The implications for social work practice are as follows: social workers may want to consider addressing issues of spirituality with survivors of childhood trauma, as this is an aspect of the person that is influenced. In situations where spirituality is significant for the survivor, social workers may want to consider assisting the survivor to draw on the resource of the survivor's spiritual capacity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The goal of this research is to explore the lived experience of spirituality and childhood trauma among four adult survivors for whom spirituality was significant. Both the influence childhood trauma has on the survivors' spirituality, as well as the role spirituality plays in the survivors' healing process are explored. From the lived experience, some recommendations are derived to assist social workers who work with childhood trauma survivors.

Social work and mental health professionals who desire to assist survivors of childhood trauma in the healing process could benefit from a greater understanding of the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality. Many survivors' indicate that spirituality is a significant aspect within their experiences of trauma, coping, adaptation and meaning making (Bauers, 1994; Ganje-Fling, Veach, Kuang & Houg, 2000; Lawson, Dreibing, Berg, Vincellette, & Pink 1998; Jacobs, 1989; Kane, Cheston, Greer, 1993; Kennedy, Davis & Taylor, 1998; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Pargament, 1998; Ryan, 1998; Sandford, 1990).

Many authors suggest that spirituality is also a vital factor for the social work profession - it is "the heart of helping" (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.xv). It is the energy that infuses our work and gives meaning to what we do, by what ever name people call it. Spirituality "is the heart of empathy and care, the pulse of compassion, the vital flow of practice wisdom, and the driving force of action for service (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.xv). This value for spirituality is expressed

within a number of social work perspectives, including Aboriginal Theory, Logo Therapy, and Transpersonal Theory (Turner, 1996). Spirituality is a core factor of human experience for both the trauma survivor and the social work professional. Thus, it is a significant dimension to be considered in research and practice.

Social work and mental health researchers have suggested that the literature addressing the influence of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality has been limited (Canda, 1988; Cascio, 1998; Derezotes, 1995; Haight, 1998; Sermabeikan, 1994; Steere, 1997). Research in the area of childhood trauma and spirituality clearly identifies that trauma can have both a positive or negative influence on the spirituality of the survivor. Some survivors described as resilient report that their spirituality is strengthened through the experience of trauma and that spirituality is a critical resource in the process of overcoming trauma and sustaining their healing (Himelein & McElrath, 1996; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Sandford, 1990). Conversely, other survivors report significant damage to their spiritual well-being which impedes their process of healing (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Hall, 1995; Imbens and Jonker, 1992; Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincellette, & Penk, 1998). As independent phenomenon, both trauma and spirituality are complex and dynamic. Their relationship to each other is just beginning to be explored and documented in the professional literature

The limited social work and mental health literature has resulted in insufficient attention being paid to spiritual issues that arise from childhood trauma and the role that spirituality plays in the survivors' healing process (Casaccio, 1999; Elliot, 1994; Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Ganje-

Fling, Veach, Kuang & Houg, 2000; Hall, 1995; Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincelle, Penk, 1998; Kane, Cheston & Greer, 1993; Ryan, 1998; Weaver, Koenig & Ochberg, 1996). The research is not clear about how spirituality acts as a resource to the healing process for some survivors or how to address impediments to spiritual development and healing that other survivors experience. There is a paucity of research literature that addresses issues of how social work interventions can harness the survivors' spirituality to most effectively assist trauma survivors to heal (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996).

To begin exploring these questions, the research has taken a salutogenic rather than a pathological orientation. A pathological orientation to trauma seeks to understand how trauma survivors are negatively influenced and why they 'get sick'. In contrast, a salutogenic orientation to trauma focuses on the origins of health and poses a radically different question: Why are some childhood trauma survivors located toward the positive end of the health ease/disease continuum (Sandford, 1992)? Or, how are some able to move toward healing while others remain devastated by the trauma experience? Both orientations are important to gaining a fuller understanding of the trauma surviving and healing process.

This research focuses on what can be learned from the spiritual experiences of childhood trauma survivors who are actively engaged in the process of healing. By gaining insight into how survivors of childhood trauma experience spirituality in the contexts of both the actual trauma experience and their subsequent healing process, the research project can begin to address the

void in the professional literature, thus, better assist childhood trauma survivors who are still struggling.

1.2 Researcher Sketch

My interest in doing research in the area of trauma and spirituality comes as a direct result of both personal and professional experiences. As a young boy growing up, my father developed an inoperable brain tumour which radically altered both his own life and the life of each member of our family. For my father, spirituality was both a critical resource in coping with his trauma experience and inextricably intertwined with his subsequent mental and emotional healing process. This experience with my father's trauma and other personal experiences while growing up affirmed the potentially significant connection of spirituality and coping with trauma for myself. However, my professional experience as a social worker has not mirrored this perspective. As an undergraduate social work student the topic of spirituality never entered the curriculum as an aspect to address within practice in any circumstance. Over the past fourteen years as a social worker trying to address the needs of youth who have experienced traumatic events, I have struggled to understand how best to address the dynamic relationship of trauma and spirituality in the healing process of these youth. My interest in doing research in the area of trauma and spirituality comes as a result of the incongruence between my personal and professional experiences and the process of trying to reconcile the two in new ways.

This research is influenced by my orientation to spirituality and my approach to existentialism. My orientation to spirituality is inclusive and broad; I believe spirituality is something that can be

uniquely experienced by each person and is something that spans religious boundaries. My approach to existentialism is influenced by similar ideas of individual uniqueness, subjectivity and meaning in suffering.

Fundamental to my approach to existentialism is an emphasis on the individual freedom and the uniqueness of each person. This approach disagrees with those who view human beings as essentially impulse-driven or controlled through conditioning (Krill, 1996). Rather, a person is viewed as having the freedom of choice and discovering their uniqueness in the way they relate to their own objective experience of life each day.

Also significant to my existential approach is the idea that there is no absolute singular truth; and therefore a belief in subjectivity and an intrinsic value placed on each person's unique view and contribution (Krill, 1996). Subjectivity for existentialists is the meeting place of the transcendent and human within each person. "It is not all-knowing, and subjectivity is different in each person and constantly in the process of change within the same person. Subjectivity exists as a unique responsive relation to the world" (Krill, 1996, p.252).

Core to my approach to existentialism is "the recognition of suffering as a necessary part of the ongoing process of life - for human growth and the realization of meaning" (Krill, 1996, p.251). Frankl (1984) further clarifies that suffering is not necessary to find meaning but rather to "insist that meaning is possible even in spite of suffering - provided, certainly, that the suffering is unavoidable" (p.136). For me, the heart of the issue is the answer a person gives to

the meaning of life for themselves. Extreme situations have the potential to push each of us to deeper levels of understandings and meaning in our lives.

This research has been deeply influenced by my personal/professional experiences, my spiritual orientation and my approach to existentialism which values uniqueness, subjectivity and meaning in suffering. While positivists ascribe to a downward, reductionists type of explanation, subjectivists can be described as having a more inductive and upward-looking explanation.

Harman (1992) summarizes this sentiment in the following:

If I want to really understand you, I need to understand your spirit, I need to understand you in a God-permeated universe. And so I am always looking in the other direction (p.101).

1.3 Research Questions and Methodology

The central research question for this thesis is the following: from the perspective of the adult survivor of childhood trauma for whom spirituality is important, what is the perceived relationship(s) between traumatic childhood experiences and their own spirituality? The objectives of this research consist of the following:

- (a) to explore the meaning and experience of spirituality of the participants,
 - (b) to explore the various influences of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality,
 - (c) to explore the how the survivors' spirituality influenced their childhood trauma experience during their healing process,
 - (d) to explore the survivors' specific spiritual practices that aided the healing process,
- and,

- (e) to provide recommendations that could enhance social work interventions with survivors of childhood trauma.

A qualitative research paradigm was used because it is most compatible with my research goals and objectives. The participants in my study were chosen because they had actively worked on developing their spirituality as part of their healing process for a minimum ten year period. Face to face interviews were conducted with the participants in order to obtain data from their perspective. I then analysed the data and documented my findings.

1.4 Contribution to the Research

It is my intent that this research will be of benefit to social work professionals and survivors of childhood trauma. Limited research currently exists in the social work and mental health literature on the relationship(s) between childhood trauma and spirituality: regarding the influence of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality, and the role of spirituality in the healing process. My hope is that this research can contribute to the current literature, provide some directions for future research directions, and yield some concrete recommendations that will help improve current practices.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

My thesis has been organized into six chapters. Chapter two presents a comprehensive review of the social work and mental health literature on the relationship(s) of trauma and spirituality. It

offers the reader an understanding of the both the research that has been documented in the literature as well as an overview of the theoretical observations on the topic area.

Chapter three describes the methodology used to explore my research topic. It includes the rationale for using a qualitative paradigm and phenomenological approach as the method of inquiry. Processes of data collection and analysis are explained.

The fourth chapter presents the collective findings of my research study. In keeping with the phenomenological method of inquiry, these findings are rich in context and description embodying the essence of the participants' experiences.

The next chapter presents a discussion, wherein my findings are compared to the current literature on this subject: areas of congruence and incongruence are highlighted, along with directions for future research.

The final chapter offers concluding remarks from both the participants and the researcher. The recommendations of the participants to social workers and other survivors are presented. As the researcher, I reflect on both the research process and the research findings, and highlight the implications of my findings for social worker practice and research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

Historically, the relationship between spirituality and trauma is an area of interest that has received attention from numerous disciplines. Over the centuries, various world religions have developed core beliefs and coping strategies that regard suffering and adversity as something which can make one stronger. The best sellers list for years has included stories of spiritually inspired individuals who triumph in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity, e.g., Nelson Mandela, David Peltzer, Martin Luther King. Some of the most influential psychological theorists throughout the century have included religion and/or spirituality in their models regarding it as an asset, e.g., James, Jung, Maslow; and as a liability, e.g., Skinner, Vetter, Freud (as cited in Wulff, 1996).

The social work profession has a long history of being concerned about how people's lives have been affected by adverse situations in their environment (McMillan, 1999). Initially, theory development emphasized the harm caused to persons who experienced severe adversity. In the last 20 years, there has been a shift to also include models that emphasize the "human potential in the face of adversity" (McMillan, 1999, p. 456). Within social work, a number of different models have been developed based on this human potential emphasis which include the strengths perspective, resilience, hardiness, empowerment and solution-focussed approaches (McMillan, 1999). One of the primary concerns of these models is to learn how people are able to overcome

adversity. Most recently, research is taking further steps toward considering how people may benefit from adversity - including the strengthening of one's spirituality (McMillan, 1999).

Currently, there is a paucity of research in the social work and mental health literature that addresses the relationship(s) between childhood trauma and spirituality. It is only in the last decade that social work research is starting to take into account the aspect of the survivors' spirituality, when exploring the effects of childhood trauma experiences. There are numerous studies that document the psychosocial influence of childhood trauma on survivors (e.g., Falasca & Caulfield, 1999; Finkelhor, 1995; Herman, 1992; Terr, 1991). The social work and mental health literature notes that a much more limited body of research addresses the area of spirituality and mental health in general (Canda, 1988; Cascio, 1998; Derezotes, 1995; Haight, 1998; Sermabeikan, 1994; Steere, 1997), and more specifically, the role spirituality plays in the lives of childhood trauma survivors (Casaccio, 1999; Elliot, 1994; Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Ganje-Fling, Veach, Kuang & Houg, 2000; Hall, 1995; Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincelle, Penk, 1998; Kane, Cheston & Greer, 1993; Ryan, 1998; Weaver, Koenig & Ochberg, 1996).

In order to set a context for understanding the research undertaken in this project, I will review what currently exists within the social work and mental health literature pertaining to the relationship between spirituality and childhood trauma. In particular, I will focus on the influence of childhood trauma on the survivor's spirituality, and the role of spirituality in the process of healing from trauma. Three primary areas will be reviewed: (a) the research that is

documented in the literature, (b) theoretical observations, and (c) interventions that address the spiritual issues and aspects of survivors' experiences of childhood trauma.

2.2 Definitions

The literature review is based upon the following definitions of childhood trauma, religion, spirituality and healing.

Childhood trauma is “an event or a series of events that render the child helpless and breaks through ordinary coping strategies, or both” (Falasca & Caulfield, 1999, p.213). “Traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death” (Herman, 1992, p.32). The common denominator for traumatic experiences is not in the actual event but rather in the meaning prescribed to the event by the person. “They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe” (Herman. 1992, p.32). These experiences leave the child haunted by terror and a sense of helplessness as to their ability to act against it. In the end, psychological trauma affects the core of some persons being, their sense of control, connection and meaning - their spirit.

There is an emerging differentiation between religiosity and spirituality in the literature. While these two terms were historically used almost interchangeably, they are now most often contrasted with each other (Mahoney & Graci, 1999). To help clarify the distinction between the two, religion will be defined as the “patterning of spiritual beliefs and practices into social

institutions, with community support and traditions maintained over time”(Canda & Furman, 1999, p.44).

Spirituality as a diverse and complex phenomenon has been defined in a divergent manner within the social work literature. There is some general understanding that spirituality is a more inclusive phenomenon than religion. While it is difficult to develop a precise definition, there are some common attributes that can be distinguished within the current social work definitions. Spirituality will be defined by these six common attributes outlined by Canda and Furman (1999):

- (a) “An essential or holistic quality of a person that is considered inherently valuable or sacred and irreducible.” (p.44)
- (b) “An aspect of a person or group dealing with a search for meaning, moral frameworks, and relationships with others, including ultimate reality.” (p.44)
- (c) “Particular experiences of a transpersonal nature.” (p.44)
- (d) “A developmental process of moving toward a sense of wholeness in oneself and with others.” (p.44)
- (e) “Participation in spiritual support groups that may or may not be formally religious”. (p.44)
- (f) “Engagement in particular beliefs and behaviors, such as prayer or meditation, in a spiritual or religious context.” (p. 44)

Within the framework of these definitions, one's spirituality may be expressed in both religious and nonreligious forms. When the literature refers to one's religion or religiosity, it will be assumed that this dimension can be subsumed as one aspect within the more comprehensive construct of spirituality.

Healing, as a social work term, will be defined as "the interior response of the human organism that is physical, emotional, social and spiritual in nature. It is understood as a metaphor, referring to the innate capacity of people to rally their resources to the challenges of life within their environments" (Marks, 1994, p.20). Implied in this is the notion that the internal and external environments are critical for health and healing (Marks, 1994). The external environment is the resource context of rituals, relationships, symbols, and language that people can use to empower themselves. The internal environment is the context of personal capacities

2.3 Research on Childhood Trauma & Spirituality

While the social work and mental health research addressing the relationship between childhood trauma and spirituality is limited, there are some emerging themes. For the most part, the research literature is polarized into two exclusive categories: studies that find spirituality have a positive influence on the process of coping and recovering from childhood trauma, and, studies that find spirituality is negatively affected by the childhood trauma experience. However, the majority of research in the area of childhood trauma and spirituality, has focussed on the influence of sexual trauma experiences. Only a small minority of research has taken a more broad approach to exploring a range of other types of childhood trauma and its relationship to the

survivors' spirituality. In this section, I will explore both the positive and negative influences that the research literature describes, inclusive of all types of childhood trauma origins.

2.31 The Positive Influences of Spirituality within the Childhood Trauma Experience

Research with adults who experience trauma indicates that religious forms of coping are especially helpful to persons experiencing, “uncontrollable, unmanageable, or otherwise difficult situations” (Pargament , 1996, p. 232). Religious coping is viewed as a dynamic dimension, with positive and negative patterns associated with corresponding implications for health and adjustment to adverse situations (Pargament et al., 1998). These studies focus on adult adversity and it cannot be assumed that these findings are transferable to survivors of childhood trauma. How religion works to assist people in the process of coping and recovering from trauma is not explained.

Resilience studies concerned with recovery from childhood trauma (e.g., maltreatment, holocaust survivors, refugee experience, physiological difficulties, sexual abuse) identify religious affiliation and/or spirituality as a protective factor against adversity (Anthony, 1987; Kahana, Harel & Kahana, 1988 ; Masten, Best, & Garnezy, 1991; Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987; O’Connell Higgins, 1994; Sandford, 1990; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; Werner, 1992). A study of resilient female survivors of childhood sexual abuse identified how the trauma had contributed to some beneficial life changes, including finding meaning in adversity and the strengthening of religious beliefs (Himelein & McElrath, 1996). While resilience considers a multiplicity of

factors both within the individual and their environment, spirituality is one identified protective factor associated with recovery from trauma.

The qualitative research literature on childhood trauma describes in greater detail, childhood trauma's influence on spirituality, and the role that spirituality plays in the recovery process from trauma. Shantall (1999) explored the experience of meaning in suffering among Holocaust survivors. Survivors reported that the ability to choose what they felt was morally right and courageous allowed them to endure the worst sufferings with dignity and emerge stronger, with "feeling(s) of moral triumph or spiritual victory" (Shantall, 1999, p.109). Despite the deep scars caused by the Holocaust, survivors indicated they have been able to make something extremely meaningful of their lives. Bauers (1994) conducted an in depth study with 20 people who had successfully survived extreme trauma. While the traumas occurred at different life stages and were varied in nature, the methods survivors used to forge ahead were very similar. One of the methods used, was to "acknowledge that there is a force or being greater than themselves and (to) align themselves with this force" (p.205). Similarly, Sandford's (1990) study of 20 childhood trauma survivors reported spirituality to be a powerful resource in helping survivors' make sense of their trauma experience and influenced their entry into the helping professions. Valentine and Feinauer (1993) reported that female survivors of childhood sexual abuse stated that their religion was important in the following ways: it provided a supportive network with which to interact; it assisted them to make meaning of the experience in a way that freed them from self blame; it enabled them to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Finally, O'Connell Higgins' (1994) phenomenological study with 40 resilient survivors of severe childhood trauma reports

spirituality plays a critical role in sustaining resilience. She further describes common characteristics among the resilient's spirituality:

- (a) They are convinced that they can choose their own path, how to be and how to see;
- (b) they are very devout, but for the most part, nourish their faith outside formal religious communities;
- (c) they cherish human relationships which they view as integral to their overcoming;
- (d) their faith is imaginatively restored through literature, film and art;
- (e) they feel chosen for survival, while their suffering did not crush them - it made them more; and,
- (f) there is a passionate responsibility to help others.

In summary, this domain of the research literature identifies spirituality and positive religious coping as contributing to recovery and resilience in the wake of childhood trauma. A number of specific positive influences of spirituality within the trauma experience that the research literature identifies are as follows: spirituality enabled survivors to be strengthened through their healing process; spirituality freed survivors of guilt related to the trauma; spirituality enabled survivors to find meaning and purpose in their lives; survivors were able to align with a force greater than themselves; the survivors' spirituality expressed through religious practice facilitated the development of a supportive community of people; the survivors' spirituality instilled a greater sense of responsibility to help others.

2.32 The Negative Influences of Childhood trauma on the Survivor's Spirituality

Trauma and spirituality are dynamic phenomenon and not all survivors find childhood trauma to be a positive influence on their spirituality. There is a domain of descriptive and quantitative research literature that indicates childhood trauma can have a significantly negative influence on the survivor's spirituality. As well, there is some attempt within the research to understand the interaction between childhood trauma and spirituality in the context of other external factors such as characteristics of the individual, environmental factors and specific trauma characteristics. This section will begin with a review of the qualitative research and move toward the quantitative research that is presented in the literature.

Descriptive Research

A certain portion of the research literature consists of descriptive research, that is, in-depth qualitative studies with small samples of childhood trauma survivors. These research studies tend to have a small sample size and involve exploratory in-depth interviews. The strength of these qualitative studies is their ability to provide a rich and thick description of the relationship between childhood trauma and spirituality, from which to build a deeper understanding of the relationship. The obvious limitations of these qualitative research studies are that their small sample size does not allow the findings to be generalized to the larger population.

A range of descriptive research studies has raised themes that suggest childhood trauma can negatively influence the survivor's spirituality. Ganje-Fling et al. (1996) indicate that childhood trauma can create numerous obstacles that hinder the spiritual development of the survivor. In a

relatively large qualitative analysis of 77 sexual trauma survivors, Ganje-Fling et al. (2000) categorized nine major obstacles to spiritual development that they observed in their respondents' definitions of spirituality and religion. This comprehensive list of identified obstacles echoes many of the findings in other descriptive research concerning itself with the negative influences of childhood trauma on spirituality. The obstacles to spiritual development that were identified by Ganje-Fling et al. (2000) and the corresponding findings of other descriptive research, are as follows:

- (a) unresolved existential questions related to the purpose and meaning of one's life (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Hall, 1995; Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincelle, & Penk, 1998; Imbens and Jonker, 1992 ;)
- (b) unresolved religious questions, originating with beliefs one was raised with that no longer work or are harmful (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Imbens & Jonker, 1992; Manlowe, 1995);
- (c) anger at spiritual source (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Imbens & Jonker, 1992; Kane, Cheston & Greer, 1993; Lawson et al. 1998; Manlowe, 1995);
- (d) disillusionment, sense of abandonment by a spiritual source, and cynicism resulting from feeling let down by faith/religious beliefs (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Hall, 1995; Imbens & Jonker, 1992; Lawson et al., 1998);
- (e) distrust and feeling betrayed by spiritual source (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Hall, 1995; Rossetti, 1995);
- (f) fear of God or change (Ganje-Fling, et al., 2000; Imbens & Jonker, 1992)
- (g) feeling of unworthiness and low self esteem (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Hall, 1995)

- (h) God's nature being the same as the perpetrator's (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Imbens & Jonker, 1992; Manlowe, 1995); and,
- (i) guilt - feeling punished for their sins (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Imbens & Jonker, 1992; Manlowe, 1995).

Quantitative Research

There is a domain of research that uses quantitative research methods to demonstrate the measurable negative effects of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality. These quantitative research methods have attempted to establish correlations between various aspects of spirituality and trauma and/or measures of effect based on psychometric measures of a self report. The efforts to conduct quantitative research from which to make statistically significant statements of effect have three primary limitations. First, there is a problem with adequately operationalizing constructs such as spirituality and spiritual well being into psychometric measures (MacDonald, LeClair, Holland, Alter, & Freidman, 1995). Second, there is a problem with validity. In order to establish validity, there must be a demonstration of empirical evidence indicating the test measures what it claims to measuring, and for different groups of people. There are significant difficulties related to construct validity and external validity/generalizability as spirituality is a diverse and fairly ineffable experience (MacDonald et al., 1995). Third, there is an issue of response bias. MacDonald et al. (1995) state that psychometric measures for spirituality have difficulty differentiating "between people who are truly spiritual and those who endorse test items indicating they are spiritual when in fact they are not" (p.174). As spirituality is a complex concept that is difficult to reduce to concrete inclusive operations, issues of validity

and reliability of the measures must be considered when viewing any of these quantitative research results.

(i) The Negative Influence of Childhood Trauma on Spiritual Well Being

The experience of childhood trauma is demonstrated to have a negative influence on the survivors' spiritual well being, based on the use of various psychometric measures. While employing the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS), Ganje-Fling et al (2000) compared persons receiving psychotherapy for childhood trauma and other reasons, with medical patients and hospice workers. Based on the SWBS, they found that psychosocial trauma negatively affected spiritual well-being, regardless of the type of trauma experienced. A study of Christian women in outpatient therapy who had been sexually abused as children, scored lower in spiritual functioning and involvement in organized religion than either non-abused outpatients or non-clinical, non-abused women as measured with the Religious Status Inventory (RSI) (Hall, 1995). Male veterans who were victims of child abuse (physical, emotional or sexual) scored significantly higher on the Spiritual Injury Scale (SIS) when compared to non-abused male veterans (Lawson et al., 1998). However, these same male victims of child abuse also demonstrated a significantly higher frequency of positive spiritual behaviors such as prayer and spiritual experiences. This raises questions about the validity of the spiritual injury measure and if it can be equated with a measure of reduced overall spiritual well being.

(ii) The Influence of Childhood Trauma on Adult Religious Participation

Various researchers have attempted to use adult religious participation as a measurable variable of the effect of childhood trauma in survivors' lives. However, adult religious participation as a measure of overall spirituality or spiritual well being has significant limitations. First, it is only one dimension through which an individual may or may not express their spirituality. Second, adult religious participation is influenced by a variety of other factors outside of the childhood trauma experience. At first glance, a statistical correlation between childhood sexual trauma and religious practices as adults may seem to imply that childhood trauma has a negative influence on the survivors' spirituality. In fact, no inference can be drawn as to whether this is a negative influence on the childhood trauma survivors' spirituality or whether it is understood as a positive influence in the survivors' spiritual development. Despite the limitations of adult religious participation as a measure of spirituality, I have included the research on adult religious participation and childhood trauma as it is contained within the body of research literature to be reviewed.

The following studies demonstrate that there may be a variety of ways to interpret adult religious participation. As previously noted, O'Connell Higgins (1994) found that the majority of resilient persons she interviewed had a faith that was integral to their ability to surmount adversity, yet most were religious non-practitioners. Shaffer and Cozolino's (1992) study of 20 adults outpatients who had experienced childhood ritualistic abuse found that while only about half were involved in organized religion, the majority affirmed some belief in a higher power. Avoidance of church was attributed to the recurrence of traumatic memories triggered when

observing rituals involved in Christian worship services. A study involving 33 women survivors of childhood sexual abuse by a father-figure found that rates for leaving church or joining a new church was comparable with a non-abused control group (Kane, Cheston, Greer, 1993). A common need for a spiritual dimension in their lives was expressed and captured in the comment “spirituality is more important to me now than religion” (Kane et al., 1993, p.235). No clear inference can be made in regards to a correlation between the experience of childhood trauma and adult religious participation.

A statistically significant negative correlation between childhood trauma and later adult life participation in religious practices was found. According to a national random sample survey in the United States, victims of childhood sexual abuse involving penetration, are more likely to be religious non-practitioners as adults (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1989). In the Netherlands, Imbens and Jonker (1992) also concluded from their interviews with nineteen female incest victims raised in devout religious homes, that they were likely to be religious non-practitioners as adults.

(iii) External Variables that Influence the Relationship of Spirituality & Childhood Trauma

Some quantitative research studies recognize that the interaction of spirituality and childhood trauma is complex and influenced by a multiplicity of external factors. In an effort to increase our understanding of this complex relationship, these research studies attempt to control for some of these external influences by including specific external variables.

A stratified random sample of 2,964 professional women by Elliot (1994) found a greater complex interaction between childhood trauma and adult religious practices when different religious upbringing and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim were considered. The data collection involved the use of a standard questionnaire along with the completion of two psychological measures: the Trauma Symptom Checklist (TSC-40), and the Family Environmental Scale (FES). Among the women raised by conservative Christian parents, those who were victims of incest were more likely to be religious non-practitioners as adults as compared to those sexually abused by someone outside their nuclear family. Conversely, “women raised by parents of other religious orientations or by agnostic/atheistic parents, a history of sexual abuse increased the likelihood that subjects would be involved in religious practices, particularly when the abuse occurred within the nuclear family” (Elliot, 1994, p 105). Conservative Christian women abused by someone outside the nuclear family were associated with the least amount of psychological distress for any of the abuse survivors groups. While Conservative Christian women who were victims of incest were associated with symptoms of distress, surpassing incest victims who were raised in other religious orientations or as agnostic/atheistic.

The following studies have included factors of gender or survivors’ attitude when exploring the interaction of childhood trauma and spirituality. A survey of 1810 Catholics who were victims of childhood sexual abuse found a significant gender effect: women reported a decline in their relationship with God while men did not (Rossetti, 1995). Within the same study, it was not surprising to find that all victims who were perpetrated against by a priest, experienced a

decline in their relationship with God as well as a loss of trust in the institution. The survey garnered a 25% response rate of primarily Catholics who were actively involved in a church ministry. In two studies with religious women who had been sexually abused as children, those women who had an attitude of acceptance scored higher on the Spiritual Experience Index (SEI-R): a psychometric measure intended to measure spiritual maturity (Reinert & Smith, 1997; Smith, Reinert, Horne, Greer & Wicks, 1995; Smith, Reinert, Horne, Greer, & wicks, 1996). Scoring high on the SEI-R does not necessarily imply spiritual maturity as it may also indicate excess use of spiritual support for those emotionally insecure.

2.33 Summary of the Research Literature

The social work and mental health research literature addressing the relationship between spirituality and trauma has a tendency to be polarized. The research reports fairly exclusive categories of either positive or negative influences on the survivors' spirituality. Resilient survivors report that their traumatic experience has strengthened their spirituality and made them "more" as a person. Spirituality is described as a critical resource in the overcoming of trauma and in sustaining the healing process. Conversely, other survivors of childhood trauma, report experiencing significant damage to their spiritual well-being, and that aspects of their spirituality significantly impeded their spiritual development. There is little indication in the research that a survivor could potentially experience a combination of these positive and negative influences, or that the influences could potentially change over time.

The research literature on the relationship between spirituality and childhood trauma is at an early stage of development which is reflected in limitations of both the descriptive and quantitative research documented in the literature. The descriptive research is strongest in beginning to provide a deeper and broader understanding of the relationship between spirituality and trauma: in particular describing the influence childhood trauma has on spirituality, and the role of spirituality in the recovery process from trauma. However, the qualitative research is limited in its ability to generalize findings to the general population. The quantitative research has attempted to indicate measurable effects of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality as well as begin to explore complex interactions of external factors that influence this primary relationship. However, the quantitative research is limited by the constructs used to try to measure spirituality as well as the methodological constraints of trying to isolate effects within a complex interactional relationship.

There remains a great potential to build on and develop the research literature base that has started to form. The research has started to shed some light on understanding the complex interactional dynamics of spirituality and childhood trauma--in particular, the influence childhood trauma has on the survivor's spirituality and the influence of spirituality in the process of healing from trauma. The research has established the fact that trauma survivors experience differing outcomes in relation to the effect on their spirituality. This knowledge raises questions pertaining to what factors lead to a significantly more positive or negative outcome for childhood trauma survivors or whether negative influences can be ameliorated by interventions either during the trauma experience or after. In order to begin answering these questions and to gain a

fuller understanding of the relationship between trauma and spirituality, there is a need to continue the effort of conducting research in this area.

2.4 Theoretical Observations

This section will explore two major perspectives within the theoretical literature that address the relationship between spirituality and childhood trauma: (a) the potential for childhood trauma to negatively affect the survivors' spirituality; and (b) the potential for childhood trauma to enhance the survivors' spirituality. Following this, I will also review the theoretical literature that addresses the issue of what enables the childhood trauma survivor to transcend their trauma experience--to turn crisis into opportunity. It is important to understand that theoretical observations are influenced by the subjective perspectives of the scholar. To begin this section, I will briefly look at how the theorist's perspectives on the concepts of spirituality and trauma, have an influence on the theoretical observations they make in the literature.

The way a theorist defines or values spirituality can lead to divergent opinions about the relationship of spirituality and trauma. The following four theorists demonstrate some of the divergent ways of viewing spirituality and the how this influences their view of the relationship between trauma and spirituality. Freud viewed religion as a dangerous illusion and as a crutch for the weak. He believed that only the "abandonment of religion and its dogmatic teachings... and reliance instead on science and reason will allow individuals and society to grow beyond so infantile a stage" (as cited in Wulff, 1996, p.51). One could hypothesize that Freud would view the potential disruptions in spiritual beliefs caused by trauma as a positive outcome. Ganje-Fling

& McCarthy (1996) view spiritual development paralleling psychological development. The experience of trauma acts to bring about a crisis in development, in that both psychological and spiritual developments are arrested around the age of the trauma. Whereas, Garbarino & Bedard (1996) conceptualizes trauma as an inherently negative spiritual experience--“the experience of darkness rather than enlightenment, a plunging into the shadows of life, coming face-to-face with the capacity for evil in human nature, with the vulnerability in the natural world, with the reality of the dark side” (p. 469). However, the initial crisis is not viewed as a “dead-end”(p.469), but rather as experiences that can promote an “even deeper spiritual awakening” (p.469). Finally, Decker (1993b) believes that all trauma experiences act to increase spiritual development so long as “development is defined as an increase in the search for purpose and meaning” (p. 33). This increase searching for a purpose may or may not result in an improvement in psychological functioning. The way in which the theorist values and defines spirituality does influence how they view the relationship between childhood trauma and spirituality.

The way a theorist views a subjective issue like trauma can influence the perspective they promote. For example, the Chinese symbol for crisis can also be viewed to mean opportunity, where the idea reflected is that the same situation may be perceived as a negative or a positive depending on the perspective of the individual. Within the theoretical literature, numerous scholars have made theoretical observations about the interaction of trauma and spirituality, but have taken divergent perspectives on whether it implies crisis or opportunity. In a pattern slightly divergent to the research literature, the theoretical literature has a tendency to either primarily emphasize the potential for childhood trauma to negatively affect the survivors’

spirituality (e.g., Imbens & Jonker, 1992; Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Manlowe, 1995; Redmond, 1996; Tessier, 1992); or to emphasize the potential of childhood trauma to enhance the spirituality in one person over the acknowledged potential for childhood trauma to damage the spirituality in another (e.g., Decker, 1993a, 1993b; Frankl, 1984; Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; Jaffe, 1985; McMillan, 1999; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). The theoretical literature is influenced by the theorist's perspective on childhood trauma as an event of crisis or opportunity.

2.41 The Crisis of Spirituality Created by Trauma

Within literature of theoretical observations, there is general acceptance about some negative influences of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality as well as some more specific influences that are less widely accepted. There is general agreement about the potential for childhood trauma to overwhelm the coping mechanisms and disrupt the belief structures of the survivor, as well as cause a crisis in meaning and purpose for the survivor. Less widely accepted are the ideas that childhood trauma can negatively influence the survivors' spirituality in the following ways: (a) causing an existential crisis for the survivor, (b) arrest the spiritual development of the survivor, and (c) negative influences on spiritual development related to psychological effects of splitting and transference.

Overwhelm Coping Mechanisms & Belief Structures

There is general agreement that trauma has the potential to overwhelm our ordinary coping mechanisms and shatter basic belief structures about self and our relation to others (Decker, 1993a; Falasca & Caulfield, 1999; Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Garbarino, 1997; Garbarino

& Bedard, 1996; Herman, 1992; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Terr, 1991; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). Decker (1993a) states that most people's beliefs about self and the world are formed as a result of interaction with the environment over time. Trauma is unparalleled in extremity to any other experiences with the environment from which belief systems are developed. By its very nature, trauma may not easily be assimilated into old belief frameworks-challenging and potentially rendering past beliefs patterns inadequate for integrating current extreme experiences (Herman, 1992; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996)

Crisis in Meaning and Purpose

The fact that trauma has the potential to create a crisis in the area of meaning and purpose is also generally agreed upon by theorists (Decker, 1993a; Falasca & Caulfield, 1999; Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Garbarino, 1997; Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; Herman, 1992; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Terr, 1991; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). Children in particular are more vulnerable to trauma in that their systems of belief and coping strategies have had the least opportunity to develop (Garbarino & Bedard, 1996). This is echoed by van der Kolk, who routinely asks psychiatric patients if they have given up all hope of finding meaning in their lives: 74% responded "yes" who had experienced trauma prior to age five when compared to 10% who responded "yes" when trauma had occurred after the age of twenty.

(as cited in Garbarino & Bedard, 1996). van der Kolk observed that an early childhood onset of trauma experiences has a marked influence on hopelessness.

Existential Crisis

Trauma can also bring about an existential crisis. Herman (1992) states that trauma “violates the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and casts the victim into a state of existential crisis (p. 51). Similarly, Garbarino and Bedard (1996) state that child victims of trauma experience an “eclipse of God” and literally end up “looking for God in a world in which God has disappeared” (p. 473). Garbarino (1998) suggests that trauma creates physical, philosophical and spiritual wounds. Trauma is a spiritual challenge that directs people into dead-ends, like revenge, and “diverts people from the path of enlightenment” (p.363).

Spiritual Development Arrested at the Age of Onset of Trauma

Fowler’s schema of faith-development theory is most often referred to in the theoretical literature when addressing issues of spiritual development and the influence of childhood trauma. Faith-development theory is based on “a conviction that humans have evolved into an ontological vocation for responsiveness to God” (Fowler, 1996, p.176). Spirituality as a multidimensional construct is seen as foundational to a sense of self, relations to others and to the making of individual and cultural meanings (Fowler, 1996). Fowler theorizes that people develop spiritually through a progression of six stages that roughly correspond to psychological development as proposed by Erickson (Ryan, 1998). People’s progression from one stage to another is not automatic nor assured due to a complex interplay of internal and/or external factors--biological maturation, emotional and cognitive development, psychosocial experience, and religio-cultural influences (Fowler, 1996).

Ganje-fling & McCarthy (1996) believe that a major influence of childhood trauma is that spiritual development is arrested at the age at which the abuse occurred. Examples of this may include a God-image frozen in time at the point when the trauma occurred, concrete ideas about the meaning and purpose of life, or polarized and rigid concepts of good and evil. Several theorists also list numerous obstacles to spiritual development resulting from childhood trauma, including mistrust, despair, anger, conflicts with religious systems, confusion about guilt and forgiveness, and feelings of spiritual unworthiness (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996, Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Tessier, 1992).

Spiritual Development Negatively Effected by Splitting and Transference

Other theorists address the specific psychological effects of splitting and transference caused by childhood trauma and relate these dynamics to the survivors' spiritual development. In particular, the victim's psychological reaction of splitting and fragmenting as an adaption to trauma inflicted by parents is examined in the context of spiritual development. A child victim's need for attachment to a parental abuser can lead them to join with the abuser by blaming themselves for their parents' moods and displeasure (Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Tessier, 1992). They may compensate through efforts to strive for perfection, and seek to cast out the evil within themselves in order to achieve safety and acceptance from their abuser (Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Tessier, 1992). For these female victims that were parented by a stern patriarchal image of God, the characteristics of the relationship to an abusive father figure may be transferred to conceptions the victim has of 'God the Father', that is, like the parent, God will love me one day when I am perfect; I need to be perfect to attain salvation; I am sinful and must be punished by a

blameless God (Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Tessier, 1992). These transferences may lead to conflict in expressing anger for fear of retribution, and a sense of unworthiness, yet a desire for intimacy with God (Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996). Tessier (1992) also notes these victims may feel abandoned by God or that their “heavenly father” is less powerful than their “earthly father”.

Summary of the Section

There is general acceptance in the theoretical literature that childhood trauma has the potential to negatively affect the survivors’ spirituality by overwhelming systems of coping and belief as well as the disrupting the survivors’ sense of meaning and purpose. The theoretical literature also indicates the potential for a number of other specific negative influences of childhood trauma on the survivors’ spirituality: causing existential crisis, arresting spiritual development, and specific obstacles to spiritual development resulting from the psychological effects of splitting and transference.

2.42 The Opportunity of Spirituality Created by Trauma

There are other theorists who do not view the negative influence of trauma as the end process but rather choose to emphasize the trauma experience as a process that may lead to greater spiritual development (e.g., Decker, 1993a, 1993b; Jaffe, 1985; McMillan, 1996; Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998). For these theorists, the potential inherent within extreme situations is not only pathology but also the opportunity to develop capacities beyond that which ordinary situations would demand: “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” (McMillan, 1999, p. 458).

Dark Night of the Soul

These writers discuss a period of emptiness and disconnection from a spiritual source as the “dark night of the soul” (Jaffe, 1985, p.102) that has the potential to open up to new awareness, new identities and a spiritual awakening. Fowler (1981) discusses external triggers that cause a crisis which encourages spiritual development. Similarly, Decker (1993b) views trauma as a catalyst, causing internal chaos, and the dissolution required to precede reformation and/or transformation. Jaffe (1985) states “ the journey to a dark, painful world of struggle, is necessary for a certain level of development ... it is only by going through this test that a person can be reborn” (p. 102). For Frankl (1984), there are three ways people can find meaning in their lives: incorporating the attitude they take toward suffering, the experience of love, or the experience of creativity. While these authors are not advocating for people to have traumatic experiences in order to grow, they are asserting a belief about the positive potential that is possible as a result of experiencing suffering. Nien Cheng (1995), a prisoner during the Cultural Revolution in China, summarizes her experience of growth through the experience of suffering torture and imprisonment:

“Throughout the years of my imprisonment I had turned to God often and felt His presence. In the drab surroundings of the gray cell, I had known magic moments of transcendence that I had not experienced in the ease and comfort of my normal life...My faith had sustained me in these darkest hours of my life and brought me safely through privation, sickness, and torture... My suffering had strengthened my faith” (P. 346-347).

Wake-up Call

The experience of trauma and coming ‘face to face’ with death can serve as a “wake up call” for some people. Family therapist, Neil Adams states “for most people the worlds of spirit and matter are completely separate ... however trauma may punch a hole in the wall that separates the two, opening a window from the material into the spiritual” (as cited in Ryan, 1998, p. 43). For McMillan (1999) this wake up call may lead a person to positively reorder their priorities in life. Similarly, researchers in the area of near death experiences (NDE) have consistently found that most persons who undergo NDE typically make significant positive changes in beliefs, attitudes and values (Groth-Marnat & Summers, 1998; Greyson, 2000).

Conversion Experience

For others the experience of stress and sense of total futility in coping with it may lead to a radical transformation or a conversion experience: a giving up and self-surrender to the sacred (Pargament, 1996). Fowler (1981) characterizes conversion as “a significant recentering of one’s previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one’s life in a new community of interpretation and action” (P. 281-282).

Positive Dissociations

While dissociation is negatively associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, other authors state that people may have positive dissociative or transcendent experiences associated with trauma (Bennet, 1999; O’Connel Higgins, 1992; Pike & Mohline, 1995). Bennet (1999) and

Greyson (2000) observes that the unbearable experiences of trauma may lead to adaptive dissociation experiences in which altered states of consciousness are attained without accompanying distress. While some dissociation experiences may be considered pathological, others may be (a) “non-pathological, (b) may coexist with pathological forms of dissociation, (c) may exist separately and be interpreted in a defensive manner, and (d) ... may be used to further treatment of trauma survivors” (Bennet, 1999, p. 155). Some healthy forms of dissociation reported in the trauma literature correlate with both definitions of dissociation and mystical experiences: whereby, a person unable to endure the trauma experience focuses on an “object or thought and ... temporarily transcends waking consciousness” (Ryan, 1998 p. 43). An example of this is recorded by Pike & Mohline (1995), whereby a child victim of ritualistic abuse reports escaping the torture by transcending into the presence of Jesus. Similarly, among persons who have been demonstrably near death, nine to 18% report a profound experience in which they believe they leave their physical bodies and transcend the ordinary boundaries of ego, time and space (Greyson, 2000).

Summary of the Section

For these theorists, the potential of childhood trauma is not just pathology, but also the opportunity to become more. Despite the potential for the immediate negative influences, childhood trauma is viewed as a potentially temporal consequence, a dark night of the soul from which a survivor may emerge much stronger. Childhood trauma as an external stimulus has the potential to provide the survivor with a wake-up call that may initiate radical transformations in their life, or even to experience states of heightened spiritual awareness. In no way are these

theorists promoting the experience of childhood trauma, but rather seeing the potential for radical growth in the process of overcoming the unfortunate experience of extreme adversity.

2.43 Transforming Spiritual Crisis into Spiritual Opportunity

Theorists speculate on the keys to transforming the experience of trauma from a spiritual crisis into a spiritual opportunity. The three main theoretical keys to transformation that will be explored involve the following: (a) resilient aspects of self that are not decimated by childhood trauma, (b) the development of innate self and (c), the meaning created by the survivor.

One idea that resiliency theory proposes is that childhood trauma may not decimate the total person, but rather some aspects of the person are able to withstand the experience and act as a resource in the healing process. Harvey (as cited in Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998) distinguishes between “recovery” from trauma and “resiliency”. She said that recovery involves a change from a poor to a desired outcome, in any area of self that is influenced by trauma. “In contrast, resiliency is evident when certain domains of self are not affected by trauma and can be used to cope with trauma-induced difficulties in another domain” (Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998, p.7). For example, a childhood trauma survivor may use intact spiritual values and beliefs to cope with difficulties in trust that resulted from their trauma experience.

For some theorists, the key to transformation lies in the ability to strengthen innate self through the connection with a power beyond themselves and to find new ways of understanding interactions with the external environment. Decker (1993a) proposes that those persons with a

sense of self anchored in interactions with the external environment (from where the trauma also originates) will be at a much greater risk to be devastated by trauma than those whose sense of self is anchored in an internal source apart from the origin of the trauma. While most people develop a sense of self based on interactions with the external environment, people are also capable of developing an innate self or beliefs about self, based on internal realizations and their connection with a power beyond themselves (Decker, 1993a). How one responds to trauma is dependent on whether the internal-based beliefs can provide sufficient resources to meet the challenge - to provide an anchor in the storm (Decker, 1993a). Similarly, Jaffe (1985) views personal transformation following renewal as a change in the inner being, a spiritual rebirth and new sense of identity based on their innate self. This new innate identity gives one a new perspective of their interactions with the external environment.

For other theorists, the key to the transformation from trauma lies in the meaning a survivor creates for the experience. Frankl (1984) believes when a person is powerless to change an oppressive situation in their external environment, the challenge is to change oneself. In the case of transcending suffering, "suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning" (Frankl, 1984, p. 135). Similarly, O'Connell Higgins (1994) and Herman (1992) identifies the transformation of trauma for some through a process of recognizing a political or spiritual dimension within their misfortune and making it a basis for social action. "While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others" (Herman, 1992, p. 207).

The message of these theorists is that the negative influences of childhood trauma can be transformed. Possible keys to the ability to transform a spiritual crisis into a spiritual opportunity include the use of resilient aspects of self to assist in the individual's healing process, the strengthening of innate self through a connection with a higher power, and finding meaning in the suffering.

2.5 Trauma Interventions that are Spiritually Inclusive

This section will review the current state of the social work and mental health research literature regarding trauma interventions that are spiritually inclusive and look at other potential disciplines of knowledge which could be explored. The literature review up to this point has documented that religious and spiritual issues are most often present for survivors of childhood trauma. As well, survivors indicate that spirituality is fundamental to their healing process. Failure to address the spiritual issues and aspects of survivors lives may result in the loss to the survivor "of a power resource for processing their traumatic experience and for giving meaning to their lives" (Grame, Tortorici, Healey, Dillingham & Winklebaur, 1999). Thus, it is imperative to review the literature on spiritually inclusive trauma interventions that currently is available to guide social work practice aimed at assisting survivors in their healing.

2.51 Limitations of the Current Literature and Need to Explore Related Disciplines

Within the social work literature there is a paucity of research documenting spiritual interventions in trauma treatment, which social work professionals can use to guide their practice. In a recent review of the broader mental health literature, Bennet (1999) concludes:

“despite the consensus concerning the significance of meaning making to the progression of trauma disorders and to the treatment and recovery from traumatic exposure, there is limited literature that directly addresses religious/spiritual/ experiential issues and experiences in trauma treatment” (p. 113).

Given the limited scope of the social work and mental health literature that addresses spiritual interventions, it may be beneficial for the social work profession to explore the healing knowledge from other disciplines that share a common interest. Chirban (1992) notes that medicine, religion, and psychology consider healing a valued goal because it consists of the rightness, wholeness and soundness of body, mind and soul. While these fields share a common goal of healing, “they have rarely shared mutual understanding and appreciation with reference to their methods toward these goals” (Chirban, 1992, p. 236). Garbarino (1996) echoes the need to attend to the spiritual challenges of childhood trauma with interventions beyond the psychological framework. “Until we develop and implement strategies to address “the meaning of life” and offer positively overwhelming cognitions to those who have been plunged into metaphysical and spiritual darkness, our narrowly psychological interventions will fall short of the mark (Garbarino, 1996, p. 163).

The orientation of religion is one area that social work may need to look for guides to intervention. Trauma and healing are an area where the orientations of religion and psychology converge. For thousands of years, “religions of the world have been concerned about suffering and its amelioration” (Pargament, 1997, p. 7). More recently, psychology and related social

sciences have emerged with practices directed at helping people to cope with the difficulties that they experience. While both share a concern about the human condition, there is a tension between the two that emerges from their divergent world views (Pargament, 1997). Pargament (1997) states that “psychology might be generally characterized as a profession that attempts to help people gain more control over what they have not controlled” (p.7), whereas religion assists people in appreciating what is beyond their personal ability to control (Pargament, 1997). This tension between differing perspectives is evidenced in how each defines the problem and the solution:

The psychological world says that we are not as powerless as we imagine ourselves to be; we have resources within ourselves that can be tapped more fully. The religious world says that in fact we are powerless in important ways and that we must look past ourselves alone for answers to important questions...the psychological world helps people extend their personal control, while the religious world helps people face their personal limitations and go beyond themselves for solutions (Pargament, 1997, p.8).

The discipline of religion may well contain knowledge that would be beneficial for the social work practice when addressing issues of spirituality and trauma.

One of the purposes of this review of the literature, was to place the current research study in the relevant context of the existing social work and mental health literature. An inherent limitation of this approach to the literature review is that it does not explore the relevant literature in other disciplines. The current body of social work and mental health literature is very limited in providing guidance for social work practice in the area of spirituality and trauma.

There is clearly a call within the social work and mental health literature to expand our knowledge base. One of the methods of developing this knowledge base is to become familiar with the literature of other disciplines who share a common interest in the topic area of spirituality and trauma.

2.52 Interventions Described within the Social Work and Mental Health Literature

Some of the social work and mental health interventions being developed to cope with childhood trauma, address the spiritual issues and aspects of the trauma survivor. The following section reviews ten case study and anecdotal accounts of spiritually inclusive trauma interventions that are documented in the literature.

Both Brende & McDonald (1989) and Paquette (1999) developed a 12-step approach to working with trauma survivors. Paquette (1999) used 12-step principles within a Christian faith framework in small group work with adult survivors of childhood trauma. Brende & McDonald's (1989) work with Vietnam Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) found that participants were able to reduce their guilt, violent urges, self-destructive behaviors, while enhancing their positive sense of self. However, Lukoff, Turner & Lu (1992) reports that the Veterans Administration terminated the program because of the spiritual focus in the treatment, despite the positive effects being obtained. Similarly, Jimenez (1993) incorporated a spiritual development component within a Christian framework to small treatment group work with Vietnam Veterans with PTSD. They found spiritual development to aid in the healing process of PTSD.

Spiegel (1996) describes efforts to use spirituality within a Jewish context to assist female trauma survivors in their healing process. The efforts focus on working within the Jewish community to tell their stories, develop healing ceremonies and rituals, create new celebrations and adopting old customs with new meanings. Their efforts are to band together to create political and institutional change that can facilitate the healing and spiritual renewal for others within the Jewish faith.

Other mainstream approaches include the use of meditation and prayer. Tan (1996) describes the use of inner healing prayer particularly for situations of childhood traumas, however, he only provides a theoretical application. Urbanowski & Miller (1996) cite five case examples to demonstrate how the combination of meditation with psychotherapy can be an effective intervention for trauma survivors.

Other authors describe the use of ritual healing methods for survivors of trauma. Jacobs (1989), Krull (1995) and Shaffer (1981) use ritual therapy in the context of the Goddess tradition. Shaffer (1981) describes the use of a feminist spirituality framework in working with female rape survivors. A variety of successful case examples are described wherein survivors achieve a positive outcome from a variety of different spiritual rituals and approaches to treatment. Krull (1995) reports on a group of women in Germany where the researched found the spiritual orientation, bond and rituals of the group to have facilitated healing for a member who is an incest survivor. Jacobs' (1989) research involved the use of healing rituals for women who were victims of male violence. She found the rituals effective in reducing fear, releasing anger,

increasing one's sense of power, and improving the overall mental health of the participant with respect to the trauma. Jacobs (1989) is unclear about the extent to which the ritual healing has long-term effects due to the short term nature of the research.

Parker, Horton & Watson (1997) describes a case study of ritual healing from childhood trauma that involves a collaboration of counselling, spiritual growth and the use of specific ritual. The ritual was not a substitute for traditional therapy or the need to deal honestly with psychospiritual developmental tasks. Rather, the ritual brought together the work done in these critical areas and acted like a crucible. Within this crucible, "the symbols of the sacred are placed, and through which their power is refined, distilled, and communicated to the wounded psyche of the victim of abuse" (Parker, Horton, & Shelton, 1997, p.53).

Ritual is also used for healing from trauma within the North American Aboriginal context. Seymour (1997) describes the Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) in Hollow Water, Manitoba where an Aboriginal Spiritual framework is used to guide the treatment of a community ravaged by the trauma of sexual abuse over generations. Mainstream counselling interventions are combined with community development approaches and traditional Aboriginal spiritual interventions to successfully begin addressing the healing for individuals, families and a community.

2.6 Summary of the Literature

There is a paucity of research in the social work and mental health literature that addresses the relationship of spirituality and trauma for survivors of childhood trauma. The research that is contained in the literature tends to be polarized. On the one hand, the research reports fairly exclusive categories of either positive or negative influences on the survivors' spirituality. Resilient survivors report that their traumatic experiences have strengthened their spirituality and made them more as a person. Spirituality is described as a critical resource in the overcoming of trauma and in sustaining the healing process. On the other hand, other survivors of childhood trauma, report experiencing significant damage to their spiritual well-being, and that aspects of their spirituality significantly impeded their spiritual development.

The current research literature reflects the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Each method has its own distinct areas of limitations and abilities to make contributions to the study of spirituality and childhood trauma. Exploratory quantitative research methodologies have the potential to be extremely helpful in developing and directing more focussed quantitative research efforts, given the state of current research literature base. However, the research literature regarding spirituality and childhood trauma is currently at an early stage of development, and there are significant difficulties in trying to quantifying concepts like spirituality into valid and reliable measures.

A review of the current research has led to the following conclusions:

- (a) Childhood trauma, as an extreme experience, assaults the survivors' spirituality resulting in an extreme range of positive and negative outcomes;**
- (b) survivors who experience enhanced spirituality identify a variety of factors that assisted them, which include the following: the ability to align with a powerful force outside themselves, the ability to make sense of their trauma and find meaning and purpose, being able to free themselves from self blame, finding inspiration in literature and art, and experiencing social support through religious communities;**
- (c) survivors of childhood trauma who experience a diminished spirituality report a variety of impediments to their spiritual development and healing which include the following: an arrested spiritual development at the onset of trauma, a loss of meaning and purpose, unresolved religious questions, anger at a spiritual source, disillusionment with their faith, a sense of abandonment by a spiritual source, fear, feeling unworthy, a god-image aligned with the characteristics of their perpetrator, guilt and feeling punished for their sins;**
- (d) the research has started to identify a variety of factors that compose the labyrinth of interactions between trauma and spirituality, but much research remains to be done to further clarify our understandings; and,**
- (e) survivors of childhood trauma often identify spirituality as significant for their survival and healing process.**

Theorists are divided as to whether they view the trauma experience as resulting in a spiritual crisis or in a spiritual opportunity. Some authors focus primarily on the crisis of spirituality as the end result of the trauma experience. The crisis leaves some individuals unable to spiritually reconcile their trauma. As a result, these survivors experience significant impediments to their healing process, lose the spiritual dimension of their lives or fixate in an early developmental stage of spirituality. Other authors view the crisis of spirituality that results from the trauma experience as a temporal stage of development. They believe trauma can “create the type of crisis of experience and meaning that propels a person to a higher stage of spiritual development with a much more personal and direct relationship with the unseen forces of the universe” (Ryan, 1998, p. 47). The key to transforming the crisis into an opportunity lie in the individuals ability to rely on inner resources, find meaning in their suffering or strengthen their innate self through their connection with a higher power.

There is limited research in the social work and mental health literature that can be used to provide guidance for social work intervention in the area of trauma and spirituality. Interventions within a psychological framework fall short of addressing the core spiritual issues necessary for healing and there is a need to explore the knowledge base of related disciplines that share a common interest. The review of the intervention research literature consisted of a minimal amount of case study and anecdotal accounts which only begin to provide some loose measure of guidance for social work practice. To a significant degree the literature has not answered the fundamental spiritual issue that arises from childhood trauma - How do you turn spiritual crisis into spiritual opportunity?

The research has established that the relationship between spirituality and childhood trauma is complex and dynamic. At this point the research literature raises more questions about this relationship than it answers: questions about whether a survivor of childhood trauma could potentially experience a range and combination of positive and negative influences; questions about what factors may lead to significantly more positive or negative outcomes; questions about whether the negative influences can be ameliorated over time; or, questions about what role does the childhood trauma survivor's spirituality play in the healing process. The specific influences of childhood trauma on the survivor's spirituality and the role spirituality plays in healing from trauma are areas that require a great deal of further research in order to build on the understandings that have begun to emerge about this complex and dynamic relationship of spirituality and childhood trauma.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experience of the connection between spirituality and childhood trauma of four survivors who indicate that spirituality was significant in their experience. In particular, I have explored the influence childhood trauma has on the survivors' spirituality, as well as the role spirituality plays in the survivors' healing process. This research topic is best explored within a qualitative paradigm, employing a phenomenological tradition of inquiry. This chapter describes the study design and theoretical underpinnings of the research. It is divided into the following five sections:

- (a) the research questions;
- (b) an exploration of the choice to use a qualitative paradigm;
- (c) an overview of phenomenology;
- (d) the roles of the researcher/researched;
- (e) a description of the study.

3.1 Research Questions

The central research question my study has undertaken is stated thus:

From the perspective of the adult survivor of childhood trauma, for whom spirituality is significant, what is the perceived relationship(s) between traumatic childhood experiences and their own spirituality?

Within this grand question there have been three distinct topical areas I have wanted to cover:

- (a) the meaning and experience of spirituality,
- (b) the influence of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality,
- (c) the significance of spirituality in the survivors' healing process.

The questions within these topical areas are detailed in the interview guideline in appendix C.

3.2 Qualitative Research

I selected a qualitative paradigm for my research inasmuch as the core assumptions of the paradigm are most compatible with my research objectives. In the following section I will compare and contrast the basic assumptions of the qualitative and quantitative theories of research, to clarify the rationale for the study's qualitative paradigm.

The quantitative and qualitative paradigms can be compared and contrasted based on five of their essential assumptions - ontological, axiological, epistemological, rhetorical and methodological (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; McCracken, 1988). Ontology pertains to basic issues about the nature of reality. It asks the question 'is there one true reality or are there multiple realities'? Phillips (1998) suggests that spirituality is deeply entrenched in an individual's subjective experience and is too multifaceted to be refined into one objective reality and truth. The phenomenon being studied fits best with a qualitative or constructivist ontological assumption that regards the existence of multiple realities. Harner (1992) in his discussions of shamanism summarizes this experiential component of knowledge and truth: "If you experienced it first hand, the shaman says it is real. If you heard it firsthand, the shaman says it is real. If you smelled it firsthand, it is real. No one can take that away from you" (p.336).

Epistemological and axiological assumptions raise questions about our capacity as researchers to be independent and value free from that being studied. These assumptions are closely tied to ones' ontological assumption (Phillips, 1998). If a person begins with an assumption about one true reality, then their epistemology and axiology will follow a course toward a positivistic kind of knowledge. Guba and Lincoln (1988) describe the epistemology and axiology of the positivist belief as "value free", "dualist" and "objective":

The investigator and the investigated 'object' are assumed to be independent entities, and the investigator to be capable of studying the object without influencing it or being influenced by it. When influence in either direction is recognized, or even suspected, various strategies are followed to reduce or to eliminate it. Inquiry takes place as through a one-way mirror. Values and biases are prevented from influencing outcomes, so long as the prescribed procedures are rigorously followed. Replicable findings are, in fact, 'true' (p.110).

My study on spirituality is subjectivist in nature as it focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and how they make sense of those experiences. Rather than trying to be value free, my research seeks to be value relative, that is, attempting "to understand and describe the values of the participants and self" (Murphy, 1998, p. 40). These value relative and subjectivist purposes fit best with the epistemological and axiological assumptions of the qualitative paradigm.

The rhetorical questions of the research paradigm ask, "whose voice is being represented?" and, "what style is it presented in?" Frank (1994) states this more directly in asking "Whose voice is privileged by the way the story is told?" (p.44) The quantitative paradigm seeks to portray the voice of the researcher in a technical format. Whereas the qualitative paradigm writes

in a more literary style presenting the voice of the participants in terms of their personal stories, and the voice of the researcher in the construction of meanings and interpretations. (Creswell, 1998; Murphy, 1998; Phillips, 1998; Van Manen, 1990). One of my research objectives was to give voice to trauma survivors who are in the process of healing, as these voices are often overlooked in the literature. This objective fits best with the rhetorical assumption of the qualitative paradigm.

Methodology pertains to the process of research. A quantitative methodology is concerned with issues of causality and explanation determined through valid and reliable deductive reasoning approaches (Marlow, 1998; Murphy, 1998). Qualitative methodology is concerned about description and understanding through trustworthy inductive reasoning processes (Creswell, 1998; Marlow, 1998; Murphy, 1998; Phillips, 1998; Van Manen, 1990). The focus of my research is to deepen our understanding of spirituality and healing within the context of those surviving childhood trauma. These issues of description, emerging understanding, context-bound, and inductive process fit best within the qualitative paradigm.

3.3 Phenomenology

Within the qualitative paradigm, there are five traditions of research paradigms: Biography, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study (Creswell, 1998). One of the primary differences among the five traditions of inquiry emanates from their foci:

- (a) phenomenology describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals pertaining to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Giorgi, 1985; Van Manen, 1990);
- (b) an ethnography explores meanings specific to certain cultures or social groups (Creswell, 1998; Murphy, 1998; Van Manen, 1990);
- (c) a case study is an exploration of a bounded system (Creswell, 1998);
- (d) a biography explores meanings of experience for one individual's personal life history (Creswell 1998; Van Manen, 1990); and,
- (e) a grounded theory approach aims at generating a theory that relates to a particular situation (Creswell, 1998).

Within the qualitative framework, the phenomenological research paradigm is most compatible with my research goals concerning trauma and spirituality, in that, a paradigm seeks to describe “the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or ... phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p.51).

The essence of phenomenological research is a descriptive and interpretive methodology. It seeks to describe the essential quality of an experience and the interpretation of the meaning of that experience (Creswell, 1998; Murphy, 1998; Phillips, 1998; Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenological approaches “examine how human beings construct and give meaning to their actions in concrete social situations” (Denzen & Lincoln, 1994, p. 204). My research has attempted to understand the survivors' realities of trauma and spirituality, in order to derive deeper understandings that may benefit other survivors and social work practioners.

The phenomenological research paradigm has its roots in philosophy. Creswell (1998) outlines four discernable themes:

- (a) A return to the traditional tasks of philosophy--a search for wisdom that is not limited to "scientism" (p. 53);
- (b) epoche - the suspension of judgements about what is real until these are substantiated on a more certain basis (p. 53);
- (c) the intentionality of consciousness - the idea that "consciousness always is directed toward an object"(p. 53); and,
- (d) the dichotomy of subject-object is refused as an object is only perceived and experienced as their consciousness is directed toward it (p. 53).

These themes blend well with my existential approach that recognizes the multiple nature of reality and knowledge, which is developed through ongoing interactions with our environment.

These philosophical themes are also accompanied by a methodological structure of research activities, rather than a strict set of procedures to follow (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) outlines the process of phenomenological research as a dynamic interplay between six distinct research activities:

- (a) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (b) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (c) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (d) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

- (e) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and,
- (f) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (p. 30-31).

Through the interview process I attempted to enter the survivors' world--to imaginatively dwell in their reality. After having followed the process of reflecting on themes, balancing parts and whole, and the writing and rewriting of description, I am hopeful a useful understanding of the survivors' trauma and spirituality experiences has emerged.

3.4 Roles of the Researcher & Researched

The very nature of the qualitative paradigm is defined in large part by its epistemology, that is, how it defines the role of the researcher. Creswell (1998) notes "the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures" (p.14). The researcher is one who is actively engaged in the process in a number of ways: (a) having to gain access to the participants; (b) personally investing in each relationship and interview; and (c) bringing their own biases, personality traits, experiences and skills to the research process.

The researcher is assumed to have some influence on the participant. During the course of the interview, the researcher and participant were in constant communication and that communication process influenced the recollection of experience (Hunnisett, 1986).

Following a qualitative assumption about the knowledge base of the participants, there is also an active role of those researched that must be acknowledged. I strongly agree with Phillips

(1998) who states “I do not view my participants as subjects of study, but rather as active collaborators in the research process” (p. 52). This speaks well to the process where those being researched participate in the feedback process as part of the verification procedures and their active role in helping make sense of the lived experiences that have been explored.

This collaborative role of participants speaks to issues of empowerment and the need for a sense of control which are inherently embodied in a trauma experience. Trauma entails a complete sense of powerlessness. The research study has attempted to embody a process that has heeded the participants’ issues of control and empowerment.

3.5 The Study

3.51 Participants

The population for my research was adult survivors of childhood trauma, who live in the Kenora area during the year 2001 and for whom spirituality was a significant part of their experience.

The sampling frame for my research was significantly smaller than the population and totalled four individuals who were selected through a method of a purposive sample. The individuals who met the study criteria were selected from three sources: two of the candidates that I invited to participate were known previously to me, given the context of my role as a social worker in a small urban centre; one potential candidate, who later declined due to her time constrictions, was

identified by another social work professional working in the area of trauma; two candidates referred themselves to the study, after learning about the research objective.

It should be noted that none of the candidates were past or current clients in my social work practice. Given the influences of trauma and the potentially vulnerable nature of this population, care was taken to only select candidates who are currently in stable relationships and functioning well. The intent of the study was to learn from those who achieved some measure of successful healing in the wake of their childhood trauma experience.

Gaining entry involved a process of first identifying potential research participants that met the study criteria, and secondly approaching those persons with an invitation to collaborate in the process. The first two methods used to recruit potential candidates were persons selected from my own knowledge of potential candidates in the community, and secondly, the self referral of study participants. These methods resulted in securing four excellent candidates. A fifth potential candidate was identified through the process of enlisting the support of other social work professionals and groups working with trauma issues in the community. This fifth candidate originally agreed to participate. However, they were offered a new career opportunity outside of the Kenora area and time did not permit for the interview to be conducted. In the end, four participants were interviewed in the research study.

I used a purposive sample to select participants who had all experienced childhood trauma and for whom spirituality was a significant part of their trauma and healing experience. Creswell

(1998) refers to this as criterion sampling (p. 119). Participants were also selected on the basis of the criteria set out by Morse (1994) - "A good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed and is willing to participate in the study" (p.228).

3.52 The Interview Process

I met individually with all participants for an in-depth interview at a quiet place of their choosing. For three of the participants, this initial in-depth interview was completed in one meeting of 2 1/2 hours - 4 hours. For one of the participants, the in-depth interview was broken into two parts to allow for their time scheduling. This interview process was completed in a total of 4 1/2 hours. I used a semi-structured interview guide (see appendix C) which offered the participants the opportunity to describe in depth, their experiences of trauma and spirituality.

The interviews were audio recorded in their entirety and were augmented with observational notes. Issues of voluntary withdrawal, confidentiality and the central purpose of the study were clearly explained to all participants prior to the initial interview (Creswell, 1998). As well, the purpose of the research was reviewed with each participant at the outset, while access and rapport issues were facilitated on an individual basis, through informed consent and the signing of a waiver (see appendixes A & B).

Once I had formulated my findings from the data collected, I arranged a follow up interview with each individual. The purpose of this second interview was to review the findings of the

research and to consult with them regarding the fit of their experience with the findings. This process is expanded on in the section regarding methods of verification.

3.53 Data Analysis

The analysis process involved the following steps: transcribing verbatim the audio recorded interviews onto a computer disk, printing out the transcriptions, and then reviewing the transcriptions for accuracy. These transcriptions provided an opportunity to continue the analysis process of looking for significant statements, meanings and themes.

I followed Creswell's (1998) steps for data analysis in a phenomenological study. The first step involved the process of "horizontalization of the data", that is, looking within each interview and listing the significant statements that were contained about the experience (Creswell, 1998, p.147). Each statement was treated as having equal worth. This procedure was followed for each interview text until a complete list of unique significant statements were compiled.

These significant statements were then grouped into "meaning units" with "textural descriptions" (Creswell, 1998, p.150). These descriptions attempted to capture the participants meaning in their original text.

The third step in the analysis process involved organizing the meanings into "clusters of themes" (Riemen, 1994, p.281). These clusters captured and represented all the themes that were found within all of the participants descriptions. (Riemen, 1994). Through this process, patterns

emerged between the different participant responses. Phillips (1998) describes this as a "dialectical going back and forth among the various levels of questioning by constantly considering parts and whole" (p.72).

The final step in the analysis entailed the comparison of the themes that emerge in the data analysis with the findings in the literature reviewed. While the findings are not generalizable due to the small sample size, conclusions, implications for social work practice and future research are highlighted.

During the data analysis process, I was cognizant of my need to be aware of my own personal bias with regard to spirituality and trauma. It was my intent to conduct this research with an open mind and to clearly represent the voices and messages of the participants who were sharing their personal experiences of trauma and spirituality.

3.54 Strengths & Limitations of the Research Design

One of the strengths of the research has been the opportunity to explore in depth a unique phenomenon of spirituality and healing in the context of trauma, which has not been well represented within the social work literature. The participants offered a unique firsthand expertise having experienced the phenomena. The opportunity to do this in depth exploration of the multifaceted and complex nature of the phenomena will hopefully broaden our knowledge base for practice and lead to new directions that the research might explore. Given the

inadequate attention to the area in the literature and the nature of the subject matter to be studied, an exploratory and deeper approach to understanding at this point in time was appropriate.

The research conducted used a purposive sample due to the unique characteristics of the participants for which I was looking. By choosing a non probability method of sampling and a sample size of four persons, I am limited by the study's ability to generalize the results. Van Manen (1990) states that placing too great an emphasis on the ability to generalize results "may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focussed on the uniqueness of human experience" (p.22).

The phenomenological research paradigm I choose allowed for an exploration of the meaning of everyday experiences; thus, it is a retrospective study by nature (Murphy, 1998; Van Manen, 1990). Retrospective information or recall is considered to be highly susceptible to distortions and subjective biases. For those who subscribe to a positivistic paradigm this is a limitation and so I have chosen to acknowledge this aspect.

This research study had limits in terms of time and energy. While a certain standard of rigor is maintained there have been some procedures that were not included. Creswell (1998) outlines eight different procedures for verification, of which he recommends at least two be employed in any given study (p.203). While two procedures of verification were used, including participant verification and clarifying researcher bias, this research did not include the following: critical

aspects of triangulations among different data sources, extensive time in the field, or external audits. Given the time and energy constraints, this is a limitation of the study.

Finally, despite employing rigorous and conscientious research methods, the findings that are made from the data collected are influenced by my own personal bias. I have clearly outlined my own bias at the outset, but I am not able to remove myself entirely from the data analysis process. My findings reflect my conscientious, albeit personal interpretation, of the data collected.

3.55 Verification & Authenticity

Creswell (1998) uses the term verification instead of validity to “underscore qualitative research as a distinct approach, a legitimate mode of inquiry in its own right” (p.201). A number of different procedures may be used for the purposes of verification. Creswell (1998) recommends that “qualitative researchers engage in at least two (of the eight different procedures) in any given study” (p.203 emphasis added). This research study includes two of these processes, that is, clarifying researcher bias and the use of member checks.

Researcher bias has been stated in the introductory section of the research report through a process of a biographical and a personal theoretical sketch. This biographical sketch includes a description of my own past experiences, biases and orientations that are likely to influence the approach and interpretation of the study. This biographical sketch also serves to set the context for declaring my motivation to undertake this study in the first place.

“In member checks” was the process of soliciting “informants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). I have previously commented on this process in the section regarding the role of the participant—that as one of a collaborator in the process. During a second interview, participants were given an opportunity to review the written findings, to ensure their experience is represented accurately and completely. Their observations were incorporated and used to revise the final representations of the findings.

“Authenticity rather than reliability is often the issue in qualitative research. The aim is usually to gain an authentic understanding of peoples’ experiences and it is believed that open ended questions are the most effective route towards this end” (Silverman, 1994, p.10). By interviewing participants in person and using open-ended questions in my interview process, I have attempted to garner an authentic description of participants’ experiences of trauma and spirituality.

3.6 Summary

The aim of this study has been to describe the lived experiences of spirituality and childhood trauma of four adult survivors, for whom spirituality was significant. I used a phenomenological research design with a purposive sample and in-depth interviews to explore the topic. I intend to take the lessons learned in the research process and integrate them into my own practice by developing more creative and supportive ways to assist youth who have survived trauma. While the findings cannot be generalized, it is hoped that this exploratory study has generated some new

understandings that may be useful future research endeavours, other social work professionals, and survivors of trauma.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS: THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

4.1 Background Summary of the Participants

4.11 Overview

This chapter documents the lived experience of the four participants based on a phenomenological analysis of common and unique themes that emerged in the process of going back and forth between the individual and collective experience. The first section of the text describes the participants of the study followed by the participants definitions of spirituality and healing that provide a context for understanding their stories. Following this overview, the text focuses on thematic analysis of three areas: (a) the influence of childhood trauma on spirituality; (b) the role of spirituality in the healing process; and, (c) spiritual factors and practices that support the healing process.

4.12 The Participants

The four participants (three women and one man) ranged in age from 39 years to 59 years, and came from various cultural backgrounds - French, Scottish/Métis, German, and Irish/Dutch. The levels of education among the participants ranged from completion of 8th grade to a masters level post graduate degree. The participants all had a minimum 10 year period of relative stability and growth in their active healing /recovery process.¹

¹ Due to the gender distribution of the study participants and the need to ensure confidentiality the report will use the female gender form when referring to any of the participants. This will not affect the results as the research findings are gender neutral.

All four participants were survivors of childhood sexual traumas. The childhood trauma experience for three of the four also included other forms of trauma experiences including physical, emotional and verbal abuse, significant trauma associated with physical illness/accidental injury, and, being the witness to acts of violence perpetrated on other family members.

All the participants had childhood spiritual and religious influences that involved participation with an institutional Christian church group (both Catholic and Protestant). Each participant identified at least one of their parental figures as having a strong religious belief system which influenced their childhood. All of the participants would characterize members of their families of origin as regular church attenders during their childhood experiences. One participant identified that in late adolescence Native Spirituality became a secondary source of spiritual influence. During adulthood the participants experienced a number of other spiritual influences. Native Spirituality became a significant source of spiritual influence for three of the four participants. As well, spirituality for one participant was influenced by Yoga and for two other participants, Alcoholics Anonymous became a significant spiritual influence.

4.2 Definitions of Spirituality and Healing

The concepts of spirituality and healing are very difficult to quantify and define as the definition of each term varied among the participants. The interview process with each participant sought to understand from each participant's perspective, how they understood these

terms, with the aim of understanding their context more fully. The following section presents a thematic analysis of the concepts of spirituality and healing.

The participants that were interviewed had differing views and images of what God was and where God was. For those who ascribe to a more eminent view of a God figure, identifying an image of God as an external force that presides over the world, it makes sense to conceive of a relational image between two separate entities. For others who ascribe to a more immanent view of a God figure, identifying an image of God as a force within each person and all creation, a relational image takes on more of a characteristic of how two parts of oneself interact. The “Spirit/God/Creator” phrase that I have chosen to use is reflective of differing ways that participants referred to this “God image.”

4.21 Spirituality

Spirituality Distinct From Religion

The participants defined spirituality as distinct from religion. Religion was seen as a set of practices that could be used to express ones spirituality or to access a more mystical and spiritual place. Religion was seen by one participant as a vehicle to help you get to a more mystical place.

As I got older, I would gravitate more toward mysticism... religion was kind of like a vehicle, and the vehicle was to get you to this place. (Mp13)

Spirituality a Distinct Aspect of Whom We Are

The participants described spirituality as an aspect within themselves that was separate from their mental, emotional and physical selves. Some participants viewed all aspects of self as intrinsically interconnected with spirituality being a distinct aspect of the whole.

It's (spirituality) sort of a place that's beyond mental. It's not a thinking thing... it's not a raw emotion but it's something that's still experienced at all of those levels. (Mp5)

Spirituality was experienced by participants as a core aspect of their self, intrinsic to whom they were. One participant described spirituality as a place deep within herself that could not be touched by the trauma experienced during childhood, a place that offered both a sense of protection from the trauma and a sense of perspective on the trauma.

It's (spirituality) almost like a separate room, where you know you're protected--that the wrong act can't get you...it was like it was a tiny space and now it's gotten bigger so that it crowds out the darkness. (Hp15)

Spirituality as Connection to the Spirit Within and Around

In its simplest terms, spirituality was defined as connecting with something divine within us and around us. It was expressed as attunement to the Spirit within each of us as well as a sense of oneness with others and world around us.

One participant expressed spirituality as a core relationship with a Divine loving God while others described it as attunement to the Divine Spirit within us. This finding is captured by the following statements of these two individuals:

I think for me it's a relationship with Jesus Christ, with God, with the Holy Spirit. (Hp9)

I think the central part of my being is being true to that Spirit inside me. (Cp23)

While spirituality was described as being attuned to the spirit within, it was also described as oneness with all people and nature. One participant had this to say:

I've had a few moments... (where) it's become so clear to me that there is no separation between people... whatever each one of us experiences, is what all of us are ... a core level that joins us all. (Mp4)

Spirituality as a Dynamic Relationship Where the Individual is Subject to Change

Spirituality was described by the participants as an active process of being attuned to Spirit/God/Creator within each one of us. Participants described this sense of a dynamic intimate relationship with Spirit/God/Creator through which one is refined and changed through an active experiential process. The participants described this dynamic relationship in the following statements:

...the medicines, ... the tobacco--it all comes from Mother Earth. Mother Earth is the Creator. The Creator is God. We forget that sometimes. Sometimes I forget that too and I get disciplined from it. (Gp42)

If I'm not one with it (Spirit) then things will happen that I become in tune, literally becoming spiritually tuned--like tuning a harp, a piano or whatever and that's what experience is. It's not good or bad. (Cp23)

If a person is having a relationship with God... it changes you no matter what, but you have to be open to it, you have to want to change (Hp20)

Characteristics of Spirituality Include a Sense of Being Loved and Times of Heightened Awareness

Participants described some of the qualities of spirituality as experiencing love from a Spirit/God/Creator and experiencing moments of heightened awareness. One participant described this sense of love and acceptance that is characteristic of her spirituality:

The core is knowing that I belong to God. That no matter what I do I won't be able to get away from Him... that He accepts me as I am (Hp31)

Another participant described a significant turning point of finding her own spirituality within herself, when she discovered her own capacity for love. Upon realizing she had the capacity to love others, she remarked,

It was so clear to me and I knew that I had spirit inside of me. It's the first time that I would have really known that I'm a spiritual being. (Cp15)

Other participants described characteristics of spirituality in terms of achieving heightened awareness during specific rituals such as the Sundance or during moments where they were able to experience the fullness of the present moment. One participant had this to say:

There's different things where ... I have at times experienced...being in the moment so much--whatever it is--that everything else kind of melts away and then there's just this ...pure experience--pure consciousness, I guess. (Mp5)

Participants defined spirituality as distinct from religion. Religion was seen as a set of practices that could be used to express ones spirituality or to access a more mystical and spiritual place. Whereas spirituality was viewed as an aspect within them that was separate from their mental, emotional and physical selves, yet all were intrinsically interconnected. In its simplest terms, spirituality meant connecting with Spirit/God/Creator within us and/or around us. Spirituality is described as an active process of being attuned to Spirit/God/Creator within each one of us. Participants described this sense of a dynamic intimate relationship with the Spirit/God/Creator: a relationship in which one is refined and changed through an active experiential process. Participants described some of the qualities of spirituality as experiencing love from a Spirit/God/Creator and experiencing moments of heightened awareness.

4.22 Healing

A Process of Letting go of Negative Patterns and Opening up to Patterns of Growth

The participants described healing as an ongoing process of letting go of patterns and behaviors that were seen as a barrier to spiritual growth and opening up to patterns of growth.

One participant added that it was an ongoing process of finding her true self as exemplified in the following remarks:

I'm in a place now where... I'm trying to reclaim myself, not that I need to do anything about working through any of the events or anything but somehow trying to find myself, which is for me, very much a spiritual ...effort. (M1p7)

Healing Involves All Interconnected Aspects of Self

The healing process was described as not only involving the spiritual aspect of self but rather including all aspects of self, which are all interconnected:

We have to recover spiritually first and after we recover spiritually, we will recover emotionally and physically (Cp15)

This participant went on to explain that healing involves all aspects of self:

The Native teaching, it is spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical and you can't do just one piece. So it's the whole package. (Cp26)

For the participants, healing was viewed as an ongoing process of reclaiming their true selves, in which all aspects of self are needed: spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional. Healing involved letting go of negative thoughts, feelings and actions that become barriers to growth and opening oneself to more positive ways of being true to the spirit within.

4.3 The Influence of Childhood Trauma on Spirituality

4.31 Overview of the Section

Childhood trauma had a varied influence on the participants' spirituality. One of the four participants reported that trauma had an overall positive influence on her spirituality, in that her relationship with Spirit/God/Creator was strengthened. For two of the participants, the trauma experience led to unique extra-ordinary or out of body experiences which the participants did not categorize as either positive or negative in their influence. All of the participants experienced at least some degree of negative influences on aspects of their spirituality as a result of their childhood trauma experiences. These negative influences include the following:

- (a) trauma buries spirituality,
- (b) Why did it happen?/loss of meaning and purpose,
- (c) anger at Spirit/God/Creator,
- (d) guilt/self blame - punishment from Spirit/God/Creator,
- (e) sanctuary of the church is violated,
- (f) taints ones spiritual development and world view,
- (g) confusion about spirituality, and,
- (h) anger at religion and the institutional church.

4.32 Positive Influences

Strengthened Relationship with Spirit/God/Creator

For the most part, the participants reported experiencing various negative influences to spirituality that resulted from the childhood trauma experience. However one participant

presented an overall positive influence of trauma on spirituality despite her other indications of particular influences that were of a more negative nature. This participant viewed the overall trauma experience as something that forced her to rely on Spirit/God/Creator more, resulting in a stronger spiritual relationship. This perspective is evidenced in the following statement:

I've never ever felt alienated from God or blaming Him in any way for what happened to me. I've always had a good relationship with Him, and in lots of ways it's brought me closer to Him, cause I needed Him to help me deal with it. I think it made me closer to God because of it--not alienated me from the relationship. (Hp18)

4.33 The Influence of Unique Extra-Ordinary Experiences

Extra-ordinary Experiences or Out of Body Experiences

Two participants reported extra-ordinary experiences as a direct result of a childhood trauma event. These experiences were unique, both in terms of their content and in the fact that the participants did not initially categorize them as a positive or negative influence on their spirituality at the time of occurrence. In the aftermath of the extra-ordinary experiences, both participants reported these events had a negative influence on their spirituality, due to difficulty assimilating the events into their understanding. During their later healing process, both participants were able to incorporate these events into their understanding in a positive manner. The influence of these unique extraordinary events on the participants' spirituality was not static, but rather changed with time.

Two participants indicated they experienced extra-ordinary events as a result of being involved in vehicle accidents. One participant described being struck by a car while riding her bike at six years of age. The participant was thrown from her bicycle and the back of her head struck a fire hydrant. As a result of this trauma, this participant experienced an out-of-body experience: the participant saw herself leave her body and float up into the air from where she was able to look down at everyone gathered around her body on the street and then she returned to her body. While this individual still does not remember all of the events surrounding the time preceding and following the accident, she remembered the extra-ordinary experience as stated in the following:

What happened--when I got hit--I remember the out of body experience. A lot I don't remember. It's like a vacuum and the memory comes back in parts. (G, personal correspondence, October 18,2001)

This participant viewed this as neither a positive nor negative experience, but rather as just the process of the transition that happens after death:

That's just what happens. You leave your body and go up. But I stopped and returned back down to my body because it wasn't my time. (G, personal correspondence, October 18, 2001)

Another participant recounted an extra-ordinary experience that occurred as a result of a traumatic experience that she had, when she was a teenager. This participant was involved in an accident wherein, the tractor she was driving rolled over on top of her. During the accident she

had the extra-ordinary experience of feeling her body being moved to a safe place at the instant the tractor was rolling on top of her. This individual describes this event in following statements:

I should never have lived. There is no way I should have lived! ... We're talking a big tractor and it was completely upside down and I was completely under it. The RCMP measured under there and they couldn't figure out how I ever was possibly under there and lived. But I can tell you, I passed out when the tractor went over and I came to, watching the tire coming down at me and I felt me move I felt me being moved and then I fainted again. I was lying there with this tractor all around me... I slid out under this tire that was still turning . (Cp26/27)

4.34 Negative Influences

Trauma Buries Spirituality

Three of the participants talked about the terror and anger they experienced during their childhood that resulted in the ultimate violation to their spirituality - that of being cut off from their spiritual selves. The traumatic environment they experienced resulted in them either being so enveloped with rage, or closing themselves off to any vulnerability that could potentially be an opening to experience more hurt. One participant described experiencing a constant rage through childhood that enveloped her, alienating her from her spiritual self:

Everything was muffled... the whole time I was a kid--I was sick--I was just angry.

(Gp25)

In response to a summary statement about her account sounding like she was alienated from her whole spiritual life, the participant replied,

Everything. Yeah. It wasn't there. (Gp27)

Another participant described this void of spirituality during childhood in the following way:

When I think of ... the way I described what spirituality is ... and... try to remember was there a time when I was a child that I felt that ... connection and that just kind of being totally at peace with being part of something? And I haven't been able to remember anything. (Mp5)

Connected with this void of spirituality is the sense that in order to protect oneself from being hurt further, participants choose to close themselves off from anything that could potentially harm them. Participants reported that by closing themselves off from all things that could potentially harm them, they were also closed off from their own spirituality. One participant expressed this statement in the following:

You have to guard yourself from the pain or the unknown--that's the ultimate violation to any kind of spiritual development or a sense of spirituality. (Mp11)

Another participant expressed the instinctive desire for truth and love to heal her wounded spirit but not having the ability to allow herself to be vulnerable enough to receive it. She expressed the search for this truth and love as follows:

All of that trauma was just a child searching desperately for what truth was and not finding the ability to go there. (Cp24)

Participants described the fear of allowing themselves to open up and experience fullness or happiness. The fear was related to losing that sense of fullness once you have experienced it. The participants felt it would be worse to lose this sense of fullness once you have experienced it, than to never have experienced fullness of life. This sentiment is expressed in the following statement:

There's sort of a part of me that thinks I wouldn't be able to take it if... I allowed myself to live like that - to live in the moment ... a really full, happy, joyful life and then something happened to lose that... I mean that's the feeling that I have is that I would not survive... it would just do me in. (Mp7)

For some participants, there was also a sense of guilt and forsaking of self connected with the knowledge that they chose to protect themselves, knowing it meant they were closing off other parts of self.

Some participants expressed the idea that trauma did not extinguish one's spirituality but rather buried it: to be uncovered at a later time when it was safe. This theme is captured in the following statements:

I buried it (their Spirit) for a very long time.... I don't know how it survived (their Spirit)... My son is a very old, old soul and as a little boy he was about as wise a person as I had ever met and as he grew up that wisdom just got buried. It didn't die. It got buried.

Its kind of funny, I never thought about it before but its almost like that's what happened with me but right from natal... right from the womb. (Cp24/25)

For three of the four persons interviewed, the ultimate influence of childhood trauma on spirituality was the alienation they experienced from their spiritual self. This is exemplified in the following example where one participant could not accept the idea of a God that loves her. As noted earlier, this participant was involved in a life threatening accident--a tractor rolled over on top of her. Prior to the accident the participant had been talking with her minister about not believing there was a God, and if there was a God, He had better show himself. The minister had scowled at the participant and said something would happen. Following the accident, the minister visited the participant in the hospital and had asked if she had received her answer. The participant lashed out at the minister with hate and verbal aggression, explaining her extreme defensive reaction being due to the fact that she felt threatened by the minister's caring presence and his ideas of a loving God . At the time, the participant could not accept the idea of a Spirit/God/Creator that loved her:

Any kind of attitude that there was an outside force that might love me enough to save me. I could accept any kind of negative (being abused by others).... but to deal with that 'yes there was a God that cared about me, that would look after me' ... My mind snapped shut...and maybe that's the answer to what happens to the spirit when there is trauma... That even when they challenge the spirit.... there was no acceptance. Absolutely none. (Cp26/27).

One of the participants also felt the alienation she experienced from her spiritual self resulted in her either neglecting or abusing the spiritual gifts she had been given and has later come to know she has. This sentiment is reflected in the following comments:

I had these gifts. Again, I abused a lot of them. A lot of them I never used... (Gp22/23)

“Why Did it Happen?”/Loss of Meaning and Purpose

One of the central questions the participants had to wrestle with was making sense of why the trauma happened to them. The participant who reported an overall positive influence from trauma on their spirituality, describes going through a questioning process of trying to make sense of the trauma and why it happened. They explained their experience and the sense of purpose they gained as follows:

You still go through that process where you wonder why is this happening to me. But as you work through it--you understand that even though He (Spirit/God/Creator) might not have wanted that to happen to you, that bad things can be used or turned into good, depending on how you deal with it. (Hp12)

For other participants, the question of “why” was not as easily answered in their youth. The participant who survived the bicycle accident, only to be faced with learning disabilities and other cognitive and physiological difficulties throughout her childhood, was much more stuck on “Why I’m still alive?”. The ongoing frustration and rage with her learning difficulties in school that she experienced are characterized in the following:

The 'Why?'. I had my sister, she could do anything. Educationally - straight A's, honour student... and I had my younger sister, same thing. I could never get past the first five minutes of any class without breaking down in tears and anger and rage. Well it wouldn't go to tears (but), it would go right to rage. (Gp26)

This individual's sense of meaning and purpose was fundamentally shaken. The unanswered question of why she was still alive plagued the participant into her later teens and early twenties, resulting in more than twenty serious suicide attempts through drug overdoses. The following statements reflect the ongoing sense that she should not still be alive, and questioning why she was still alive when others who have done a less serious overdose had died:

I had overdosed more times than anyone I know. Most of these people don't make it period. I don't know why they die - when they are only doing that (a lesser overdose).
(Gp13)

This overall question of why, and the need to make sense of why the abuse and trauma was happening to them, was an ongoing theme that was connected to other themes of blaming self or Spirit/God/Creator. These other themes will be reviewed later in this section.

Anger at Spirit/God/Creator

The participants talked about the anger they felt about their traumatic childhood experiences. In particular, two of the four participants expressed a strong sense of anger and blame toward God for the traumatic events they experienced. For one participant, this anger was directed at

God for allowing her to survive the bicycle accident she was involved in. The serious head trauma, that the participant incurred as a result of the accident, caused significant learning disabilities and other life long struggles that she was still coping with. As already noted, this person had the sensation of leaving her body after the accident and then having to return to her body. This participant was angry at not being able to continue her journey and die because living with the resulting disabilities was too difficult. The participant's anger at God was expressed in the following statement:

All the anger went in cause I always went back to the accident and why I'm alive? It shouldn't be this hard....surviving the accident and not having that ability. I didn't have any ability at that time--so I thought. (Gp9)

For another participant, anger at God and the institution of the church for the childhood experiences she had, was also very intense. This participant went through the process of completing a step four in Alcoholics Anonymous, which involved detailing all the people she was angry at and listing all the reasons why. For this participant, the great majority of the anger in her life at that time was directed at God and the church. She described her step four experience as follows:

And God hit the top of my list and the church. I wrote 12 pages of hatred I had to God and the institution of the church--now it's pretty hard to get spiritual when you think that... of God. (Cp18)

Guilt/Self Blame - Punishment From Spirit/God/Creator

The doctrine of sin that was promoted by the church was perhaps the most troublesome aspect of the institutional church for two of the participants. When taken in the context of experiencing ongoing trauma in their family home, the doctrine of sin reinforced a sense that the participants were not worthy or that they were to blame for the abuse they were experiencing. This was the implied message that participants experienced as a result of the abuse in their own homes, which was also reinforced by the messages they received while attending church. One participant expressed her sense of anger and outrage she still felt later in her adult life, as a parent with young children:

When my kids were little, they would always want to go to church school in the summer. And that's when my anger at religion first started to come out... I would tell them they could go but if they started teaching doctrine ... they couldn't go any more... They would come home and say the word 'sin' and I would go right through the roof. (Cp12)

For another participant the doctrine of sin reinforced both a sense of blame for the abuse she experienced and a reduction in self worth as a person. This sentiment is captured in the following statement:

...their (the church) whole concept of sin--for the longest time that was such an embedded thing that basically it was my fault... that I was to blame, and I mean that was just a constant thing... If I was a better person--so every little thing that I did wrong became so magnified for me.... you know the constant--it's never good enough. (M1p10/11)

Related to the doctrine of sin and the implied sense of guilt or self blame, was that participants sensed that they were bad and thus the trauma they experienced was a direct punishment from God. One participant related how her image of God was one who punishes you for being bad. Thus, she understood her Polio to be a punishment from God, marking her for life. The participant felt that she was bad for allowing the sexual abuse to happen and for finding some physical pleasure in the sexually abusive act:

I had Polio Encephalitis which means it was in the head and most people who had Polio Encephalitis died. If you managed to live, you weren't as crippled as ...(other types of polio) ... so I managed to live and they told me that I would have a very bad limp and I likely would never really walk right... and a lot of that was around that God had marked me and he was going to show the whole world what a bad girl I was because I had allowed this sexual abuse... more than anything else, because it was comforting... (there was some pleasure in the physical touching) Absolutely. (Cp8)

Sanctuary of the Church is Violated

For one participant the church was a place of refuge and sanctuary from the chaotic environment of her home. This sense of sanctuary and refuge was violated when a priest attempted to assault the participant, thus making it an unsafe place. In talking about this experience the participant stated the following:

It (the church) was quiet there... It became a sanctuary until at a certain age--I don't remember how old I was--one of the priests at the church started ... making advances ... It (the sense of sanctuary) was violated. (M1p9/10)

Taints Your Spiritual Development and World View

Participants all talked about how the experience of trauma shaped their development and perceptions of the world. One participant talked about how she did not have a sense of her original pure spirit as a child, a sense of lost innocence. She wondered what her pure and innocent child like spirit would have been like before it was tainted by the trauma experiences or her religious training. Once innocence is lost, it can not be regained. This participant expressed a sense of loss of her spiritual innocence in the following statements:

I don't have any sense of my own--or very little sense--of what my own spirit was like when I was ... younger...what that would have been before it was shaped by either the events of my life or religion. (M1p8)

Associated with a tainted world view is a more distrustful view of the world--that not everyone was to be trusted. This included distrust of another person's claim about their spirituality. For the participant who was sexually abused by her grandfather who was a religious leader, she became distrustful of people hiding behind false claims of spiritual righteousness. In commenting on how trauma had tainted her spirituality and world view, this participant stated the following:

I maybe distrust another person's spirituality more. (Hp20)

Confusion About Spirituality

Two participants experienced trauma that was perpetrated by religious leaders in their lives. This resulted in the violation being connected with religion and spirituality. One of these participants experienced sexual trauma at the hands of a grandfather who was also a leader of the church her family attended. The abuse was followed by a time of prayer where in the perpetrator would ask for forgiveness for what they were doing. This participant experienced both a tremendous sense of powerless in relation to being able to disclose the abuse and a tremendous degree of confusion about spirituality. This participant recounted the following sentiments of the powerless state she felt, in relation to her abuser:

I didn't feel I could tell people and be believed when I was a child, because of his role as a spiritual (leader). (Hp4)

In the same way, this participant recounted her confusion about spirituality in relation to encountering both abusive and good characteristics, in the same person of the abuser:

Even my grandfather and my grandmother, I mean, they always had devotions in the morning and that feeling that you were talking about--of being connected--that feeling was there in their home. I knew God was in their home. I knew Jesus Christ was there. I knew what they were telling me was the truth but I also knew that what he was doing was wrong and that I didn't have any power... that's the worst part of it... trying to sort it out (Hp12/13)

A very real dichotomy and confusion developed: the person who was helping the participant in her spiritual development was also the very same person who was abusing her.

Anger at Religion and the Institutional Church

All the participants were raised with some involvement in the institutional church. While religion and the institutional church are not synonymous with spirituality, they were viewed by the participants as one of the influences in their spiritual development. Thus, it was important to examine what the participants' experience of religion was in relation to the trauma experienced and the unique influences that were reported by participants.

The anger participants felt toward the institutional church was related to the responses of persons within the church community and doctrine of the church. Some of the significant negative responses of persons within the church involved receiving counsel to stay in an abusive situation, having the injustice of the abuse not acknowledged, and not experiencing the church as a caring community wherein they felt valued. Some of the doctrinal statements that were experienced as difficult, related to a loss of self worth, a sense of sinfulness, and of personal responsibility for the trauma experienced. These themes were described in the preceding section regarding guilt and self blame.

(i) Failure of the church to acknowledge the injustice.

The response by the church to stay in the abusive situation and their failure to acknowledge the injustice is reflected in the experience of one participant whose mother sought counsel. This

participant's home environment was permeated by an abusive father. The participant described the response of the church when her mother sought help:

The other thing that happened was at one point when my mother really wanted to get out ... she went to the priest... told him what was going on and he basically said you know... 'you made your bed lie in it', kind of thing ... I was just so angry at the church... I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be there because it was still a kind of a little bit of a place of refuge for me but I was so angry that it was so hypocritical .. how the church had been so complicit in us being in the situation that we were in for as long as we were--so if it wasn't for my mother's devotion to Catholicism it's more likely that she would have gotten out at some point. (M1p10)

(ii) The incongruence of talk and action within the church.

For one participant who sought a caring community to support them during her youth, the church reflected an incongruence of talk and actions:

It (support/care) certainly wasn't reflected in how people treated me. There was no one to me who symbolized the kind of person that Jesus was--which is, He was somebody who would recognize and be with anyone and be with people in their worst moments of suffering. There just wasn't any sign of that anywhere. (Mp12)

(iii) Not feeling valued within the church community.

One participant reported looking for support from the church during her traumatic childhood. For this participant, the church had been very important during her whole childhood. As the

participant got older, she looked for support, a sense of being valued for whom she was, and, a sense of community where she could feel that she belonged. The participant's hope for these things fell completely short in all regards, as described in the following statements:

The church was so important to me... as I got older I was looking for this sense that I was important to the church... that I was part of a community somehow. I mean it was just so over and over and over again so clear to me that... I was not part of a community. I did not matter to anyone there--not one single person. (Mp1 1)

As a result of these childhood experiences with church in relation to their trauma, two of the participants noted that they still have a great difficulty with the institutional church. They have not been able to resolve these issues to date and attending a church service triggers these difficult issues for them. One participant described this in the following way:

I miss that (church), because I won't go back to any kind of organized church community. I've sort of tried it, just in the sense of going with a friend... I can get through an hour or whatever but it is very hard for me. (M1p12)

At this point a caution should be noted. The participants' experiences within the institutional church during childhood were not all negative. Involvement with the institutional church did foster some positive spiritual development even for those participants who also experienced negative influences. For one participant, the church was a critical positive influence throughout their childhood and continues to be a significant part of their adult life.

Summary of the Section

Childhood trauma had a varied influence on the participants' spirituality. A positive influence for one participant included a strengthening of the relationship she had with Spirit/God/Creator. Other participants were influenced by the extra-ordinary experiences she had as a direct result of the trauma incident. All of the participants experienced at least some degree of negative influences on their spiritual self which included the following: (a) a sense of their spirituality being buried, (b) a loss of meaning and purpose, (c) anger at Spirit/God/Creator and the institutional church, (d) feelings of being punished by Spirit/God/Creator, (e) the sanctuary of the church being violated, (f) tainted spiritual development, and, (g) confusion about spirituality.

4.4 The Role of Spirituality in the Healing Process

4.41 Overview of the Section

The following section identifies the specific themes that emerged regarding the role spirituality played in the participants' healing process. While healing involved all aspects of a person, this research explored the unique role of spirituality in the healing process. In order to set an overall context of understanding the significance of spirituality in the healing process, I will describe the participants understanding of the overall view of the role spirituality played in this process. As well, I will describe the significant events which marked the participants' turning points toward the path of healing. Following this, the main themes of spirituality and healing will be explored in three separate sections:

- (a) the influences of spirituality on the mental, physical & emotional self;
- (b) the influences of spirituality on relationships with others;

(c) the influences of spirituality on the relationship with God/Divine.

4.42 Turning Point for Healing

All four participants were deeply influenced on a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual level by the childhood trauma that they experienced. These influences have been described in previous sections. Increasingly, these negative influences affected their lives and the people around them. Each participant expressed a clear turning point, where they decided to make changes in their life and to move in a healing direction. This turning point for each individual came at a point where they realized they needed to stop the chaos or craziness in their lives either for their own benefit and/or the benefit of those they loved. One participant described her turning point in the following statement:

My bottom was when at 24 I got pregnant again ... I ended up having twins--which I didn't know... I was very determined to look after them. I wanted to and after five months I fell apart and I couldn't--I had to give them up ... That was so hard. And so that was it. I realized that I was at that point... it wasn't just me anymore. It would affect them all their lives, whatever I decided to do, and that I wasn't going to live like that any more. So I started trying to work through all of this stuff--trying to live. In terms of my personal life to live the kind of life that I wanted ... that's twenty years... its taken me about and I'm still, I mean I'm still struggling at times (M1p6)

4.43 Spirituality Plays a Central Role in the Healing Process

All four participants described a central role for spirituality in their healing process. The following two excerpts from participants highlight their experience about the central role that spirituality played in their healing process overall:

It's (spirituality) absolutely the core. Without that there is no healing. Because healing is about the spirit ... if the spirit is well there is no dis-ease. (Cp25)

A second participant spoke about the overall role of spirituality in her healing process:

It (spirituality) was a very, very big part of my and still is a very big part of my healing-- and I think it also--I think it helped me survive as a child. I don't think I would be as intact as I am if it wasn't--it was a lifeline... (Mp12)

4.44 Influences of Spirituality on Mental, Physical & Emotional self

While all of the participants acknowledged that spirituality played a significant role in their overall healing processes, a number of more specific themes emerged in relation to spirituality's influence on their own mental, physical and emotional self. Within the realm of self, participants identified that spirituality influenced seven main areas in their healing process in the following ways:

- (a) provided a measure of protection, both during and after the trauma;
- (b) enabled participants to find meaning and/or purpose in their suffering;
- (c) promoted new ways of understanding and relating to their perpetrators;
- (d) supported the process of acceptance and forgiveness;

- (e) enabled the participants to let go of anger, hostility and negative feelings;
- (f) provided participants with the strength to face the trauma and pain; and,
- (g) fostered an increase of self awareness and sense of control in their lives.

Spiritual Protection - Small Inner Room of Light

One of the four participants did not report experiencing an overall negative influence on her spirituality, in that, they did not feel angry at Spirit/God/Creator or abandoned by Spirit/God/Creator during their childhood trauma. Rather this participant felt that her spirituality was ever present and it was this influence that saved her:

(The) thing that saved me was my spirituality at that time--even though I was a small child--I think that--you know that Jesus protected me. (Hp2)

Despite the abuse the participant endured as a child at the hands of their grandfather who was a religious leader, she found sanctuary within a spiritual center inside of herself. This was a place that the abuse and darkness could not touch her. A place that was not dissociative but in a very real way anchored the participant in knowing that she was not bad and the responsibility for the abuse lay with her grandfather. In this place, the participant knew that she was loved and cared for by Jesus and with time, this “light” has grown within her to crowd out the “darkness” she experienced:

It’s almost like a separate room. Where you know, you’re protected. That the wrong act can’t get you...dissociation...I never ever experienced that. I was always right there and I think that place, that wasn’t touched, is more in a spot after the fact ...where I knew that it

wasn't me. I knew, although these things were happening to me and it was confusing-- that it was like, *it was a little tiny space and now its gotten bigger, so that it crowds out the darkness* (italics added)...I knew that it wasn't me that was responsible ...that's what helped me to keep the molesting from becoming my responsibility...it kept me from believing that I was bad. (Hp15/16)

Rather than feeling alienated from her spiritual center, this participant's experience of abuse as a child drew them closer to her spiritual center for protection:

It was Jesus who protected that spirit inside me to know that this was human and ...it didn't have anything to do with me, it had to do with that man. (Hp5)

For this participant, spirituality provided a sense of protection and perspective to know she was not to blame, from the time she experienced the abuse up until the present. Thus, this participant reports that she never experienced anger directed to Spirit/God/Creator nor an alienation from her spiritual center, which the other three participants experienced. Rather, this participant drew closer to her spiritual center during the time of trauma and she did not perceive trauma as having an overall negative influence on her spirituality. The anger she did experience was directed toward her perpetrator and the participant still needed to resolve the questions of why her grandfather would victimize her or if there was any meaning to be found in suffering. These issues will be explored in the following sections.

Finding Meaning and/or Purpose in Suffering

All of the respondents indicated that spirituality played a significant role in shifting their perspectives on understanding their suffering. While trauma left each participant with a need to answer the question of “why they had to suffer”, their spirituality assisted them with creating a new understanding to integrate their experiences. Three of the participants expressed the view that suffering was sometimes necessary to move us toward growth. One participant expressed this in the following way:

For some people death and certain kinds of life experiences—certain kinds of suffering are the only way for them to spiritually move on or evolve or...to grow. (Mp19)

Another participant understood the purpose of her suffering was for her own teachings and to prepare her for the responsibilities she currently has as a pipe carrier:

You know when I look back now and see it from where I am today there’s that purpose. There’s a purpose—I had to go through what I went through. And it has a lot to do with how I’m walking my life today.... It’s all teachings. (Gp44)

A third participant echoed this theme that suffering offers opportunity for growth and her belief in the evolution of the soul:

As spirits before we enter the child we become, we choose parents, we choose the situation we come into and that’s what allowed me to live with a lot of what’s happened—is that teaching of ... evolution of the soul. (Cp23)

The fourth respondent did not see suffering as necessary for promoting growth but rather something that may inevitably happen and has the potential to be turned into good:

You still go through that process where you wonder why this is happening to me but as you work through it, you understand that even though He (Spirit/God/Creator) might not have wanted that to happen to you--that bad things can be used or turned into good, depending on how you deal with it. (Hp31)

While the participants did differ to some degree as to whether they viewed suffering as necessary for growth and/or whether it was an inevitable part of life, they did agree that the ability to work through the trauma allowed each of them unique opportunities to grow and shape them into whom they were today--healthy, strong and loving people. One participant expressed this sentiment in the following remarks:

It doesn't bother me anymore, except that I know a child was injured and I was that child. It's kind of like I've been able to separate who I am from the incident, although not really because it does make me who I am. (Hp2)

Ultimately, finding a purpose or sense of meaning in the suffering is an empowering process. One participant summarized what finding meaning and purpose in the trauma had done for her:

It gives me power over it (the trauma). It (trauma) doesn't have power over me. (Hp31)

New Understandings and Ways of Relating to Their Perpetrator(s)

A second portion of answering the question of why, had to do with trying to make sense of how one person could victimize another person. For three of the participants, the abuser was either a parental or grandparent figure who was in a care giving role with them as children. For one of these three participants, the abuser was a religious leader with whom she experienced both significant spiritual connections and at other times experienced her own traumatic victimization. All three of these participants reported that their spirituality played a significant role in finding new understandings related to these issues. The common theme of understanding that emerged was being able to see the abuser(s) as vulnerable and broken human beings who were acting out of their own experiences. This was not seen as taking the responsibility away from the abuser but rather provided a framework for understanding how they could victimize their own child or grandchild. One participant was able to make sense of her abuser in the following way:

There are always times when you think about what had happened but I think that's where the spirit is to the point where you can realize that the person who assaulted you was a person--maybe a broken person. That what they did to you, they did it because of their experiences in life. They didn't have healing and forgiveness and compassion, or didn't allow that in their life. (Hp25)

Similarly, another participant chose to see her abuser as someone who was spiritually sick, not any different from any other human being:

You might look at this from a different angle, that you might see these people as spiritually sick, as you might be yourself. (Cp18)

A third participant reflected on the ability to have compassion for her own parents, who were the perpetrators of much of her childhood trauma. This participant understood that much of the abuse she experienced was reflective of her parents background experiences and the vulnerable human beings that they were:

I have always felt a lot of compassion for both of my parents because ofI mean, I knew that so much of what happened in our family was to do with things that had happened to both of them. So I think that the traditions and the communities that I belong to have helped me to keep understanding that more. (Mp20)

Acceptance and Forgiveness

The ability to come to new understandings of what the meaning or purpose of suffering is and to understand how one human is capable of victimizing another, helped the participants move toward acceptance and forgiveness. For all of the participants, acceptance and/or forgiveness was a significant part of their healing journey. One participant summarized the need to accept the past and to move in a new direction in the following statements:

I'm not particularly proud nor ashamed of what used to be. I have acceptance of all of that. It's what was. (Cp28)

It is much more appropriate to get into how can I heal than the energy of attaching blame which isn't. What good does that do anyone? (Cp21)

For three of the participants, the ability to forgive the abuser was seen as the key to their own healing. This was an essential process of letting go of negative thoughts and feelings that freed the participant to move toward healing. This sentiment is echoed in the following statement:

You need to be able to forgive before you can heal... the act of forgiveness is the key--that's the whole key behind it all. (Hp25)

There was some disparity in whom the participants understood benefited from the act of forgiveness. For one participant the act of forgiveness was seen to be something that was intended to benefit self rather than the perpetrator:

In the Bible it tells us to forgive each other. It was through that experience that I realized that the forgiveness was not for my grandfather, it was for me--so I could heal. (Hp25)

Another participant felt the act of forgiveness was something that was beneficial for both herself and the perpetrator:

With my father's death, the one thing was to not let my own emotional struggles around my experiences with him (past abuse) to interfere with his being able to go on and do whatever. That it was damaging to him and also to me to hang on in whatever way. So it gave me a push every once in a while--that whatever I needed to do for myself... to let that go--and it freed me and also this sense that it freed him. (Mp19/20)

The participants viewed forgiveness and acceptance as a spiritual process for two reasons. One the capacity to forgive was viewed as inherently spiritual in nature. Secondly, the

participants' need to seek justice and retribution for the spiritual wound inflicted could be given over to the spiritual level, where they trusted it would be dealt with. For one participant, the act of forgiveness was only possible because of the spiritual capacity she had:

I can still forgive what he (abuser) did to me even though it is hurtful--but it is not really me that's forgiving, cause I don't have--as a human being you can't forgive that kind of wrong. (Hp9)

As well, forgiveness was viewed as a spiritual process in the sense that the injury inflicted was among other things, a spiritual wound. Once the participants had chosen to forgive, they could then relate to their perpetrator on a spiritual level, where they do not have to worry about maintaining a balance in their relationship with the abuser. In essence they were able to release the burden of ensuring justice, to this spiritual level. One participant expressed this spiritual process as follows:

...understanding the kind of spiritual dynamics that every single person is experiencing, and that no matter what my physical experience or my emotional experience has been with somebody, that this thing that will affect all of us most is how I can understand and relate to them on a spiritual level. Because on that level... there is a balance there... that is not dependent on me to maintain. (Mp19)

For another, this sense of raising the issue to a spiritual level was expressed in the following statement:

I know that Jesus can forgive, even those kinds of terrible things that are wrong and that's really between him and God. (Hp10)

For the participants, the process of forgiveness and letting go was a spiritual process that was key to their own healing. The process of forgiveness was seen to benefit the victim, and for some participants the process of forgiveness was also seen to benefit the perpetrator. The participants believed that it was their spiritual capacity that allowed them to forgive and offered them the opportunity to release the burden of justice to this spiritual level.

Letting go of Anger, Hostility and Negative Thoughts

The process of letting go of anger and other negative feelings, were inherently part of the process of finding new perspectives on the trauma as well as moving toward a place of forgiveness. One of the most significant influences of the trauma for the participants was the degree of anger they had at God and/or their abuser(s). As already indicated, participants were able to move toward forgiveness by finding new perspectives for understanding suffering, as well as making sense of how their abuser(s) could victimize them. The combination of these actions resulted in a significant letting go process to happen including the letting go of anger, hostility and negative feelings. Healing as a process involving the letting go of barriers to growth and an opening up to things that promoted growth, was evident in the release of negative emotions that the participants experienced. One participant related her ability to let go of anger, rage and other negative emotions that were leading her to want to kill one of the perpetrators in their life:

I felt that white-hot anger. I was going to kill him. ...I went and got paper out and wrote down 'I hate (perpetrator's name)', and I did the process--because that spiritual process was in my heart and that God would provide... I didn't turn that anger at anybody. (Cp20)

This same participant spoke about being able to let go of the anger, hatred and jealousy that she experienced:

It just melted right out of me--to this day. (Cp20)

Another participant talked about the process of letting go of anger and the act of forgiveness as essential to her healing:

It (the perpetrators own abusive life experiences) spilled over and polluted your life. I think that's where the main healing took place was after I got all that anger out. Then I could ask Jesus to help me forgive him for what he did to me: for what he stole. (Hp25)

This participant went on to express what this healing process felt like for her:

Relief. Peace. I didn't have to be angry any more--now. It was all between Jesus and my grandfather...freedom...and that it didn't have to affect me anymore. (Hp25)

The process of gaining new perspectives on their suffering and on those who had abused them resulted in a letting go of anger, hostility and other negative feelings. At the same time, for participants who had been very angry at God and had significant barriers to their spiritual selves,

the letting go process also involved a significant letting in of spiritual processes that promoted their own healing.

Strength to Face the Trauma and Pain

The healing journey required a great deal of resources to overcome the past trauma. The participants all reported that their spirituality gave them the emotional and physical strength they needed to face the trauma and pain during their healing journey. The participants have expressed how healing involves all aspects of self - mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. One participant expressed how the practice of Yoga was for her a spiritual and a physical practice. She explained how the physical practice of Yoga was essential to enable her to complete a portion of her healing journey in the following statements:

The physical practice of Yoga has really helped me to be in my body and that got me through...allowing myself to feel physically what had happened to my body ...I couldn't have done that...if I didn't have the strength. So I sort of built up my strength for a number of years...it wasn't a conscious thing. I just think that my body knew at what point I could handle this...the memory....At times it was a very physical...thing...also very emotionally draining, but I think the fact that my body was strong and I felt connected to my body (helped). (Mp15)

Other participants commented that spirituality provided the strength to emotionally go back to face the trauma. One participant expressed a sense of grounding where spiritually enabled one to face the childhood trauma and make sense of it:

It (spirituality) helps me go back to how I felt. That little boy: the young man, and the pain, and how to come to terms with it. (Gp35)

For another participant, spirituality assisted her to know the abuse was wrong and provided her with the strength of righteous anger to promote her healing:

It made me angry that he would try to put the blame on me. That's what made me really mad and maybe it was that anger inside of me that helped too. (Hp19)

Increased Sense of Self & Personal Control

For all of the participants, spirituality's role in healing resulted in an overall increase in self awareness and sense of control in their lives. Being able to let go of anger at their perpetrators and God and to let in acceptance, forgiveness, trust and a new openness to their spiritual self had influences on various realms in the participants' lives, including an increase in self awareness and comfort with self, a new appreciation for life, an increased trust in the Divine to help overcome fears, an increased ability to discern true spirituality in others, increased control over intrusive memories, and, increased ability to manage affect.

(i) Increased self awareness and wholeness.

Some participants expressed an emerging sense of self discovery and self awareness. One participant expressed this sense of learning and discovery in the following statement:

I learned a lot from that old man: from that elder. I learned a lot of stuff... there were things there (about myself) which I never knew existed. (Gp34)

This participant went on to express some of the changes in character that she had seen in herself:

He's taught me strength, humility, humbleness. (Gp39)

Another participant described living in her head and being disconnected from her emotional and physical self, as a way of surviving. When this participant started to practice Yoga, she started to reconnect to these areas of their life and she was continually surprised at the degree of disconnection:

It was really interesting... when I started doing Yoga and was just becoming aware of how...disconnected I was... there were ...all kinds of things I just had no idea about how I felt, what I actually looked like, what my physical body looked like and all kinds of stuff. It just would continually surprise me. (Mp15)

This participant went on to describe how spiritual practices of Yoga and Native Spirituality helped her reconnect her head to her heart and body, thus, to become more whole:

I think the reason Yoga (and)...Native Spirituality...became so important to me (was) because my way of surviving was to live in my head: to be out of my body...disconnected from my emotions....So those other things are very unintellectual, and I really needed that: things that let me experience myself...(as a) physical person, as an emotional person, things that touch my heart...ways to live the rest of my life that would, rather than piece things off again, that would bring it together and allow me to experience that... (to) be whole. (M1p15/16)

(ii) Increased Appreciation for Life.

One participant had a long history of suicide attempts and lack of desire to live. She experienced a renewed appreciation for life and living. Through a relationship with an elder who was severely physically and mentally disabled, the participant gained a new appreciation for all that she had in life, and the simple joy of being alive. This participant expressed this sentiment in the following statement:

Understanding what all of us take for granted--getting up out of bed, going for a walk, going out to pick berries...he showed me how grateful he was to be alive. Not necessarily have a fancy car or fancy job--just to be alive. I try not to forget that--even through my rough times. (Gp36/39)

(iii) Trust in Spirit/God/Creator and Overcoming Fears.

For others, regaining trust in people and in Spirit/God/Creator allowed them to overcome fears that were instilled as part of the childhood trauma. One participant expressed this sense of overcoming the fear of rejection that resulted from her childhood trauma experience:

There are some things I am beginning to overcome. But it has taken a long time.

Rejection--it is a fear of rejection. Fear of not being worthy. Fear of not understanding.

Fear of not...being acceptable. (Gp30)

For another participant, the ability to overcome fears and the ability to trust people again, was directly related to her spirituality and healing:

I know that as a human being it's beyond my capacity to grow like that: toput those fears aside and say its OK I can trust again, there still are good people in the world, don't think evil of everybody. But you have to be careful. (Hp10)

This overcoming of fears and learning to trust people more was also related to the spiritual realm and trust in Spirit/God/Creator. One participant identified the central guiding principle for her life--trust in Spirit/God/Creator to direct your life:

Trust the Creator. People are people. Human beings are human beings. Faith, a lot of it's geared to faith. (Gp42)

(iv) Increased Ability to Discern True Spirituality.

Two of the participants had experiences in which the perpetrator was a religious leader in the church their family attended. One of these participants recounted how even as a child she learned to discern true spirituality in others. As an adult, this participant had become highly sensitive to persons using spirituality as a way of diverting their own responsibility for actions and using it only to appear in a favourable light before others. This ability to discern others spirituality began during the participants incidents of abuse as a child. This participant recalled how she would be molested by her grandfather and then her grandfather would pray to God for intervention to help both of them stop what they were doing--vividly remembering being able to see through the false spirituality and the blame her grandfather was projecting.

I remember when he (perpetrator) prayed with me. You know, its kind of funny because I was thinking to myself, 'Oh Brother, here we go again'. You know, kind of rolling my

eyes into the back of my head and thinking like ‘oh for Pete’s sake’ and shaking my head...It was just like who does he think he’s fooling? I mean he’s talking to God here.

(Hp19)

(v) Control Over Intrusive Memories.

One of the negative symptoms of the childhood trauma experience that was reported by the participants was the occurrence of intrusive trauma memories laden with intense affect. As participants were able to move through the spiritual processes of healing, one of the outcomes was a reduction in the occurrence and intensity of intrusive memories. One participant commented about the change she experienced in regards to intrusive memories:

I remember before I dealt with it...those memories would come back to me...and lots of times, it just seemed to happen. But (now) I never--I have to think about it. I have to consciously think about it. It doesn’t ever come back to me spontaneously anymore... in a haunting way where I have--I shudder and say, ‘turn that off’Its not controlling.

(Hp10/11)

(vi) Increased Ability to Manage Affect.

All of the participants expressed a significant degree of disruption in their affect management as a result of the childhood trauma they experienced. Spirituality positively influenced the participants’ ability to manage their affect and their daily lives in more healthy ways. Two participants related examples of being able to step back and consider an appropriate response, rather than responding in a negative and reactionary manner.

I had to do a lot of changing myself because of my anger. I would respond inappropriately to my kids. That's one thing I had to work on quite a bit...I had to stop before I responded to them because I had to think through instead of just reacting...how important is what they did just now in the grand scheme of things? (Hp21)

I learned a lesson in co-dependancy, that was a hard one: ...how when you're in the situation, you don't see it. But today, I can sit back and look at a situation. I do that a lot. (Gp40)

For all of the participants, spirituality's role in healing resulted in an overall increase in the sense of self and sense of control in their lives. This was evidenced in their accounts of positive change in various realms of their lives including, self awareness and wholeness, overcoming fears and regained trust in Spirit/God/Creator, a new appreciation for life, abilities to discern true spirituality in others, greater control over intrusive memories, and, increased ability to manage affect.

Summary

This section has explored the role of spirituality in the healing process, in relation to the participants' mental, emotional and physical self. Within the realm of self, participants identified that spirituality influenced their healing process in seven main ways: (a) provided a measure of protection, (b) enabled participants to find meaning and/or purpose in their suffering, (c) assisted participants in gaining new perspectives of relating to and understanding their perpetrators, (d)

encouraged participants to find acceptance and forgiveness, (e) enabled participants to let go of anger and other negative feelings, (f) provided participants with the strength to face the trauma and pain, and, (g) assisted participants to gain a greater sense of self and personal control in their lives.

4.45 Influences on Relationships With Others

The role of spirituality in the healing process was not limited to the influences on the participants mental, emotional and physical functioning. Rather, spiritual influences of healing radiated out into the relationships with people that the participants had. The three major themes that will be explored in this section include the following:

- (a) an increased love, compassion and respect for all people;
- (b) a greater capacity and sense of responsibility to help others because they have been through trauma; and,
- (c) a transformation in relationships with others.

Unconditional Love, Compassion and Respect for All People

All the participants commented on the change that they had experienced in their relationships with others. They all discussed themes of an increased sense of care and compassion for other people that was influenced by their spirituality and was part of their healing process. One participant talked about having been very emotionally guarded and that she consciously had a rule about not letting herself care too deeply about someone else. For this participant this all changed when she started to care for an elder who was mentally and physically disabled. The

process of their relationship provided many lessons including one on the experience of unconditional love for others:

I said I would never allow anyone in before that. But I went against my own beliefs...but I learned from that. That it can be done. That I could love another human being and not have any conditions. (Gp34)

One of the other lessons this participant learned from this relationship with the elder was respect for all people:

He treated everyone equally. With an equal amount of respect and love--everybody...and that's what I learned from him and that's what I try to do today: regardless of how messed up a lot of people are, what their views are. (Gp38)

Another participant described spirituality as having influenced her trauma experience by creating a heightened understanding about the frailty of being human, and the need to be compassionate to others. This participant talked about her own forgiveness and reconciliation she had made with a parent who was abusive.

I've been very encouraged to do that (forgive her parent) by the traditions that I've embraced: to be kind...and to be forgiving. I think that's also then allowed me to be very compassionate with other people as well. (Mp21)

For all the participants, spirituality was described as having influenced their relationships with others by infusing their actions with a greater sense of love, compassion and respect for all people.

A Greater Capacity and Sense of Responsibility to Help Others Because They Have Been Through Their Own Trauma Experiences

A second major theme that emerged with all the participants was a greater sense of responsibility to help others with their lessons gained from their own struggles of pain and trauma. The participants felt that they had learned a great deal through their experiences of trauma and healing. They felt these experiential knowledge inevitably increased their ability to understand others who were struggling. This was conveyed as the knowledge one gains from “having been there.” One participant expressed this idea in describing how her past addiction issues helped her connect to people she has counselled.

Everybody else talks to people about getting sober and I talked about the pain of being sober and having to take another drink and how you can get through that treatment. It helps being a drunk. I mean that’s the neat part of all of this. (Cp28)

Beyond the ability to understand other people better because of their own struggles, participants expressed an increased sense of responsibility to use what they had learned in their healing process to help others. One participant expressed this sense of responsibility to others in the following statements:

I could dwell on it and think about it (the past trauma) but that's not my job. My job is tohelp other people because of it. The Bible tells us that we all go through things in our lives that aren't necessarily pleasant and we can come alongside another person who has been through a terrible ordeal and understand their pain because of it. (Hp14)

Spirituality significantly influenced how the participants related to others. The participants emerged with a deeper understanding and sense of responsibility to stand alongside and help others who were in pain, reflecting a deep commitment to use what they had learned and experienced to benefit others.

Transformed Relationships

All of the participants described transformed relationships that were influenced by spirituality in their healing process. The transformed relationships were with people with whom the participants were closely involved during their adult lives. In one instance, this involved a parent who had perpetrated the childhood trauma. One participant described the struggle she had in dealing with their son, whom she turned into authorities for molesting her daughter:

I lived with the fact that I had turned my son in, because I did...for a long time--every once in a while that still will come over me--not like it did at one time. And he and I are on an incredible basis, as a son and a mother...(I'm) someone that he knows he can rely on and trust and we have an incredible relationship. (Cp16/17)

Following this statement, I asked if she felt “this relationship had been transformed?” She responded:

Absolutely. By all those spiritual principles with Alcoholics Anonymous. (Cp17)

Two of the participants made conscious choices about reconciling with their childhood perpetrators. In the first instance, the participant had forgiven her perpetrator but had consciously chosen not to have a relationship with him, believing that it was best for her own healing. Through the participant’s act of forgiveness, she had been able to have a sense of peace about her past but saw no benefit to building a new relationship with her perpetrator:

I always felt like you (their grandfather) did what you did and this is the result. You’ll have to deal with that yourself. She (their aunt) might have wanted to try and see if that relationship could be restored. But as far as I’m concerned it was done and I think that’s the healthiest thing for me--not trying to reconcile that relationship. (Hp27)

The other participant chose a path of trying to reconcile with her parent which her spiritual traditions encouraged her to do. She stated,

I have a remarkable relationship with my mother now, which in my experience, other people that I know who are survivors of childhood trauma that’s similar to mine--it’s very rare. (Mp20)

This participant was clear that her own impetuous to move toward trying to reconcile with her childhood perpetrator was because of her spiritual traditions. Of equal importance was her

mother's spirituality which the participant credits with giving her mother the strength to bear the burden of the reconciliation process:

I'm just overwhelmed at times. I am so grateful for that--this kind of reconciliation. And with my mother, I think that what allowed her to do that was her spiritual strength. She was able to do things for us as we got older that many people I know just don't have it in them to do...(or) the resources to be able to do it. And she just put herself in front of us and allowed us to say what we wanted to say to her. She heard us,...accepted responsibility, and I think that comes out of--that's part of that foundation (spiritual) that she had which she gave to us. (Mp20)

This participant expressed the possibility of this kind of reconciliation most succinctly, when she stated the following:

Relationships that were abusive before are transformed--that's very powerful. (Mp21)

While only one participant experienced a transformed relationship with her childhood perpetrator, all of the participants experienced transformations in relationships with people close to them. One area where the evidence of the cumulative process of spirituality and healing can be observed is in the transformation in key personal relationships.

Summary

The role of spirituality in the healing process radiated out beyond the individual to the relationships they have had with people. The participants described the influence of spirituality

in the following ways: (a) fostered an increased capacity to love, feel compassion, and respect for all people; (b) developed a greater sense of responsibility to stand beside and assist others with understandings they have gained from their own experiences; and, (c) experienced the transformation of relationships, some of which had been previously abusive.

4.46 Influences on Relationship With Spirit/God/Creator

The final area to be explored regarding the role of spirituality in the participants' healing process looks at the influence spirituality had in the area of the participants' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator. The participants had differing views and images of what God is and where God is. These views of immanent and eminent relationships with a God image have been previously discussed. Regardless of how the participants conceived of a God image, their descriptions of how they relate to their Spirit/God/Creator reflect changes that have occurred through the healing process. The participants identified four influences that occurred:

- (a) the relationship with S/G/C grew stronger;
- (b) participants experienced a sense of spiritual growth;
- (c) the spirit which was injured by the trauma was healed; and,
- (d) the development of spiritual gifts.

A Stronger Relationship With Spirit/God/Creator

It is important to remember that for three of the participants, the initial influence of childhood trauma was to feel anger and alienation from God. For those three participants, there were significant obstacles in finding a way to rebuild this broken relationship with Spirit/God/Creator.

For the fourth participant, the actual trauma events were situations that moved her to having a stronger and closer relationship with Spirit/God/Creator as a resource that she could depend on to help her through the ordeal:

I've never, ever felt alienated from God or blaming Him in any way for what happened to me. I've always had a good relationship with Him and in lots of ways its brought me closer to Him cause I needed Him to help me deal with it (trauma). I think it made me closer to God because of it (trauma), not alienated me from the relationship. (Hp18)

For the other three participants, the trauma they experienced initially caused them to feel alienated and farther away from Spirit/God/Creator. This was not the end point in this relationship. All of the other three participants found ways to strengthen this broken relationship during their healing process. In a similar way to the transformations participants experienced with other people, the participants experienced a transformation in their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator. This sense of a new found trust, hope and provision in a relationship with Spirit/God/Creator instead of anger and alienation is reflected in the following statement:

Whatever I need usually comes...Where that comes from...is the Grandfathers (S/G/C)...Whatever is supposed to be, will be--it will come. It's not usually when you want it. It will come when it is supposed to. (Gp44/45)

Participants Experienced a Sense of Spiritual Growth Through Experiential Learning

All of the participants interviewed, described a sense of spiritual growth within their healing process. This growth has come through the lessons learned in dealing with the aftermath of

childhood trauma, reflecting the experiential lessons of learning how to heal the broken parts of oneself. The theme of spiritual growth is connected to previous themes related to gaining new perspectives, forgiveness and other changes that have occurred in the overall healing process.

This sentiment of growth was conveyed in the following statement of one participant.

When I look back at that (trauma) now, and see where I am today, there's that purpose ...I had to go through what I went through. And it has a lot to do with how I'm walking my life today. Thankful of why I am not painless, but a lot more settled than I once was. I don't have a big ego. I'm certainly not worried about what I will become in my life or, there's a lot of things I don't worry about, which I did prior. It's all teachings. (Gp44)

Participants would parallel their own life long healing process with this spiritual growth process. For the purposes of this study, I have artificially tried to separate spiritual issues from the whole of the persons being, thus it seems repetitive to say participants did experience spiritual growth. However it remains a valid theme that continually emerged throughout the interviews, as expressed in the following statements.

I am starting to understand simple basic spiritual truths and they're like peeling an onion. When I first started to understand or conceive (of) them, they were bigger and more generalized. When you get down to the heart of an onion, it's really, really strong in all kinds of ways. The outside of an onion you can take and break and you get down to the inside and its that thin membrane, its incredibly (strong)...and that's what growing spiritually is like. (Cp17)

The Spirit Which Was Injured by the Trauma Was Healed

The participants reported that trauma injures the spirit of the child victim. A recurring theme throughout the interviews included descriptions of how participants had gone about healing their injured spirit throughout the healing process. For one participant, healing the injured spirit inside was the first step in the overall healing process.

We have to recover spiritually first and after we recover spiritually we will recover emotionally and physically. (Cp15)

In another instance, a participant identified a particular process of forgiveness she went through as the most beneficial act toward healing her spirit. This participant said:

You ask Jesus to be a go-between, between your spirit and his (the perpetrators). And you pray that Jesus will let His forgiveness come through you to the other person's spirit. And I think that act, that prayer, those prayers that I prayed, that was the most healing instance where it actually healed my spirit inside... Relief. Peace. I didn't have to be angry anymore. Now it was all between Jesus and my grandfather. (Hp25)

Participants described how spirituality influenced their emotional, mental and physical selves. Furthermore, their once injured spirit was also influenced through the healing process.

A Greater Sensitivity to Spiritual Direction and Developing Spiritual Gifts

The participants indicated that their healing process increased their sense of love and compassion for others and a sense of responsibility to stand beside and help others with what

they learned. While these attributes could all be described as spiritual gifts and directions, participants described other ways of knowing and gaining direction through dreams, visions, being a pipe carrier, intuitively knowing peoples struggles and seeing future events.

One participant described her ability to just look at a person and know the pain and issues with which the person was struggling. For this participant it was an intuitive knowing and different way of feeling and sensing that she developed through her spirituality. This participant described one aspect of this type of knowing in the following selection:

I can pin point things on people--people in our community. I can talk with them and I can give them some advise--how to do something and they look at me... (thinking) 'how did he know that?' It had nothing to do with knowing (points to his head) it was something to do with what's here (points at his heart)... it's a human instinct. We all have it. I've just been able to tap into it. That's the difference today. (Gp33)

As a pipe carrier, this same individual talked about how she used the pipe or her connection to Spirit/God/Creator to guide her. This participant stated that she was able to see how future events would unfold, for the purpose of guidance in her life, or for others who are seeking direction. Being a pipe carrier was her spiritual life line:

Remember, I told you I knew before it happened? (Taps on his pipe) So that told me. I don't pursue anything, if it is not supposed to be. I respect that. (Gp45/46)

For another participant, guidance and direction was gained through dreaming about a future event. In one instance, when this participant was seeking some spiritual direction in their life, she had a dream of a new building at an Ashram. This participant understood this to be guidance that she should travel to this place. When the participant arrived at the Ashram, she found that a new building had been built exactly as she had dreamed of:

One of the things that happened was I had dreamed about that they had built a new building... and I followed them to this beautiful new building (in their dream). Anyway, when I went there (to the Ashram), it was there....that was just amazing to me (M1p19).

In a similar way, another participant talked about how the visions she had, guided her in what she should be doing or whom she should be going to help:

And the visions I have... the visions guide me--who needs help or what's going on. But people come to me...its not me. Like ... things guide them to me. (Gp43/44)

Through the healing process, the relationship with Spirit/God/Creator involved developing a greater sensitivity to spiritual gifts and other ways of knowing. These spiritual gifts and ways of knowing were not described as new, but rather as always part of the person: they had been buried when their spirit was assaulted by the trauma. The process of getting rid of negative thinking and patterns and opening up to healthier ways, also opened up some previously unknown spiritual gifts and ways of gaining spiritual direction that were within the person all the time.

Summary

The role of spirituality in the healing process not only influenced the individual and relationships they have with people, it also extended to the relationship they had with Spirit/God/Creator. The participants described four major influences of spirituality in their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator: (a) their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator grew stronger; (b) they experienced a sense of spiritual growth; (c) the spirit which was injured by the childhood trauma was healed; and (d), they gained a greater sensitivity to spiritual direction and the development of spiritual gifts

4.47 Summary of the Section

The data reflects that healing involved all aspects of self, the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. However, the unique foci of this study highlighted the participants' experiences of spirituality in their healing process. This process of healing involved letting go of negative emotions, thoughts and behaviours that impeded growth and an opening up to other healthier patterns of thought, feeling, and action. The participants reported that spirituality influenced three major areas of their lives: (a) their mental, physical and emotional self; (b) their relationships with other people; and, (c) their relationships with Spirit/God/Creator.

Within the realm of mental, physical and emotional aspects of self, the participants identified that spirituality influenced seven main areas in their healing process: (a) spiritual protection, (b) finding meaning and/or purpose in their suffering, (c) gaining new perspectives of relating to and understanding their perpetrators, (d) finding acceptance and forgiveness, (e) letting go of anger

and other negative feelings, (f) finding the strength to face the trauma and pain, and, (g) gaining a greater sense of self and personal control in their lives.

In terms of the participants' relationships with other people, they indicated that spirituality influenced them in three primary ways: (a) their increased capacity to love, feel compassion, and respect for all people; (b) they developed a greater sense of responsibility to stand beside and assist others with understandings they have gained from their own experiences; and, (c) they experienced the transformation of relationships, some of which had been previously abusive.

The participants' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator was influenced by spirituality in the four following ways: (a) the relationship they have with Spirit/God/Creator grew stronger; (b) they experienced a sense of spiritual growth; (c) the spirit which was injured by the childhood trauma was healed; and, (d) they gained a greater sensitivity to spiritual direction and developing spiritual gifts

4.5 Spiritual Processes and Practices That Support the Healing Process

4.51 Overview

This section will explore the spiritual processes and specific spiritual practices that participants felt supported their healing. The following section will explore three main areas: (a) the spiritual processes related to the survivors' relationships with others; (b) the spiritual processes related to the participants' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator; and, (c) a brief

description of various specific spiritual practices that survivors identified as helpful in their healing process.

4.52 Spiritual Processes That Were Inherently Relational with Others

Participants identified six major themes of spiritual processes that supported their healing which occurred within the context of relationships with other people. This section will explore the support processes that were identified:

- (a) find the “light” in the past darkness;
- (b) find the light in the present - “God’s love manifest in others”;
- (c) decide to trust others with your pain and allow them to support you;
- (d) find a supportive community;
- (e) help others; and,
- (f) make amends.

Look for the “Light” in the Past Darkness

Like the experience of trauma, the experience of healing and spirituality was very real and concrete for the participants. All of the participants identified people who were like “light” to them in their past darkness, their time of trauma. One of the critical processes for healing and recovery that was identified by the participants was the ability to look back and claim the experiences of love that helped to sustain them. The ability to claim these concrete experiences helped to ground them in the strength of knowing love and hope, and to enable them to explore the pain. This idea was expressed by one participant in the following statements:

Well first of all, to look back and find what it was in there (in the trauma) that did help me survive: that did give me spiritual strength....I believe that no matter how bad it was for any human being that there is something there....We have all experienced love and even if it was a moment with somebody who wasn't even a significant person--it doesn't matter what it was....Look for the experience so that I can recognize it. I know it's there. I have felt it...I have felt love. I have felt hope. I have felt--I have had moments sitting outside. Whatever it is...to look for light...because that's then what it's built upon. That's what the recovery--that's what the healing is. It's to recognize. And then that becomes a source of strength in being able to look at whatever the hurt was, whatever the damage was. And it helps then to recognize it when it is there...to claim it now. (Mp24/25)

Each participant identified people in their lives that were like light to them amidst their enormous darkness. These persons included parental figures, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, and religious leaders. For one participant, one of the significant sources of light during her traumatic childhood was her father. She explained this in the following way:

My relationship with my father really helped because I think it gave me a concrete example of how, number one, a man should treat his daughter, and I also saw how a man should treat his wife...So maybe more than anything that saved me. (Hp19)

Another participant found the love that helped sustain her in her relationship with relatives:

I had a great-aunt and uncle who were...*the shining light* (italics added) through my childhood. They would come and see me (in the hospital) and then when I came out of

the hospital, I would usually go and stay with them until I could go back home again.

(M1p1)

Find the Light in the Present - “God’s Love Manifest in Others”

The ability to find the light in the present pertains to the participants’ ability to identify persons in their adult life who were able to provide the necessary love, caring and support needed for their healing process. All of the participants identified persons who had been significant to them throughout their healing process. One participant reflected on this ability to recognize caring people as a concrete way to see God’s love in their life:

I could recognize that I could see that (caring nature) in people and I would stick to people who were like that...I think in some of the Christian teachings it’s that, you know, that *God’s love is manifested in each of us* (italics added). (Mp24)

Decide to Trust Others and Allow Them to Support You

The ability to recognize caring people in one’s life is the first of a two-part healing process identified by participants. It is not enough to simply recognize caring people in one’s life. The participant also had to choose to trust that other person and allow them to support them. This is not an automatic outcome. One of the ways trauma influenced spirituality was for people to bury it and not allow themselves to be vulnerable and open to any other potential pain. The participants’ decision to trust others with their pain and to allow themselves to receive the love of others was a separate but crucial choice. One participant commented on this part of the healing process for her:

A big part of my spirituality has been--and my recovery, has been to recognize people who had the ability to be caring, who had integrity, who were trustworthy, and then allowing those people to support me and give me opportunities to do all the things I needed to do to get well again. (Mp24).

Another participant described this process of deciding to trust others with her pain and opening up to receive love as a spiritual truth. She learned that giving and receiving was part of the same whole. This participant talked about how she started to learn this truth when she was challenged to open up at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting:

I said, 'well I'm not going to walk around here and whine and cry on everybody'. And so he said, 'if you ever want to be part of this program and if you ever want someone to trust you with their emotions, you first have to trust someone else with yours'...He said, 'you have to give your pain away in order to feel that trust...it's a spiritual truth'. It's a spiritual axiom and I know now that giving is receiving and receiving is giving and they are part of the same whole...you can't have one without the other, it's a circle. (Cp17)

This participant later went on to describe one of the first times she was able to truly share her pain with someone else as part of her step five process of the Alcoholics Anonymous program:

Step five is you go out and tell all this to somebody and I did that and it was all quite cold and unemotional. And then something, I don't know--one of those spiritual miracles--well he got up and left the room...and he came back in the room, and I just started to cry...and I talked about that stuff and what it did to me. And for the first time in my life I

told someone, not only the stuff that had happened to me but the stuff that I knew was hidden--the attitude that I had taken. That was freeing--Oh! (Cp19)

For other participants, certain individuals in their lives provided critical support in the way of offering spiritual teachings, perspectives and rituals. For one participant, the influence of this central elder continued even after the elder has died:

I just knew this person was going to be a part of my life for some particular reason...and he was going to teach me something. He is still teaching me stuff. I know that whenever I Sundance or whenever I do a ceremony...he's there! He's taught me strength, humility, humbleness. (Gp39)

Another participant echoed this same sentiment of valuing the relationship she have had with many special elders over a thirty-year period. In particular, this participant commented on how the support and spiritual guidance the elders provided helped her siblings and her work through trauma issues related to their parents:

A number of times I had gone to sweats and done things with my sisters, my mother, with a lot of support from people around us--particularly from a few elders who would help us find ways to do things and sort of telling me things about the kind of right perspective to have in relation to my parents and particularly my father. (Mp19)

The ability to recognize caring people and then deciding to trust these people to support them, allowed the participants to enter the critical giving-receiving process for their spiritual and

overall healing. The support of others came in many forms for the different participants including supporters stood beside the participants and allowed them to unload their burden of pain; supporters challenged participants in areas that they needed to grow; and, supporters also imparted spiritual teachings, perspectives, rituals and guidance through the healing process.

Find a Supportive Spiritual Community

The participants all expressed a need to belong to a caring spiritual community of people that helped foster the healing process in them. These communities of people involved church groups, Alcoholics Anonymous groups, Yoga groups and Native Spirituality. Each of these communities of people provided spiritual guidance and principles by which to try and live their lives as well as the support to try and change negative patterns. One participant talked about her decision to try and stop the chaos in her adult life and find a different way of living:

I was tired of beating up others...I was tired of beating myself up as well. I had beaten myself to a pulp: to oblivion at this point. So when I went and talked to some people in the Program (A.A.), that's when I decided to try and change in some ways. (Gp30)

For another participant, the desire to change led her to instinctively seek out people she knew to be caring and loving. This participant decided to move to their town and join their group in order to learn a new way of living. In this case the group was a community of people practising Yoga:

I knew that I needed to go somewhere where there were people... where I could start to learn how to live a better life. I knew a couple of people there and I just instinctively

knew that was where I should be. What started there, was those people were part of a Yoga community. So from 1980 until now there's been this whole other thing which has been about Yoga. (M1p14)

A third participant, who was very angry at the institutional church, was able to find a supportive spiritual community at Alcoholics Anonymous:

This anger toward religion...I just don't like the premiss of the Christian church and some of those things. A.A. was so simple, it was so--no traditions--and I like the simplicity. I don't need all the rules. (Cp22)

Belonging to a supportive spiritual community of people was an important factor in the healing process for the participants in many of the same ways that significant individuals provided support.

Help Others

Deciding to love and care for others was something participants felt was influenced by their spirituality and assisted them in their healing process in two significant ways. First, the act of caring for others was a day to day way of integrating one's spirituality in everyday life and attaining a sense of congruence and wholeness in ones life. Secondly, the act of helping others inadvertently worked toward the healing of self--a part of the giving-receiving cycle that forms a whole.

As trauma survivors who experienced a fragmented life the goal of feeling whole and integrated in everyday life was a significant part of their healing process. One participant commented on this process of living a very intentional life where living each day in a caring manner became a way of integrating her spirituality into her day to day existence and attaining a sense of wholeness:

This is life and life is about spirituality. Therefore, ...what I do in my day to day life is all part of that...its just more of a practical approach about how to live more fully every day. That spirit is a part of everything else. Its not that spirituality is over here (separated).... What I could see were good examples from many, many people of how to do that in their day to day life. (Mp14)

Participants also talked about the choice to help others as a reciprocal process that helped them in their own healing. One participant explained how she understand this giving-receiving process and how it contributed to healing:

When you lose yourself, and all kinds of social work theory says this absolutely backwards and wrong, but A.A. says 'get out of yourself and go and help somebody else. You'll find out that you've got helped'. And that's true, absolutely true. What really happens is the whole while you let go of your obsessions with all your crap--enough that you can go out and find some good and give some good, you realize that you felt good for a little while, and that's a truth. (Cp18)

Make Amends

The process of going to people you have hurt to make the amends was an important step in one of the participant's healing journey that was influenced by her spirituality. For this participant, the process of making amends brought about some release and restoration in relationships that had been very emotionally charged. This participant talked about going to make the amends with an ex-partner who had sexually assaulted their daughter. Through the process, the participant found some release of the anger, rage and jealousy she had been carrying:

I went and did my amends with my ex-husband. And I didn't want to go there. I prayed--and for someone who doesn't believe in prayer. When I got there, I told him the truth, which was, 'you never ever really knew who I was', because I never let him know who I was inside. His jaw dropped and he said something to the effect 'that was the biggest piece of truth I had ever spoken'.... it was just like it (anger and rage)melted right out of me--it just melted right out of me to this day. (Cp20)

4.53 Spiritual Processes That Were Inherently Relational With Spirit/God/Creator

The spiritual processes that support healing which occurs within a relationship with Spirit/God/Creator mirrored the processes that occurred in relationship(s) with other individuals and communities of people. Firstly, the participants described a process of being able to identify a source of love and light in their world of darkness. Secondly, the participants made a conscious decision to trust this source of love and light. This section will explore how participants described these processes that occurred in their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator.

Helpful Images of Spirit/God/Creator

For three of the participants, one of the most significant influences of childhood trauma was the degree of anger and rage they felt at Spirit/God/Creator. For some of these participants, the issues of anger were resolved through finding the meaning and purpose of their suffering. For one participant, the healing involved finding a new image of Spirit/God/Creator that she could identify within a positive way to assist her past her barrier of anger. For this participant, the new image that helped her move past her barriers of anger involved seeing Spirit/God/Creator as a pure energy form of love which could encompass and accept all of her anger:

He (their sponsor) told me that his God was his pure light. He taught me I could yell and scream and call this God any kinds of names I wanted. That God could absorb my anger and return all my love because God was pure love...just as some kind of energy. I didn't even give it a form, as a matter of fact I still don't. (Cp13/14)

This image of Spirit/God/Creator as pure love was a key first step that enabled this participant to be able to reconnect this broken and buried relationship. The second step was to try and find Spirit/God/Creator in a concrete knowable way. This participant described her search to connect with this new image of Spirit/God/Creator the discovery that it did exist within her when she realized she had the capacity to love others:

I sat there crying, stating that I am not going to find God within me. I don't know what I'm doing. And then it (the book she was reading) just kind of opened up inside me and ...talk about turning the lights in the stadium (on). And it talked about the feeling you had for a friend. Well this woman who sponsored me, I have a kind of love for her to this

day that I don't know that I have ever had for any other individual, my kids included. She had wronged me. She went out and got drunk...and I loved her anyway...and I went wow! I have the capacity for love...it (was) just all so clear to me and I knew that I had Spirit inside of me. It's the first time that I would have really known that I'm a spiritual being.
(Cp14/15)

For this participant, the anger at God was transformed through finding a new image of Spirit/God/Creator and then discovering the existence of this presence in a concrete way within herself. The participant's ability to find her spiritual source of love and light within was a critical component in her overall healing.

Decide to Trust Spirit/God/Creator

Once Spirit/God/Creator is identified as a source of love and caring, the next step involved deciding to trust this source. One participant explained that the steps within A.A. parallel this process:

Step two is, 'I have this love'. Step three is that 'I'm going to turn my life over to that'.

Step four and five are about getting rid of the crap that's between me and that love.

(Cp15)

All of the participants talked at great length about their healing journey and the integral process of having learned to trust Spirit/God/Creator to support and guide their everyday life.

One participant expressed this trust she had learned through all of her struggles, and the gift she now believes she had to give to others who are still struggling:

You know with all the crap that happens in the world, you know you can count on Him (Spirit/God/Creator),...it's a part of life and He can help you through it:...making sense of those things, those bad things that happen to every single person. That's what the gift is. That's where your relationship with God makes the difference. Because hopefully you can help someone else to get to that same place where they feel secure because of their relationship with the Creator--who's totally in control, even though there's chaos around you. (Hp31)

4.54 Specific Spiritual Practices That Assisted the Healing Process

Prayer and Meditation

Prayer was seen as a “lifeline” to Spirit/God/Creator that both helped participants to survive during their childhood and continued to be a big part of their ongoing healing process. The act of prayer and/or meditation became a quiet place where participants could go as well as a place to seek intercession, guidance and support. For one participant, prayer was an effective process by which to send positive energy to other people needing healing. Prayer and/or meditation were one specific method of drawing near to Spirit/God/Creator to access the resource of this relationship for a variety of purposes.

Music

Music in the form of playing an instrument, singing or chanting was something that touched the spirit of some participants. Music was used to sooth difficult feelings of anger. When all other avenues to ones spirit during childhood had been buried or closed off, participants used music to connect with another person's spirit and their own. Music was also offered up in the form of prayer for others--taking ones deepest desires and expressing them through music.

Writing

The process of writing out all ones deepest feelings connected with traumas and injuries experienced was found to be a deeply spiritual experience that brought about a major "cleansing" of negative emotion for some participants.

Symbolism

Everyday symbols of spiritual reality help some participants stay connected to their awareness of their spiritual self. Visual items helped some participants cut through the clutter of mental activity and connect with people on a spiritual and emotional level. Some specific symbols that participants found helpful ranged from eagle feathers, Buddhist art, being in nature, and the hobby of gardening.

Sweat Lodge, Smudging, Following the Pipe

The sweat lodge, smudging and following the pipe were specific practices within Native Spirituality that some participants found helpful. Smudging is used symbolically to maintain a

connection with their spiritual self, to spiritually center themselves, and as a method of releasing and clearing away pain/emotions they may have been carrying.

The pipe was used to provide spiritual direction for their life or help others find their direction. The pipe was seen as a lifeline to Spirit/God/Creator.

The sweat lodge, as a sacred place, was used by participants to access spiritual resources for four main purposes: (a) it helped release the pain of others, that the person may have been carrying; (b) it helped release the participant's own pain; (c) it assisted in the healing process through specific rituals performed within the lodge; and, (d) it helped to bring to consciousness, issues people may have buried but need to address in their own healing.

Church as a Place of Solace

The church building as a physical place was used by some participants as a safe, quiet and peaceful place to seek refuge during difficult times - a sanctuary.

Specific Yoga Practices & Attending an Ashram

One participant found specific Yoga practices very helpful during the healing process in three main ways: (a) they allowed the participant to develop the physical strength necessary to face her past trauma; (b) they helped her to connect with her physical body and know the trauma she experienced; and, (c) they provided helpful new perspectives to guide and understand her life.

Attending an Ashram as a spiritual retreat center offered the participant the opportunity to intensely work on spiritual development and her own healing process.

Protect Self With a Bond of Light

This was a specific practice described as using the energy of Spirit/God/Creator to form a protective bond of light around the individual.

Dancing

Traditional Native Jingle Dress dancing and attending the Sundance was identified as helpful practices. Jingle Dress dancing, the drum and song were seen as something that brought all parts of self together involving physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental activity. The Sundance for one participant was a specific annual spiritual practice that she will continue to follow for a twelve-year period. Thus far, it has helped the participant to release the pain she carried for all those people she has aided over the past year, and it has helped to prepare the participant for the upcoming year through spiritual renewal and vision.

Specific Spiritual Objects

For one participant who follows the Native Spiritual traditions, specific objects and medicines were seen as critical in providing a number of things including relief from pain, protection, guidance, and the strength necessary to follow her healing journey.

4.55 Summary of the Section

This section explored the spiritual processes and specific spiritual practices that participants felt supported their healing. The larger themes covered the spiritual processes related to the survivors' relationships with others, their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator, and, a brief description of various specific spiritual practices that survivors identified as helpful in their healing process. Spiritual processes related to the participants' relationship(s) with others including finding the light in the past darkness and in the present life situation, identifying other individuals and communities that are caring and allow them to support you, helping others, and, making your own amends. Spiritual processes related to the participants' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator involved finding new images of Spirit/God/Creator, learning to know and identify this spiritual source of love and care in concrete ways, and deciding to trust Spirit/God/Creator. A resource list was compiled of specific spiritual practices that the various participants found helpful thus far in their healing journey.

4.6 Participants' Recommendations to Other Survivors and Social Workers

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked what they would want to recommend to other survivors of childhood trauma and/or social workers working with survivors. The following section summarizes their responses.

4.61 Honour the Spirit Which Has Come Through the Trauma

One participant advised that when looking at the influence childhood trauma has on an individual, always remember to absolutely honour that spirit that has come through and survived. The human spirit is resilient and needs to be honoured for its strength.

4.62 Healing is Based on Finding the Light in the Past Darkness

Two participants recommended that social workers help survivors find the small rays of light in their past trauma that helped them survive and gave them the spiritual strength they needed. Every child has had a safe place so help them remember it. Help them remember what that love felt like and help them claim it, knowing they did experience it. Build on that knowledge and ground them in the knowledge of this experience as you help them move through to looking at the darkness.

4.63 Balance the Violation of the Trauma with Hope and the Persons Intrinsic Worth

One participant believed that above all else, never give the survivor the message that they're forever damaged. There is always hope of healing and transformation. The trauma may have done a tremendous amount of damage to the mind, body and emotions but the spirit is still well and it is still alive. Be sensitive to the spiritual issues of the survivor. The spirit has the ability to transform the mind, body and emotions. The survivor needs to be given love and they need to know that they are still worthy of love.

4.64 Sensitize Workers to the Influences of Violence on Youth and Their Spirituality

One participant felt it important that social workers and other care givers working with young people who had survived childhood trauma need to better understand the influences. She stated this in the following:

When you have a kid who has been sexually assaulted or witnessed murder, ...automatically they put it toward themselves. Some of the workers make the mistake and say 'oh. They're violent'. No, they're not. They are violent toward themselves because of what they have seen. (Gp53)

One of the central reasons all of the participants agreed to share their stories was the hope that they could pass on to others what they have learned about trauma and spirituality through their healing journeys. This recommendation to sensitize workers encompasses the whole area of relationship(s) between trauma, spirituality and healing.

4.65 Offer Your Whole Self as a Social Worker

One participant offers to social workers the following guidance:

Maybe the most important part is to let their (social workers) spirit come through. Let it be tempered with the intellectual knowledge in the books and the wisdom they have gained from their experiences but let them come with an open spirit and not deny that to people--because that's the only thing you have to bring, really. (Cp28)

4.7 Summary of the Chapter

The scope of this research was to explore the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality in the healing process with four adults who had survived the experiences of childhood trauma. The focus of this research was threefold: (a) to examine the influence that childhood trauma had on spirituality; (b) to explore the role spirituality played in the healing process; and, (c) to identify the spiritual processes and specific spiritual practices that supported the healing process.

Childhood trauma had a varied influence on the participants' spirituality. For one participant, a positive influence included a strengthening of her relationship with Spirit/God/Creator. Other participants experienced unique extra-ordinary or out of body experiences as a direct result of the trauma incident. All of the participants experienced at least some degree of negative influences on their spiritual self which included the following: (a) a sense of their spirituality being buried; (b) a loss of meaning and purpose; (c) anger at Spirit/God/Creator and the institutional church; (d) feelings of being punished by Spirit/God/Creator; (e) the sanctuary of the church being violated; (f) tainted spiritual development; and, (g) confusion about spirituality.

Spirituality influenced the participants healing process in three major areas: (a) their mental, physical and emotional self; (b) their relationships with other people; and, (c) their relationships with Spirit/God/Creator.

Within the realm of mental, physical and emotional aspects of self, the participants identified seven ways in which spirituality influenced their healing process: (a) providing spiritual

protection, (b) finding meaning and/or purpose in their suffering, (c) gaining new perspectives of relating to and understanding their perpetrators, (d) finding acceptance and forgiveness, (e) letting go of anger and other negative feelings, (f) finding the strength to face the trauma and pain, and, (g) gaining a greater sense of self and personal control in their lives.

In terms of the participants' relationship with other people they described the influence of spirituality in the following ways: (a) fostering an increased capacity to love, feel compassion, and respect for all people; (b) developing a greater sense of responsibility to stand beside and assist others with understandings they have gained from their own experiences; and, (c) experiencing the transformation of relationships, some of which had been previously abusive.

The participants described the influence of spirituality on their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator, in the following ways: (a) the relationship they have with Spirit/God/Creator grew stronger; (b) they experienced a sense of spiritual growth; (c) the spirit which was injured by the childhood trauma was healed; and, (d) they gained a greater sensitivity to spiritual direction and developing spiritual gifts

The participants identified spiritual processes and specific spiritual practices that supported their healing process. The larger themes covered the spiritual processes related to the survivors' relationships with others; their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator; and finally a brief description of various specific spiritual practices that survivors identified as helpful in their healing process. Spiritual processes related to the participants' relationship(s) with others

included the following: (a) finding the light in the past darkness and in the present life situation; (b) identifying other individuals and communities that are caring, and allow them to support you; (c) helping others; and, (d) making your own amends. Spiritual processes related to the participants' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator involved finding new images of Spirit/God/Creator, learning to know and identify this spiritual source of love and care in concrete ways, and deciding to trust Spirit/God/Creator.

The results of the research indicate that participants experienced a significant relationship between childhood trauma and spirituality. Childhood trauma has a varied but definite influence on the survivors' spirituality. Participants indicated that spirituality played a significant role in their healing process, and they were able to identify specific spiritual practices and processes that supported their healing process.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter will explore how the findings from this research relate to findings examined earlier in the literature review. I will begin by illustrating the similarities and differences between my findings and those in the research literature; most of the section headings will correlate to the major headings in chapter four, with additional commentary on the scope of trauma, the psychosocial influences of trauma, and the dynamic dimension of influences on spirituality. Following this, I will compare my research findings with the literature on theoretical observations.

5.1 Comparison to the Research Literature

5.11 The Scope of Childhood Trauma

Falasca and Caulfield (1999) defined childhood trauma as “an event or a series of events that render the child helpless and breaks through ordinary coping strategies, or both”. The common denominator for traumatic experiences is not in the actual event but rather in the meaning prescribed to the event by the person (Herman, 1992). Using this broad definition of childhood trauma, the majority of the research literature on childhood trauma and spirituality focusses on sexual trauma (e.g., Eliot, 1994; Himelein & McElrath, 1996; Imbens & Jonker, 1992) and a minority of studies consider a broader range of childhood trauma origins (e.g., Bauers, 1994; Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; O’Connell Higgins, 1994). The research literature has been fairly narrowly focussed in exploring the scope of childhood trauma

Ganje-Fling (2000) found that trauma negatively affected spiritual well-being regardless of the type of trauma experienced. While my findings do not support the singularly negative influence on spirituality, they do support the research regarding trauma having an influence on spirituality, regardless of the type of trauma experienced. All of the participants in my study had experienced sexual trauma. For some of the participants, other types of childhood trauma experienced were of equal or greater significance to them. For one participant, the trauma of being involved in a motor vehicle - bicycle accident and experiencing the resulting physical disabilities was more traumatic than the other types of trauma experienced. For two other participants, the experience of childhood illness and the process of receiving hospital care was an equally significant trauma experience. One participant at a young age was admitted to the hospital because of tuberculosis. The participant was placed in isolation with few visitors, given painful needles into their spinal area, and only approached by people wearing gowns and masks. Among other things, the experience for the child was not only terrifying and painful but also of feeling abandoned. The other participant for whom illness was also a traumatic experience, the admission to a hospital involved transportation into the city from a remote community. The child was left at the hospital by parents who needed to return to care for the rest of the family. This experience of illness was traumatic for this child, involving feelings of terror and abandonment from the long separation from family while being very sick.

My findings support the definition of trauma as any event that causes a child to feel helpless and places them in a situation that pushes them beyond their normal coping capacities. The exploration of severe childhood trauma should not be limited to a scope of only sexual trauma as

severe traumas can result from many other sources, including accidents and illness. Regardless of the origin of childhood trauma, it influences the child's spirituality.

5.12 The Psychosocial Influence of Childhood Trauma on Survivors

There is a wealth of research that has already documented the varying influences of childhood trauma on the emotional, mental and physical functioning of the survivor. The intention of this study was not to replicate these well-documented findings, but rather to focus on an area that has been overlooked in the trauma research, that is, the relationship between trauma and spirituality. Instead of providing a detailed description of the results of psychosocial influences, I will only make a summary comment regarding the consistency of what was reported by the participants in relation to the trauma research.

The research process involved questions about the complete trauma experience. I explored both the psychosocial and spiritual influences of childhood trauma that were experienced by the participants in order to gain a complete context for understanding the specific influences on spirituality. The psychosocial influences of the trauma reported by the participants are consistent with the trauma research that already exists. To varying degrees the participants reported experiencing the following influences: (a) flooding of feelings of anger, rage and frustration; (b) experiencing the involuntary triggering of intrusive memories that would cause feelings of panic or terror; (c) experiencing involuntary body memories of the trauma experience; experiencing a loss of safety, general fear, and mistrust of others; (d) feelings of confusion about the trauma, alienation from others, and feelings of abandonment; and, (e) feelings of guilt and

shame related to the trauma experience. Some of the various coping strategies that were employed by the participants included the following: (a) attempts to numb and block out the feelings or to split themselves off from their feelings; (b) anger directed inward in self destructive actions of abusing drugs and repeated suicide attempts; (c) anger directed outwards in aggression and violence toward others; and (d) attempting to be the peacemaker in the family, to end the threat of future violence and trauma.

5.13 The Dynamic Dimension of Influences on Spirituality

The research literature on the relationship(s) between childhood trauma on spirituality tends to be polarized. The majority of studies that have been published in the literature portray one of two pictures: trauma is seen as only causing a negative influence on spirituality (e.g., Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Hall, 1995; Imbens & Jonker, 1992), or that spirituality actually grows stronger through the trauma experience, where spirituality is viewed as a positive resource for healing (e.g., Himelein & McElrath, 1996; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Shantall, 1999).

The polarization in the research literature may be a result of the limitations within the research that has been undertaken thus far. One of the limitations that may have contributed to the polarization is the perspective from which the research originates. A pathological orientation to trauma which seeks to understand how trauma survivors are negatively influenced and why they "get sick". A salutogenic orientation to trauma focuses on the origins of health and wonders how people "get health". While these limitations in perspective may help explain some of the

polarization within the literature, it does not account for the absence of describing a variable and changing pattern of interaction between childhood trauma and spirituality.

Pargament et al. (1998) is one of the few studies to identify a more complex interaction between spirituality and trauma revealing a dynamic relationship with both positive and negative patterns of association. The findings in my study concur with this research. I found that trauma may cause an initial influence on spirituality that may be negative, neutral, positive, or some combination thereof. One participant in my study reported an overall positive influence on spirituality as well as some more minor areas of negative influences. Other participants reported a mix of neutral and negative influences in response to various types of trauma. After each participant had successfully engaged in their healing process, the influence of trauma on spirituality was viewed as positive and as an experience that strengthened them and prepared them for other purposes in life. The relationship(s) between childhood trauma and spirituality are dynamic. They cannot be polarized into exclusive positive or negative categories as much of the research literature has done. My findings support a view that the initial influence of trauma on spirituality may be a combination of negative, neutral and positive outcomes that, with time, consistently moved toward the positive axis through the healing process.

5.14 Positive Influences of Trauma on Spirituality

A portion of the research literature reports that trauma had a positive influence on spirituality, that is, the trauma experience strengthened a person's relationship with God (Bauers, 1994; Himelein & McElrath, 1996; Rossetti, 1995). The findings in my study concur with this

research. At the time of the trauma, only one participant reported a positive outcome which strengthened her relationship with Spirit/God/Creator. The other participants reported the initial influence of trauma on their spirituality as primarily negative. As each participant moved through their own healing process, each reported a strengthened relationship with Spirit/God/Creator as a result of experiencing the childhood trauma.

5.15 The Influence of Unique Extraordinary Experiences

The research literature on spirituality and trauma does not identify the occurrence or influence of unique extraordinary experiences in the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality. Two of the participants in my study reported having extra-ordinary experiences as a direct result of a childhood trauma event. They reported that there was no immediate influence either positive or negative on their spirituality. With time, they both reported that the extraordinary had a negative influence on their spirituality as they were difficult to assimilate into their understanding. Through the healing process they were able to assimilate these events into their understanding in a positive way.

One of the study participant's experiences could be categorized as a near death experience. The participant was involved in a motor vehicle-bicycle accident. He reported that this near death experience was a primarily neutral event for him in that he initially accepted the experience as the normal process of death. For the participant, the resulting physical disabilities and difficulties in coping led to negative associations with the near death experience. He became very angry at the fact that they had to return to his body and was not able to continue "upward".

This study finding is in contrast to those reported in the literature pertaining to near death experiences. Typically, persons who undergo a near death experience, make significant positive changes in beliefs, attitudes and values (Groth-Marnat & Summers, 1998; Greyson, 2000).

The research literature on childhood trauma and spirituality makes only scant reference to exceptional experiences that occur as a result of trauma. Pike & Mohline (1995) make reference to a positive dissociative experience of a ritualistic abuse survivor that escaped the torture experience by transcending into the presence of Jesus. Within my research study, one participant reported that during a vehicle accident, they had the sensation of having their body moved to a safe place, as the tractor rolled on top of them. For this participant, the influence on their spirituality was initially neutral. When the participant was not able to integrate the experience into their understanding, the experience was perceived as being very threatening and negative. Through the healing process, the participant was able to integrate the experience and it had a very positive influence on the participant's spirituality. At this time, there is little research literature on trauma and spirituality with which to compare these findings about the occurrence and influence of extra-ordinary experiences on the relationship between spirituality and trauma..

5.16 Negative Influences of Trauma on Spirituality

Ganje-Fling et al. (2000) have compiled the most comprehensive identification of the negative influences of trauma on a person's spiritual well-being. In chapter two, I used these same ten negative influences on spirituality as a framework for summarizing the findings of other

researchers. Rather than repeating the description at this point, I will use it as the basis for comparing the research literature with my study findings.

My study findings directly concur with six of the ten negative influences to spirituality that were identified by the research literature. There was complete concordance in the following issues related to the negative influence of trauma on spirituality: (a) trauma survivors experienced existential distress related to questions of meaning and purpose of one's life; (b) trauma survivors experienced unresolved religious questions, originating with beliefs one was raised with that no longer were helpful; (c) trauma survivors experienced anger at a spiritual source; (d) survivors experienced a sense of guilt or self blame for the trauma, a feeling that they were being punished by Spirit/God/Creator (e) trauma survivors experienced a sense of unworthiness and low self esteem; and, (f) trauma survivors experienced disillusionment, doubts, and cynicism resulting from feeling let down by faith/religious beliefs.

There were also three other areas that my research findings that indirectly concurred with the research literature concerning the negative influences of trauma on spiritual well-being. While my study did not distinguish these issues as distinct and separate categories of influences, they were contained within other categories of my findings. The three categories for which my study findings had indirect concordance with the research literature are as follows: (a) trauma survivors experienced a sense of abandonment by a spiritual source; (b) trauma survivors experienced a sense of distrust and feeling betrayed by a spiritual source; and, (c) trauma survivors experienced fear of Spirit/God/Creator.

There was only one area of negative influence on spiritual well-being that is identified in the research literature that was not directly or indirectly identified in my study findings. The research literature identifies the impediment of experiencing God's nature to be the same as the perpetrator's. This negative influence was not identified by my study participants and thus my findings differ slightly from those of the research literature.

My study findings also include four additional categories of negative influences on spiritual well-being that are not directly identified in the research literature. These four study findings on negative influences include the following: (a) trauma taints your spiritual development and world view; (b) the sanctuary of the church was violated; (c) the experience of trauma caused confusion about spirituality; and, (d) most significantly, trauma buries spirituality. There is some agreement between the research literature and my study findings regarding spirituality being buried. Ganje-Fling & McCarthy (1996) make the theoretical observation that spiritual development is arrested at the age at which the trauma occurred. The idea of spirituality being buried goes beyond the scope of arrested development. It also includes aspects of detachment from the rest of self as well as the protection of spirituality, by placing it in a safe place out of harms way. Clearly there are some differences between the research literature and the study findings in regards to the influence of buried spirituality. For the other three additional negative influences that were identified by the study findings, there may be some indirect concordance in the research literature. Without access to the in-depth data that the research literature is based on, I cannot be conclusive about any indirect linkages at this time.

Overall, there is strong agreement between the research literature and the findings of my study in regards to childhood trauma and the negative influences on the spiritual well-being of the survivors. There was direct or indirect concordance on nine of the ten factors identified in the research literature with four additional influences being identified within my study. The areas in which the study findings go beyond the scope of the research literature present possible directions for future research.

5.17 The Role of Spirituality in the Healing Process

At this point, the trauma research literature does not document very well the role of spirituality in the healing process. There are some general references to spirituality being viewed as a resource in surviving and healing from trauma (Anthony, 1987; Kahanna, Harel & Kahanna, 1988; Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987; Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1991; Pargament, 1996; Werner, 1992) but little research details the interaction of spirituality within the healing process. This was one of the reasons for undertaking this exploratory study. The research literature that does attempt to describe the relationship(s) of trauma and spirituality in the healing process will be compared with the study findings.

Mental, Physical & Emotional Self

The study findings concur with the research literature on three areas of the positive influences that spirituality has on mental, physical and emotional self in the process of healing from trauma. These three areas of positive influence identified by the literature include the following: (a) the survivors' spirituality assists them in finding meaning and purpose in their lives (Himelein &

McElrath, 1996; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Sandford, 1990; Shantall, 1999; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993); (b) the survivors' spirituality assists them in being free from self blame for the trauma (Valentine & Feinauer, 1993); and, (c) the survivors' spirituality provided them with a sense of moral triumph and spiritual victory (Shantall, 1999). Clearly the most widely accepted positive influence of spirituality that the research has described to date involves helping survivors finding meaning and purpose. The other two influences can only be located in two studies within the group of research literature I explored. My study findings clearly support all three of these positive influences on mental, physical and emotional self that are detailed in the research literature.

My study findings identified five additional areas that spirituality positively influences healing within the domain of mental, physical and emotional self. These areas are not documented in the research literature that I reviewed. The additional positive influences of spirituality on mental, physical, and emotional self include the following: (a) spirituality provided a measure of protection at the time of the trauma incident(s) and immediately following; (b) the survivors' spirituality assisted them in developing new ways of relating to and understanding their perpetrators; (c) the trauma survivors' spirituality encouraged them to move toward forgiveness and acceptance; (d) the trauma survivors' spirituality provided them with the physical and emotional strength to face their pain; and, (e) the trauma survivors' spirituality helped them realize an increased sense of self and personal growth. While many of these outcomes that occur through the healing process have been described in the research literature on trauma and healing, they have not necessarily been associated with being influenced by the survivors' spirituality.

Relationship with Others

The research literature identifies one positive influence that spirituality has in the healing process that relates to the survivors' relationship with others namely, survivors develop an increased desire to help others (Sandford, 1990; O'Connell Higgins, 1994). My research findings concur with the research literature, but once again, my study findings go further in describing three other positive influences in the domain of the survivors' relationship with others. These additional areas include the following: (a) trauma survivors' experience a growth in their capacity for unconditional love, compassion, and respect for all people; (b) trauma survivors experienced transformed relationships with others, including a transformation in relationship with a perpetrator; and, (c) trauma survivors found that they had a greater capacity to help others due to the knowledge and wisdom they had gained from having been "through it before"--they had a "gift" to share.

Relationship with Spirit/God/Creator

The research literature identifies only one positive influence that spirituality has in the healing process that relates to the survivors' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator namely, the survivors experience a strengthened relationship with a force greater than themselves (Bauers, 1994; Himelein & Feinauer, 1996). The findings of my study agree with the research. The study participants found their relationship with Spirit/God/Creator was strengthen. Furthermore, the study findings go beyond the research literature and identify three additional areas that spirituality influences the healing process, regarding the relationships that survivors have with Spirit/God/Creator. The additional areas of positive spiritual influence that the study identified

include the following: (a) all of the trauma survivors experienced spiritual growth through the healing process; (b) the spirit which was injured by the trauma, was healed; and, (c) trauma survivors experienced a greater sensitivity to spiritual guidance and the development of spiritual gifts.

5.18 Spiritual Processes and Practices That Support the Healing Process

There is a paucity of research literature that directly addresses spiritual issues and experiences, in the treatment of trauma (Bennet, 1999). Given this fact, there is little research literature with which to compare the study findings. In the following section I will compare the study findings with what does exist in the research literature and highlight the potential areas of future research the study findings illuminate.

Relationship with Others

My research study identified six major themes of spiritual processes that supported the participants' healing, which occurred in the context of relationships with other people. The theme of finding a supportive spiritual community or network of people is in accordance with the research of Valentine & Feinauer (1993). O'Connell Higgins (1994) found that often these spiritually supportive networks or communities are outside of formal religious communities, which concurs with my study findings as well.

Five additional supportive spiritual processes were identified in my study findings, that are not found in the research literature I reviewed: (a) It was of critical importance for the study

participants to find the light in the past darkness in order to ground themselves in the knowledge of what helped to sustain them; (b) trauma survivors needed to be able to identify the light in their present life situation that could potentially help sustain them through the healing process; (c) once trustworthy people were identified, trauma survivors needed to decide to trust these people and allow them to provide the support they needed; (d) trauma survivors benefitted by their decision to help others, as it was a way of helping themselves; and, (e) trauma survivors found it helpful to make amends to those they had wronged in their past. Each of these processes were influenced by the participants spirituality and viewed by the participants as practical ways of integrating their spirituality into their daily lives. These processes were identified by the study participants as critical to their healing, thus, they are worthy to be considered for future research and practice directions.

Relationship with Spirit/God/Creator

My research study identified three major themes of spiritual processes that supported the participants' healing, which occurred in the context of relationships with Spirit/God/Creator. Two of these themes parallel the spiritual processes with people; trauma survivors first needed to be able to identify the existence of Spirit/God/Creator and secondly, decide to rely on this relationship to provide the support they needed. These two study findings concur with Bauers (1994).

There was one critical spiritual process that occurred within the context of a relationship with Spirit/God/Creator that was not found in the research literature. My study finding described this

theme as the survivors' ability to find helpful new images of Spirit/God/Creator. The research literature is very clear concerning the negative influence of trauma in relation to the survivor's image of Spirit/God/Creator. The participants in my study found it critical to be able to formulate a new images of Spirit/God/Creator, that were free of the obstacles and negative associations that their previous images caused. This is a unique finding of my study identified by the participants as critical to their healing process and it merits further consideration for future research and practice directions.

Specific Spiritual Interventions

The research literature addressing spiritual issues and spiritual interventions is anecdotal at best with only a few authors contributing articles about specific practices they have employed. This is an area of research and practice within social work that is in need of development (Garbarino, 1996) and a stimulus for this research study. The limitations of this study did not permit more than a cursory exploration of the specific spiritual interventions that the participants found helpful. Given the limitations of the research literature and the study findings, only a comparison of the anecdotal listing of practices can be made.

My research study compiled a list of ten specific spiritual practices that assisted the participants in their healing processes. Four of these practices concur with the those identified in the research literature: (a) using symbolism to imaginatively restore ones spirituality (O'Connell Higgins, 1994); (b) the use of ritual healing ceremonies from various religious and spiritual backgrounds (Jacobs, 1989; Krull, 1995; Seymour, 1997; Shaffer, 1981, Spiegel, 1996); (c) the

use of the Alcoholics Anonymous twelve step principles for spiritual development and healing (Brende & McDonald, 1989; Pacquette, 1999); and, (d) the use of meditation and prayer (Tan, 1996; Urbanowski & Miller, 1996).

My research findings identified six additional specific spiritual practices that were not found in the research literature. These additional findings include the following spiritual practices: (a) the use of music to connect to ones spiritual center and, as a form of prayer; (b) the use of writing techniques to release negative emotions and thoughts to a spiritual plane; (c) the practice of Yoga and using the Ashram as a spiritual retreat center for spiritual development; (d) protecting oneself with a bond of spiritual energy or light; (e) the participation in jingle dress dancing as an activity that integrates all four aspects of self; and, (f) the use of specific spiritual objects and medicines to provide guidance, strength and healing.

The limitations of my study did not permit an in-depth exploration of the specific spiritual practices that participants found helpful in their healing process. My study findings concurred with the anecdotal accounts in the research literature and provided other unique anecdotal accounts to that could be explored in more detail at a future time. Spiritual interventions in a social work context is an area in need of development and it will require the integration of healing knowledge from other disciplines (Chirban, 1992).

5.2 Comparison of Theoretical Observations

The social work and mental health research literature on the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality within the context of the healing process is in a stage of early development. In contrast, the literature on theoretical observations on the same topic has a greater divergence of opinion and depth of thought about the dynamics of the relationship. This section will compare the literature on theoretical observations that was reviewed in chapter two with the findings of the research study.

5.21 The Crisis and Opportunity of Spirituality Created by Trauma

The theoretical literature contained divergent views regarding the potential influence of trauma on spirituality where some theorists view the negative influence of trauma on spirituality as the only potential outcome of the experience (e.g., Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Imbens & Jonker, 1992; Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Manlowe, 1995) and other theorists acknowledge the potential for initial crisis created by trauma, along with the potential for the crisis to be a catalyst for greater spiritual development (e.g., Frankl, 1984; Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; Jaffe, 1985). My research findings would concur with this latter perspective. The initial crisis and suffering brought on by trauma created a dark night of the soul for some of the research participants but also the opportunity to develop greater capacities. All four of the research participants emerged stronger through the healing process, in that their spiritual crisis had been transformed and they developed greater capacities because of their crisis experience.

Trauma has the potential to both enhance spirituality in one person while damaging the spirituality in another, that is, not all people will be influenced in the same way (Decker, 1993a, 1993b; Frankl, 1984; Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; Jaffe, 1985; McMillan, 1999; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). My research study found that one participant reported the initial overall influence on spirituality to be something that enhanced spirituality. This participant's spirituality served to preserve and protect through the trauma experience and to serve as a critical resource in her later healing process. The other three participants reported the initial influence of trauma on spirituality to range from neutral to negative. For these participants, spirituality was placed into an initial crisis. During the participants later healing process, spirituality served as a catalyst for transforming their trauma experiences into the greater capacities they now have. Pargament (1996) and Fowler (1981) would characterize this later process as a radical transformation or conversion experience namely, the reshaping and recentering of one's previous values, beliefs and life orientation systems. The research findings agree with the theorists who view the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality to be dynamic and varied in the outcome.

5.22 Dissociative/Transcendent Experiences

Some theorists observe that people may have positive dissociative or transcendent experiences associated with trauma (Bennet, 1999; Greyson, 2000; O'Connell Higgins, 1992; Ryan, 1998). As previously noted, there is scant research literature that details these types of experiences and at this point, it remains more of a theoretical observation. Bennet (1999) and Greyson (2000) believe that trauma experiences may lead to adaptive dissociative experiences in which altered states of consciousness are attained without accompanying distress--not unlike the definition of

mystical experiences. My research study found that two participants reported extra-ordinary experiences as a direct result of a trauma experience. One of these experiences concurs with Greyson's (2000) description of people leaving their physical bodies when they are near death. The other finding of extra-ordinary experience involved the experience of one participant feeling her body move to a safe place during a vehicle accident. This participant did not leave the accident scene yet experienced a measure of physical protection amidst the trauma. This finding does not fit as well within the theoretical constructs of positive dissociation or the transcendent experiences that are described in the theoretical literature.

5.23 From Spiritual Crisis to Spiritual Opportunity

The Use of Inner Resources

Theorists speculate as to how trauma survivors are able to transform a spiritual crisis into a spiritual opportunity. The theoretical literature discusses the idea that trauma can be transformed through inner resources or internal interactions within the person (Decker, 1993a; Jaffe, 1985; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun (1998) discuss the idea that trauma does not decimate the total person, but rather some aspects of the person are able to withstand the experience and act as a resource in the healing process. The findings of my study would concur with this theory. The participants' spirituality was a vital factor in the healing process. In one instance, spirituality was the vital protective factor that immediately provided a measure of protection and perseverance amidst the trauma. In the findings with other study participants, spirituality was initially overwhelmed and as a consequence it was buried to

safeguard and protect this aspect of self. At a later time, when it was safe, spirituality was unearthed to be used as a resource in the participants' healing process.

The Development of Innate Self Through Internal Interactions

Decker (1993a) and Jaffe (1985) view transformation from trauma as a process of spiritual rebirth and development of innate self. Innate self is defined as beliefs about self that are based on internal realizations and their connection with a power beyond themselves rather than a sense of self anchored in interactions with the external environment. My findings would support the importance of developing a sense of innate self as fundamental to the healing process. Healing for my study participants was an ongoing process of anchoring themselves in their spirituality or innate self. The participants' spirituality functioned as a reference point from which they were able to make sense of their past trauma experiences and adopt new attitudes, actions, and responses.

However, my findings challenge the theoretical assumption that differentiates between the internal and external environments. The participants in my study found it critical to develop their innate self in the context of interactions with both their internal and external environments. Participants identify the presence of Spirit/God/Creator both in their direct relationship with Spirit/God/Creator and in their relationships with other people--the love of Spirit/God/Creator manifest in others. The findings of my research indicate that innate self is developed in the context accessing a power beyond themselves in both external and internal interactions.

Decker (1993a) states that how a person responds to trauma is based on the strength of the resources of their innate self. One of my research participant's found spirituality helped protect and preserve her during the time of trauma. Decker (1993a) would consider this situation as one where the participant's internal-based beliefs provided sufficient resources to meet the challenge-to provide an anchor in the storm. The other three participants found their spirituality overwhelmed by the trauma situation. It was only through their subsequent healing processes that these other participants developed their spirituality and a stronger sense of innate self. My findings would concur with the theoretical idea that the strength of innate self is a critical capacity in how a person is able to respond to trauma.

Suffering is Transformed Through Finding Meaning

Other theorists find that the key to transforming trauma lies in the meaning a survivor creates for the experience (Frankl, 1984; Herman, 1992; O'Connell Higgins, 1994). These theorists would add that once meaning and purpose has been found, it can become the basis for social action and a gift that they can give others. The findings of my research would strongly concur with this theoretical perspective of how to transform suffering and the gift it then becomes for others. Each participant talked about the increased passion and desire to help others. They talked about sensing they had a gift to offer others as a result of what they had learned through the experiences of trauma and healing. One participant expressed this idea in the following way:

That's what the gift is....hopefully you can help someone else to get to that same place where they feel secure because of their relationship with the Creator - who is totally in control, even though there's chaos around you. (Hp31)

5.3 Summary of the Chapter

My findings indicate that a child's spirituality is influenced regardless of the origin of the trauma. The majority of the literature on trauma research is polarized into looking at positive or negative aspects of trauma influences. My research findings are congruent with the minority of research literature that identifies a more complex interaction between trauma and spirituality, inclusive of positive and negative patterns of association.

The research literature pertaining to the relationship(s) of trauma and spirituality in the healing process is sparse. The study findings concur with what is presented in the research literature. As well, the study findings describe three positive influences of spirituality in the healing process that go beyond the research literature in three areas of the survivors life: (a) the survivors' mental, physical and emotional self; (b) the survivors' relationships with others; and, (c) the survivors' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator. These study findings that extend past the scope of the current research literature would be possible areas of future research.

There is very little research literature in the area of spirituality and trauma with which to compare the occurrence and influence of unique extra-ordinary experiences. These study findings extend past the scope of the current research literature in this area, thus it would be a possible area for future research.

There was strong agreement between the research literature and the findings of this study in regards to childhood trauma and the negative influences on the spiritual well-being of the

survivors. The study identified four additional negative influences that go beyond the scope of the research literature. These additional areas present possible directions for future research.

The study findings concur with what is presented in the research literature pertaining to the role of spirituality in the trauma healing process. However, this study also challenges the current research literature in the areas where the findings go beyond the scope of what the research literature presents. The findings that extend past the scope of the research literature include critical spiritual processes in the areas of survivors' relationships with others, survivors' relationship with Spirit/God/Creator, and specific spiritual practices. These unique findings merit further consideration for future research, policy and practice directions.

The research found a strong congruence with the literature on theoretical observations which supported the idea that the influence of trauma will vary between people, and that trauma has the potential to cause both spiritual crisis and spiritual opportunity. The findings regarding extraordinary experiences found some agreement with the theoretical literature that discussed positive dissociative experiences. However, the study also raised issues that challenged the boundaries of the theories in this area.

There is strong agreement between the research findings and the theoretical literature in the area of transforming a spiritual crisis into a spiritual opportunity. The study and theory concurred on the following processes within the transformation process: (a) the use of inner resources, (b) the critical resource of innate self, (c) the transformation of suffering through

finding meaning. There was some minor issue of disagreement between the findings and the theory regarding the development of innate self through interactions with the internal and external environments.

Overall, there are substantial areas of agreement between the study findings and the research literature. The areas where the findings were incongruent or went beyond the limits of the literature, offer the potential for further exploration and investigation. It is hoped that these research findings and the areas highlighted for future exploration can contribute to the development of our knowledge of the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality in the healing process.

CHAPTER 6**CONCLUSION**

This research study explored the lived experience of spirituality and childhood trauma of four adult survivors, for whom spirituality was significant: looking at both the influence childhood traumas had on their spirituality. In addition, the role spirituality played in their healing process was examined. The purpose of this concluding chapter is to reflect on my research process and research findings. I will evaluate the research study and discuss implications for social work practice and future research.

6.1 Evaluation of the Study

This study was confined to a purposive sample of four adults who had experienced childhood trauma and for whom spirituality was an important aspect of their healing process. The sample size was small and thus does not lend itself to generalizing my findings to the general population. However, the study does represent the undeniable experiences of four individuals and their stories potentially have lessons for other survivors, mental health practitioners, and the research literature.

My data collection process used an interview guide to assist me in staying focussed on my research topic. Hence, my method of inquiry is not a pure phenomenological design. However, the participants' candidness allowed me to capture their experiences through their eyes and reality. Through the process of face to face interviews, I learned from my participants' unique

narratives of trauma, spirituality, and healing. This I believe provided depth and breadth to my data which would have been difficult to capture in a quantitative research design.

My study did have resource constraints which limited the number of participants that I could include and the range of exploration. I was able to obtain an in depth understanding of each participant's experience of the relationship(s) between trauma, spirituality and healing. Given the resource constraints of the study, I was not able to extend the research to explore in-depth the specific spiritual practices and processes that each person used to assist in their healing. Research in this area would certainly complement my research.

Throughout my research, I have focussed on the experience of participants who found spirituality a critical resource in their surviving and healing processes. I omitted a significant piece of the spirituality and healing equation by not involving survivors who have successfully engaged in healing but for whom spirituality did not play a significant role. I can only theoretically speculate at this point that this population of survivors exists as I have not personally researched this area nor have I found any research on this topic. Future research in this area could potentially complement my research and assist in creating a fuller understanding of the healing process.

The literature review of the study was confined to the mental health literature dealing with the relationship(s) between trauma, spirituality and healing. It is clear that this topic is not an exclusive concern of the mental health profession. The areas of biology, physics, and religion

are some of the other disciplines that have explored this topic as well. Due to the resource limitations of this research, I was not able to undertake an exhaustive exploration of all the literature on the topic from the various disciplines. I was limited to only surveying the mental health literature. My research findings and the depth of understanding of the relationship(s) between trauma, spirituality and healing would benefit from the inclusion of the research literature from other disciplines that are concerned about the topic.

6.2 Conclusions

Having reflected on the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality for the four participants in my study, the question that follows is thus: What have I learned from my research that might have application in future practice, education and research initiatives? The participants in my study were chosen because they had actively worked on their healing process and they had indicated that spirituality was significant in their experience. How can the lived experience, which is depicted in my thesis, help other trauma survivors to heal? How can social work interventions be tailored to most effectively assist trauma survivors to heal? What areas of future research did my research findings highlight for exploration? These are the questions I asked myself and now attempt to answer, drawing from the participants' stories and my own understandings of their lived experience of trauma, spirituality, and healing.

6.21 The Survivor's Spirituality is a Critical Resource in the Healing Process

The participants in the research study suggest that spirituality was a critical resource in their healing process. For each participant, spirituality was a critical resource that they were able to

draw on in order to transform the mental, emotional, physical and relational parts of themselves. One participant was able to access this resource during the immediacy of the trauma experience while the others learned to access this resource at a later time in their healing process. Regardless of when the participants were able to access the resource of spirituality for their healing, this was the key resource for developing their innate self and an inner-directed process of living their lives.

It is important to be clear about the role of spirituality in healing. While spirituality was a critical resource for healing, other resources were also essential. The process of healing was a process of letting go of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that impeded the attainment of wholeness and the development of true self for the participants. The participants' spirituality was only one aspect of their total being that was involved in the transformation process. Spirituality was interconnected with the person's mental, physical and emotional being as well as with the person's relationships with people and Spirit/God/Creator. All of these aspects of self have reciprocal relationships with each other and they were all required as resources in the healing process. The findings in the study indicate that spirituality had the greatest potential to positively influence the other aspects of self. Thus, it was viewed not as the exclusive resource, but rather as the most critical resource in the healing process.

While this was the experience of the four childhood trauma survivors in my study, I cannot generalize these findings for other trauma survivors and mental health practitioners. The transformative stories of the research participants do give hope that healing from trauma can

happen as well as provide direction to explore other survivors' spirituality as a potential resource in the healing process.

6.22 Spirituality May Lie Dormant & Undeveloped

The findings of the research indicate that for three of the four study participants, a major influence of the childhood trauma was the sense of having their spirituality "buried". Contrary to this, a fourth participant indicated that one of the major influences of childhood trauma was the strengthening of spirituality. The three participants who reported a buried spirituality were clear that at times they felt cut off from their spiritual self, a sense of spiritual alienation. Spirituality was described as not being decimated, but rather buried and in a dormant state. The healing process for the participants involved findings ways to tap into this dormant resource and to develop their spiritual capacities to assist their healing. This finding is not generalizable, but does offer other trauma survivors and social worker practitioners an area for potential exploration to assist the healing process.

6.23 The Influences of Childhood Trauma & Spirituality are Dynamic

The study findings indicate that the influences of both childhood trauma and spirituality over time. For the participants, the transformation from the spiritual crisis to spiritual opportunity and growth was achievable. The research findings suggest that the influence of childhood trauma on spirituality was varied from positive to negative at the time of the event(s) and these influences continued to change over time. The influence of childhood trauma on the survivors' spirituality was not instantaneous or static, but rather dynamic and changing as they were processed over

time. While these findings are not generalizable, they do provide hope that other childhood trauma survivors may be able to transform their crisis into a growth opportunity.

6.24 A Reciprocal Relationship Between Spirituality & Childhood Trauma

The findings of the study indicate that the research participants experienced a reciprocal relationship between spirituality and their childhood trauma experience. For the participants, the childhood trauma experience critically influenced and shaped their spiritual development. Conversely, the survivors' spirituality critically transformed their understanding and experience of the childhood trauma experience. The findings indicate that the participants grew stronger because of the influence of the childhood trauma experience. The relationship between childhood trauma and spirituality was not linear but rather reciprocal, trauma and spirituality each having the ability to influence the other. The findings of these research participants lend potential perspective to other survivors and social work counsellors regarding the initial crisis experience of childhood trauma.

6.25 Spirituality Offers a Framework of Meaning

The research findings indicate that the participants' spirituality offered them a rich narrative and framework from which to assimilate the childhood trauma experience in a meaningful way. One of the most significant challenges for childhood trauma survivors is to find meaning and purpose in their trauma experience. The participants' framework of spirituality provided a positive framework from which to gain a meaningful understanding of both their trauma experiences as well as their abusers. This ability to integrate the experience in a meaningful way

lead to the survivors' ability to gain acceptance and/or grant forgiveness to their abuser and in some instances transform the relationship with the abuser. The capacity of the participants' spirituality to provide a framework for meaning was very significant. While the participants' experience of finding meaning and purpose is not generalizable, it does provide potential guidance for assisting other trauma survivors for whom spirituality is significant.

6.26 Spirituality is an Integral Part of the Whole Person

The research findings indicate that participants experienced spirituality as an integral part of their whole being. Spirituality was interconnected with their mental, physical and emotional selves as well as integral in influencing their relationships with people and Spirit/God/Creator. Spirituality was not an isolated part of them that had no relationship to the other aspects of their being or relationships. For the participants, spirituality meant being true to their spirit and living in a way that this truth influenced all parts of themselves and the relationships they had. The participants' spirituality transformed their thoughts and feelings related to their trauma experiences. Their spirituality influenced how they related to Spirit/God/Creator and how they related to others. In some instances, spirituality transformed the relationship a survivor had with their abuser. The participants' spirituality encouraged them to move beyond their own pain and issues and to take on a commitment of acting with greater compassion for others. For the research participants, spirituality was integral to all aspects of their being and the relationships they had.

6.27 Spirituality Was Developed in a Multiplicity of Ways

The study findings indicate that the participants were able to nurture and develop their spirituality in a multiplicity of ways. In being true to their spirit, each participant found unique and meaningful ways of nurturing their spirituality. Participants used a variety of solitary methods (e.g., prayer/meditation, writing, music, gardening) and activities with other people (dancing, a sweat lodge, church participation, rituals) to nurture their spirituality. While these findings cannot be generalized, they do indicate the potential of finding unique and creative ways of assisting other survivors who wish to nurture and develop their spiritual capacity.

6.3 Recommendations for Social Work

6.31 Social Works' Responsibility for Spirituality

One of the core goals of the social work profession is to assist persons in their innate drive to become more fully human, that is, to enable persons to develop to their fullest potential. The findings of the research suggest that for the childhood trauma survivors who participated in the study, spirituality was a critical resource in their healing process. While these findings are not generalizable, the survivors' spirituality was identified as a potential resource in the healing process. As social workers, we then have a responsibility to explore issues of spirituality with survivors to determine if spirituality is significant for them or not. In situations where spirituality is significant for the survivor, spirituality is a potential resource for assisting the survivor to develop to their fullest potential. We then have a responsibility to assist survivors in developing their spiritual capacity for their greatest benefit.

There are a number of implications for the social work profession given this responsibility to assess whether spirituality is significant for survivors and to assist with spiritual issues in appropriate situations. Currently, the literature that addresses spirituality within social work practice is limited. The social work profession will need to develop a knowledge base for practice that can be used to guide practitioners. This literature base will need to develop understandings of how to approach spirituality in a manner that is inclusive of diversity and yet able to assess negative spiritual patterns that block the healing process. There is a need for guidelines for interventions that address areas of spiritual crisis and that enables clients to develop their spirituality in positive ways. These interventions will need to go beyond the narrowly constructed psychological framework. They will need to integrate the healing knowledge of other disciplines. Garbarino (1996) echoes this concern in the following statement:

Until we develop and implement strategies to address 'the meaning of life' and offer positively overwhelming cognitions to those who have been plunged into metaphysical and spiritual darkness, our narrowly psychological interventions will fall short of the mark (p. 163).

The responsibility to be spiritually inclusive in our assessment and intervention with childhood trauma survivors has a number of implications for the individual social work professional as well. The individual professional will need to address their personal and professional comfort level with spirituality in four areas:

- (a) social workers will need to assess whether they are able to bring their spiritual self into the healing process with their clients;**
- (b) social workers will need to assess their ability to respect the spiritual diversity of their clients;**
- (c) social workers will need to address their skill level in being able to assess spiritual development issues with their clients; and,**
- (d) social workers will need to address their skill level in being able to intervene in ways that can assist clients to develop healthy spirituality.**

The social work professional who is not skilled, knowledgeable, and/or comfortable in dealing with spirituality, needs to ensure that trauma survivors for whom spirituality is significant, has access to supports who can provide spiritual guidance (e.g., elders, clergy, spiritual mentors).

Both the individual social work professional and the overall social work profession share a responsibility for spiritually inclusive practice with the trauma survivors with whom they work. Knowing that spirituality can play a critical role in the healing process from trauma for some survivors, it would be unethical and professionally negligent to ignore and/or deny the spiritual capacities of those we seek to assist as social workers. The profession has a responsibility to develop its knowledge base and education systems to a level that can prepare their social work professionals for responsible practice. The individual social work professional has a responsibility to ensure that the spiritual issues raised by their clients are addressed either through

their own interventions or in conjunction with those of an appropriate resource person. The trauma survivors' spirituality has the potential to be a critical resource in their healing process. If social work is to assist trauma survivors develop to their full potential, the profession needs to be prepared to attend to childhood trauma survivors' spirituality in situations where spirituality is significant for the clients.

6.32 Help the Survivor Draw on the Resource of Their Spiritual Capacity

The findings of the study indicate that for the study participants, the experience of childhood trauma had the potential to injure or bury their spirit. In situations where the spirit was buried, it was not available to the survivor as a resource to help preserve them in the face of trauma nor as a resource for them in their healing process. The study participants were able to find ways of uncovering their buried spirit and to develop their spiritual capacity, which became a critical resource in their healing process. While the findings of the study are not generalizable, they do suggest that it may be worthwhile to adopt some of the participants' successful methods of tapping into their spiritual capacity, for social work practice. In situations where spirituality is significant for a childhood trauma survivor, the findings suggest social work practice may enable the survivor to access the potential resource of their spiritual capacity in the following six ways:

- (a) help survivors identify the love that sustained them in the past and ensure they claim this experience;

- (b) help trauma survivors identify those around them in their present life that they can anchor onto and begin to trust, so that they can experience the love they need to sustain them;
- (c) assist survivors' in developing new images of Spirit/God/Creator that enable them to identify this presence in their lives and allows them to embrace this resource;
- (d) explore with survivors some new understandings of their perpetrators that can allow the survivor to experience greater degrees of acceptance and/or forgiveness;
- (e) explore new understandings of the trauma that allow survivors to find meaning and purpose in their suffering; and,
- (f) offer survivors new spiritual practices, rituals and processes of developing and nurturing their spirituality, which allow them to develop their innate self and become spiritually attuned.

6.4 Future Research Directions

The findings of my study suggest that the process of healing was a highly individualized response, unique for each person. If this is the case, then qualitative studies are needed that are sensitive to individual meanings, experiences and processes in which healing is understood. In-depth studies are required to capture the diversity and uniqueness of survivors' struggles and successes. As themes emerge within qualitative studies, quantitative studies could be developed with the capacity to test theories and have the ability to generalize the results to the overall population of trauma survivors.

During the discussion of the comparison of research findings with the literature in chapter five, I outlined numerous areas that the research findings extended beyond the literature surveyed. Each area of identified incongruence warrants future exploration and research. The findings which extend past the current research literature, point to possible new understandings that can help develop the knowledge base of the social work profession in the areas of trauma, spirituality, and healing.

Future research direction should also give thought to explorations of the research literature in other disciplines that are concerned about the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality, in the context of healing. The social work literature has a history of including research from the disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology in order to enrich its knowledge base. In order to bolster the social work knowledge base, it would be wise not to limit the scope to a handful of social science disciplines, but to also include biology, physics, religion, and other disciplines that have researched this specific topic of relationship.

In summary, this thesis has been a testament to four people who have responded to severe childhood trauma by truly finding transformation and healing. Each narrative has its own unique journey of how spirituality was influenced by trauma and the role spirituality plays in the healing process. Together, the stories weave a larger picture of spirituality and healing: the letting go of negative thoughts, feelings and actions and opening up to more positive ways of being true to the spirit within; the expanding of self awareness and the connection to Spirit/God/Creator both within and around oneself.

Each participant in the study gave very generously of their whole self in the telling of their stories. If I have done my job well, the reader will see some part of them resonate with the narratives of the four participants. I believe this larger story speaks to the potential within each trauma survivor and professional helper namely, to find transformation in our difficult situations and to become all we can be, through connection to our spirituality and each other.

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APPENDIX A**Cover Letter**

Dear Participant:

I am a Master of Social Work Student at Lakehead University and I am conducting a research study entitled The Lived Experience of Spirituality and Trauma Among Adults who have Experienced Childhood Trauma. The following will tell you more about the study so that you will have the information you need to decide whether or not you want to participate.

The purpose of my study is to look at the relationship(s) between spirituality and trauma among those who have experienced childhood trauma. I am particularly interested in how the relationship between spirituality and healing is understood and experienced from your perspective.

If you agree to participate, I would meet with you, at your convenience, to talk about your understanding of spirituality and what it means to you, as you deal with past traumas. The interview will be open-ended, in the sense that it will be guided by what you have to say, rather than by a set questionnaire.

Our initial interview will be audio taped and transcribed verbatim by Margaret Elyk, a professional transcriptionist. These transcriptions will provide an opportunity for me to look for significant statements, meanings and themes from all those interviewed. I plan to write an initial summary of the findings that reflects both your experience and the meaning you attribute to it. At this point I would like to meet with you again to check whether my interpretation of your experience reflects your own understanding. We would look at any points you feel might have been missed or need to be revised. I have estimated that each interview will be conducted for between 1-2 hours. Following the second interview, I will review the feedback from each participant and revise the findings for the final research report.

I would like to reassure you that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained without exception. A pseudonym that you may choose will be used at all times to guard your true identity. Access to the interview tapes and transcribed material will be restricted to members of my thesis committee, the transcriptionist and myself. All of these persons listed who have access to this material have signed undertakings respecting confidentiality. At the conclusion of my study, the interview tapes will be destroyed. The transcribed materials and data from the study will be stored with my supervisor at Lakehead University for seven years and then destroyed. The content of the interviews will only be used for the purpose of this study and possible articles that may be published thereafter. Upon completion of the thesis, a copy will be available at the Kenora Public Library as well as the Lakehead University Library.

I understand that participation in the study is likely to raise very personal issues for you. If at any point, you are feeling uncomfortable with continuing with the project, you are free to withdraw without explanation. Participation is entirely voluntary.

It is my hope that one of the benefits to participating is that your documented experience may serve to help others who face the task of coping with childhood trauma. As well, the benefits include making a contribution to the literature regarding the significance of spirituality in the context of surviving childhood trauma.

There is no obligation to participate in this study. If you are interested in obtaining more information about the study or are interested in participating, please contact me at (W) 467-5437 or (H) 467-8130.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Randy Montford-Hildebrand

**Note: 1) This cover letter will be printed on Lakehead University letterhead
2) This cover letter is modified from Phillips (1998).**

APPENDIX B**Letter of Consent**

I _____ have read and understood the covering letter of the study entitled "The lived experiences of Spirituality and Trauma Among Adults who have Experienced Childhood Trauma" by Randy Montford-Hildebrand and I agree to participate. I am aware that I will be asked to participate in an initial open-ended interview and one follow up consultation regarding the findings of the study. I realize that the questions are of a personal nature and may arouse feelings of discomfort. I am aware that I may withdraw at any time from the study and that all information collected will be kept confidential. I understand that the results of this study will appear in Randy's thesis and in possible articles that may be published but that my name and identity will not be revealed. I have been advised that the research will involve the discussions of past traumatic events which may evoke difficult memories and feelings. If I should require counselling services as a result of participating in any part of this project, I know that two counsellors have agreed to be available for support - Cheryl Green and Jack Martin. They can both be reached at New Directions Counselling (468-1838).

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Guideline

1. Review

Review of study, process, participant's role, and the objective of capturing a full understanding of the perceived relationship(s) between spirituality and childhood trauma.

2. Open-ended lead question

In as far as you are comfortable, I'm wondering if we could start today with telling me a little bit about yourself and your experience with childhood trauma and then more about how you came to have an interest in spirituality?

3. Areas to be covered/ possible questions

i) Spirituality

- Can you tell me how you experience spirituality and what that means to you?
- Is there any particular moment, incident or feeling that stands out for you that might help describe this experience of spirituality?
- Can you describe this experience from the inside - feelings, physical sensations, mood?

ii) Influence of trauma on Spirituality

- What influence did the experience of childhood trauma have on your spirituality - both during and after the trauma experience?
- Did you experience any positive or negative influences on your spirituality?
- Is there any particular moment, incident, thought or feeling that stands out for you that might help describe these influences on spirituality?
- If your spirituality was negatively influenced by childhood trauma, how were you able to address these issues? What was helpful and what was not?

iii) Influence of Spirituality on Trauma

- has engagement in spiritual beliefs and activities affected how you look at or deal with your past trauma experiences?
- Have you noted any changes in yourself that you associate with your spiritual practices or beliefs? (Physical, emotional, social, mental or spiritual?)

iv) The Significance of Spirituality in the Healing Process

- How do you experience the relationship between spirituality and healing?
- What role does spirituality play in your healing process from childhood trauma?
- Can you describe any particular moment, incident or experience that contributed to your understanding or experience of this relationship?
- What factors enabled you to use spirituality to act as a resource in your healing process?

- How do you nurture your spirituality? What makes it stronger or weaker? (Qualities or conditions that contribute to inception, progress, stalemate or regression?)
- What are your daily or weekly spiritual practices?
- If you were to write out a recipe for healing what would it be?

v) Recommendations

- what do you believe to be most important for counsellors and other survivors to know about your spiritual experiences in surviving and healing from childhood trauma?

vi) Review of interview

- Is there anything we haven't covered today that you feel is important to your understanding and experience of spirituality and trauma?
- What has this interview been like for you?
- Is there anything further you would like to add or to comment on?

APPENDIX D

Research Ethics Review Criteria

Purpose of Research

The purpose of my research is to explore from the perspective of the adult survivor of childhood trauma, what the relationship(s) between trauma and spirituality are?

Informed Consent

Please see the attached cover letter and consent form in appendix A & B.

Research Instrument

Please see the attached interview guideline in appendix C.

Procedure for Ensuring Confidentiality

Please see the attached cover letter and consent form in appendix A & B.

Seven Year Storage

Please see the attached cover letter in appendix A.

Apparent Risks/Benefits for Participants

Please see attached cover letter in appendix A.

Process of Dissemination of Research Results

Please refer to a copy of the cover letter in appendix A.

A copy of my thesis will be in the Lakehead University Library and the Kenora Public Library by December, 2001.

Peer Review of Research Proposal

The research proposal was reviewed and approved by my thesis committee on February 15, 2001.