

Stepping through different realities

A phenomenological hermeneutic study of psychotherapists'
spiritual experience

Kay Ryan

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Abstract

This study explores therapists' spiritual experience, personally and within the therapeutic relationship. It focuses on the lived experience of therapists and the different meanings made of what is experienced.

The purpose of this research is to bring into the light spiritual experiences of therapists and how they are experienced in the therapeutic process. It contributes to current debate about spiritual experience in the day- to- day practice of psychotherapy.

The methodology of phenomenological hermeneutics is chosen as it provides the means to study therapists' lived experience. The study is guided by the philosophical thinking of Heidegger, Gadamer and Van Manen.

The findings of this study reveal different types of spiritual experience. These include non-ordinary states of consciousness where there is a feeling sense of being beyond the boundaries of linear time and space. Experiences involve noticing subtle body feelings before they manifest in everyday consciousness. They include hearing and seeing phenomena that may normally be overlooked or disavowed in psychotherapy. The findings show therapists' ability to notice, explore and utilize subtle body phenomena was a combination of their own capabilities, their spiritual practice, and years of experience as therapists. The therapist's body appeared to be like a doorway into experiences that had transformative effects on both therapists and clients.

The meanings made of experiences reflected therapists' spiritual and cultural beliefs. These beliefs meant that therapists are attuned to something bigger than everyday identity that gave meaning and purpose to the work and was a rich source of wisdom and guidance, comfort and a sense of being held in the work. Specific attitudes and qualities of presence are revealed that reflect therapists' spiritual beliefs.

Participants described experiences that emerged out of the context of the therapeutic relationship but could not be explained clinically. The findings show therapists' world views, their spiritual and cultural beliefs and capacity to experience the unknown, bring a richness and diversity of meanings to the therapeutic relationship that includes the wider contexts of culture and the environment. This study explores current thinking about spiritual experience in psychotherapy and its effects on the therapist. It raises issues for further discussion relating to the role of therapists' spiritual experience in contemporary psychotherapy.

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent had been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements”

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Chapter One Introduction

Aims of the research

This research focuses on therapists' spiritual experience and explores its meaning in the therapeutic relationship. The study gathers experiential data by interviewing six therapists and undertakes a hermeneutic analysis of the texts of the interviews. I explore therapists' spiritual experience and consider how it is revealed in and affects their work with clients.

As a therapist with 20 years experience I am aware of how I have changed in my approach over time. I notice I have developed a certain ease in my work, accompanied by more fluid and lucid awareness that enables me to notice and follow subtle sensations as they emerge in my work with particular clients. As time has passed I find that I can more easily be aware of how these sensations arise in and belong to the interaction between the client and myself, and the larger field within which the work is situated. It is in the unfolding of these subtle and more unknown sensations that surprising and transforming shifts seem to occur in the client's process. I think this increase in my awareness is due to a mixture of my experiences over time, my spiritual development and on-going training in Process Oriented Psychology which is the approach that informs my work. My decision to investigate the area of spiritual experience emerges from a curiosity to find out what other therapists who also have a long term interest in spiritual experiences and how they recognize and make meaning of what happens in their work.

Spiritual experience has diverse interpretations and meanings within different cultures and spiritual traditions. In the West it has until more recent times been associated with religion. In this study I make a distinction between spiritual experience and religion. I use the term Religion to refer to established systems of commonly held beliefs and practices that support a connection with spiritual phenomena. The rituals, practices, and narratives of religion are unique to each religious group, such as Anglicanism, Catholicism, and Hinduism (Scotton 1966). Spiritual experience on the other hand is a phenomenon that can

be generalized across cultures. It can be experienced as both different from and as encompassing the material world of objects and parts, much like the air we breathe. Spiritual experiences and their meanings are subjective and relative. For this reason I make my bias explicit in the next section of this chapter. The participants' interpretations of spiritual experience will emerge from the analysis of the texts.

This phenomenological hermeneutic study focuses on the subjective experience of psychotherapists. Increased interest in therapists' subjective experience within psychotherapy has meant that the focus in theory and practice has shifted from clients' subjectivity to the interplay of the subjectivities of both therapist and client as bringing about change (Stolorow, R., Atwood, G., Orange, D., 1994). With this change there is an increasing demand for therapists to be aware of, and be transparent about, what they are experiencing and to be able to see possible connections to the client's process. One of the tasks of a therapist is to know when to stay with an experience long enough to allow it to speak for itself and when to conceptualize what is happening as a way to arrive at meaning. Another aim of this study is to explore the interface between experiencing and conceptualizing as different ways of arriving at meaning and how they might influence psychotherapy in practice.

I believe at times what is happening in practice can change at a faster rate than the theories that inform it, that under these circumstances, there can be a gap between theory and practice. By looking at what is happening in practice my hope is that information may emerge that could inform on-going theoretical developments. How do therapists view spirituality? How do they experience it? What difference does spirituality make to therapists' approach within the therapeutic relationship? Can therapists also be spiritual guides and what does this mean? When is it appropriate to work therapeutically with spiritual phenomena? These questions underpin this research and guide my contact with each participant as well as the analysis and discussion of the data.

One of the aims of this research is to explore possible links between spiritual practice and psychotherapy technique. In many psychotherapy approaches, therapists' presence, values,

and attitudes are perceived as being essential ingredients in the therapeutic process, and are even more than therapeutic technique (Kohut, 1977; Rogers, 1951). I have chosen participants from various therapeutic approaches and spiritual orientations in order to include as much diversity as possible as a way to investigate similarities within the different approaches. I explore both the literature of transpersonal psychology, specifically Process Work, and psychoanalysis. These approaches reflect both my own background and the diverse backgrounds of the participants, and create a context for the discussion of the findings.

This study is also an opportunity to focus on my practice and to examine my own thinking about spiritual experience. I look to increase my understanding about the relationship between psychotherapy and spirituality and how it is perceived by therapists whose approaches are different from mine. I hold the belief that spiritual experience can assist therapists' ability to connect with the deeper meaning of clients' processes and bring about transformative change. My hope is that this study will contribute to on-going dialogue across different therapeutic modalities as to the place of spiritual experience within psychotherapy.

Pre-understandings and biases

“Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 290).

The understandings and biases I bring to this research emerge out of my perception of my life as an evolving pattern. My desire to investigate the topic of spiritual experience within psychotherapy emerges out of a life long search for deeper meaning and purpose and from having an unshakable sense that there is something more. This philosophical orientation is due in part to my early association with the Catholic Church into whose culture I was born and educated and whose beliefs continued to inform my early adult life.

Before becoming a psychotherapist I was a Catholic nun and school teacher. I studied theology and practiced meditation on a daily basis for many years. Since leaving the Catholic Church I have explored spirituality outside the confines of religion, investigating the creativity inherent within altered states of consciousness using movement, sound and imagery while in meditative states, shamanic journeying and lucid dreaming, and various forms of divination such as the I Ching. Over the past ten years I have been drawn to the philosophy of Taoism, learning how to flow with nature as it presents itself in the momentary process. In many ways my spiritual background and experience is similar to that of the participants in the research and limits my ability to approach the data in an unbiased manner. However, as Gadamer (1989) recommended, I have endeavored to maintain my awareness of how my bias weaves in and out of the process of the research and have used my tradition and the traditions of participants to increase my understandings at the time.

My training in psychotherapy began in an eclectic manner with the Humanistic approaches of Carl Rogers and Fritz Perls. I also spent some years with the psychodrama training group in Auckland. I have always had an interest in the ideas of Carl Jung although never studied his work to any great degree. The turning point in my work and training came when I attended a conference in Australia on the topic of spirituality and psychotherapy. I was particularly taken with the guest speaker Max Schupbach as he seemed to confirm what I was thinking and experiencing. Schupbach, who later became my trainer, introduced an integrative model of working therapeutically that is based in Jungian psychology and Taoism, called Process Oriented Psychology or Process Work.

At the conference Schupbach demonstrated Process Work by working with one of the conference participants. It was his warmth and openness to what the participant brought and his skill at unfolding the meaning within the participant's body symptom that confirmed the rightness of this approach for me. Up until then I had struggled with the split in myself and my work between psychology and spirituality and was searching for possible ways to bring them together. This was the first time that I experienced an integration of psychological and spiritual approaches, and for me it was like coming home.

Over the past 15 years I have been studying and developing Process Work in my practice and have been part of setting up a training program in New Zealand. Bringing Process Work into connection with mainstream psychotherapy has been interesting and mostly involved finding ways to bridge different paradigms without devaluing either one. This research is part of my continuing attempt to value and critique different world views and ways of understanding what happens in psychotherapy. It is my hope that it will be a way to talk about spiritual experiences amongst my colleagues and to encourage on-going debate in this area.

Choice of methodology

My choice of methodology emerged as my research question became clearer. I knew the research topic, with its focus on ineffable phenomena did not fit comfortably within a positivist framework. I was also not interested in creating a theory that could be generalized to other situations but wanted rather to explore the lived experience of the research participants and the potential meanings held within this experience. I needed a methodology that was able to assist me with the exploration of ineffable phenomena and that provided a method of analysis for them. I chose phenomenological hermeneutics as best fitting these aims.

Phenomenology is interested in the essence of lived experience and is a way to discover the core essence of therapists' lived experience of spirituality. A phenomenological approach demanded that I should put my understandings and prejudices aside momentarily and listen both to what was being described and how it was being described.

Making meaning of experience described in the text is the domain of hermeneutics. I was at first drawn to Gadamer's (1989) hermeneutics as I wanted to be able to acknowledge and use my horizons and prejudices within the research process as a way to arrive at a deeper meaning of what was experienced. I was also aware that according to Heisenberg's

uncertainty principle (Crotty, 1998), what I observed in this study could be neither entirely objective nor independent of me as the researcher, because it was inevitably changed in the very act of my observing it. I wanted to observe how my horizons and the horizons of others changed through the process of this research. I was also interested in Gadamer's (1989) notion of openness to dialogue and the hermeneutic circle as a way to arrive at deeper meaning of texts.

I used a phenomenological hermeneutic approach in the gathering and analysis of the data and discuss my findings using the phenomenological approach of Process Work.

Definitions of terms

Absolute peak experience

This is a term used by Maslow (1964) to refer to experience where there is a loss of the sense of self and a feeling of being one with all things. Such experience can awaken the individual to core issues in life. *Relative peak experience*: refers to an individual's meaningful experience or moments of insight where unlike absolute peak experience, the sense of self as individual remains intact

Channels

These are modes of perceiving and communicating experience through the senses and relationally. In Process Work these are visual, auditory, proprioception, movement, relationship and world.

Client / analysand

I use the term client in a general sense as it is more commonly used in practice. Analysand is used when referring to psychoanalytic theory.

Consensus Reality

This relates to the reality that the majority, in a particular society or culture, agree is valid and real. It can be talked about objectively. *Non-consensus reality* refers to experience that is subjective and where there is no general consent as to whether it is real. Such experience is usually difficult to talk about.

The Dreaming

A term used in Process Work to explain sentient essence or unbroken wholeness beneath the threshold of consciousness, which it thought to be the seed of all experience.

Edge

In Process Work this refers to the boundary between primary and secondary processes.

Field

This is a term originally from physics which in Process Work is used to describe invisible and in part immeasurable forces that exert themselves on those in their midst much like the earth's gravitational pull Mindell (1992). *Intentional field* This is a term used to describe the sentient force field that moves all things. It is a force that is experienced as an 'it', acting on individuals as if it had an intention of its own

Field phenomena: Refer to unusual, strange or synchronistic events or interruptions that happen in the momentary interaction with a client that can be related to the client's process (Diamond and Sparks 2004).

Ineffable phenomena

This refers to experiences that are difficult to put into words

Mystical experience

Refers to non-ordinary states of consciousness that are experienced as numinous, momentary, noetic and where there is a felt sense of the interconnectedness of all things.

Primary Process

This is used in Process Work to describe the known aspects of individual identity.

It is the opposite of *primary process* referred to in psychoanalysis where it means more unknown, unformulated experiences of self.

Process Oriented Psychology (Process Work)

This is a multi-disciplinary, transpersonal approach to psychotherapy which has its roots in Jungian psychology, Taoism and modern physics. It is explained more fully in the literature review.

Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

This refers to the modality of psychotherapy that originated with Freud. It is explained in more detail in the literature review.

Psychotherapist / therapist / analyst

I use the term therapist when referring to those who took part in the study even though some of them come from modalities that are based in psychoanalytic theory. It is the term most frequently used and recognized in current practice. Therapist / psychotherapist are also used interchangeably when referring to psychotherapy in general. I use the term *analyst* when referring to or quoting psychoanalytic theory.

Secondary Process

In Process Work this is used to describe the less known aspects of an individual's identity. It is different from *secondary process* in psychoanalysis where it refers to the more known structures and aspects of self in everyday life.

Sentient awareness

This is an experience of essence or subtle body feeling that precedes consciousness. It is non-local in that it is everywhere. Like the Tao it is so subtle that it can hardly be spoken.

Spiritual experience

This refers to experience where there is a felt sense of the interconnectedness of all things. Such experience is difficult to put into words.

Spiritual practice

This is the use of such practices as meditation, inner work and ritual to development awareness and attune to the sense of interconnectedness with all things.

Spiritual development

This refers to development of individual capacity for spiritual experience as integral to human development and potential. It happens in conjunction with psychological development

Transpersonal psychotherapy

This is a modality that includes the personal as well as all experience beyond the personal as integral to human growth and development. This is the modality that informs much of this research. It is explained more fully in the literature review.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I outline different themes and world views relating to spiritual experience and psychotherapy that are found within the literature. Spiritual experience is a large topic with an enormous amount of literature attached to it. In this brief review I have attempted to cover only those areas that are relevant to this study, particularly the areas that pertain to how spiritual experience and psychotherapy intersect. This intersection is highlighted through a brief historical account showing how world events, culture and formative thinkers have led to the present day situation and sets a context of the study. I outline the literature of the different world views and theories of spiritual experience within psychotherapy using both transpersonal psychology and psychoanalytic traditions and their philosophical roots as these approaches best represent diverse positions within the topic of study. I also explore the literature for different types of spiritual experience and their meanings in psychotherapy. I outline the literature relating to therapist's subjective experience within the therapeutic relationship and how therapists' spiritual experience relates to transference and countertransference. Finally, I outline parallels between spiritual experience and psychotherapy and summarize the findings of other studies similar to this research and that are relevant to it.

I have left out explorations of spiritual experience within Religious traditions as this is a large area and may confuse spiritual experience with religion. This study is focused rather on the phenomenology of spiritual experiences and their interpretations within psychotherapy. I have not considered therapeutic approaches such as Behaviourism, Transactional Analysis and Narrative therapy as I was interested in the broader traditions of transpersonal psychology and psychoanalysis which may encompass some of the understandings found in other modalities.

Intersection of spiritual experience and psychotherapy

Historical Overview

The word spiritual is often associated with something ineffable, uplifting, mysterious, and transient, and something different from the physical, material world. The term “spirit” is derived from the Latin *spiritus*, or the Hebrew *ruach*, which means breath or air and air in motion like the wind. In the East the words *prana* or *ch'i* mean air, spirit or energy of life are used (Grof 1989). In Greek the word for spirit or soul is *psyche* from which psychology and psychotherapy are derived; *ology* meaning word and *therapy* from the Greek *therapeia* meaning to heal. These derivations reveal some of the original links in language between spiritual experience and psychotherapy.

Spiritual experience is shrouded in thousands of years of ritual and culture. Many cultural and historical contexts for understanding spiritual experience are based on philosophical beliefs and world views that include both spiritual and psychological development and healing. In pre-Christian civilizations, spiritual experience was intrinsically linked to psychological healing where the earliest practitioners were called shamans, priests, priestesses, prophets and soothsayers (Ellenberger, 1970). In indigenous cultures up to the present day, shamans, or Tohunga in Maori culture, are viewed as being healers and priests, who move between material and spiritual worlds in a reciprocal relationship that is intended to bring about individual healing and enhance community life (Eliade, 1964). This reciprocal relationship is based in the belief that the material world is a manifestation of the spiritual or what the Australian Aboriginal community call the Dreamtime. Dreamtime is a way of describing the view of the earth as being like a holder of “seeds” yet to germinate. The ‘seeds’ have the capacity for new life which is derived from the imprint of patterns carried through the ages (Lawlor, 1991, p. 1). Being able to access the Dreaming before it becomes conscious is the task of the shaman and is regarded as a source of wisdom and information for the living. It is also a means of healing the troubled or unwell and has the ability to provoke new understandings of both self and the world (Munn, 1984 cited in Lawlor, 1991). Similar ideas about the relationship of spiritual and material are contained within the philosophies of Eastern traditions.

Spiritual experience in Western culture was originally found within the healing practices of herbalists, mainly women, who used the earth's resources to bring relief and healing to those who were both mentally and physically unwell. In early communities such as in Celtic tradition of Ireland, individuals called Druids were considered to be the wise men and women who "organized knowledge , passed it on through oral tradition and served the political, emotional, social and spiritual needs of the people" (Sutton, 2000, p. 136). With the advent of Christianity many spiritual practices were interpreted as magic or evil. Shamans, druids, witches and herbalists were banished. Thousands were executed for their beliefs and practices. As the churches took over as the authority in relation to spiritual experience, many indigenous healing practices were driven underground. Spiritual experiences such as mystical states¹, were considered to be the domain of nuns and monks who committed their lives to spiritual development, often separating themselves from everyday life.

At the time of the Renaissance, religious organizations such as the Catholic Church devised means such as the private and confidential confessional relationship to provide psychological help to individuals and preserve the church's hegemony over spiritual matters. However, it was during the Enlightenment era that the church's doctrines were challenged. The emergence of the positivist movement with its mechanistic and objectivist view of the world meant that psychology² could be developed as a separate discipline and could be studied empirically. The separation between religion and psychology meant that science was able to create a language to study the physical world and religion was left to study God and spiritual experience. Both church and science however, in their focus on larger narratives about human existence, overlooked the importance of the subjective experiences of individuals (Cortright, 1997). Individual subjectivity was later addressed by the Romanticists who stressed the value of aesthetic aspects of life, the deeper feelings and sense of being captivated by the mysterious, which are often associated with spiritual experience.

¹ Mystical experience refers to ineffable experiences that are difficult to grasp and where there is a felt sense of numinosity (James 1902).

² Psychology relates to the scientific study of the human mind and its functions (Oxford Dictionary on-line).

With the development of science and Descartes' view of an objective world, the reality of spiritual experience was challenged. The positivist movement claimed that experiences, such as mystical states, that could not be tested empirically and measured, were not real (Cortright, 1997). It was in an attempt to study subjectivity inside this positivist paradigm that Freud founded psychoanalytic psychotherapy. This brought a focus on psychological aspects of individual wellbeing and development. Spiritual experience was discounted as emerging out of an individual's immaturity and neurosis, and a means of avoiding the realities of life.

The enormous changes brought about by science, globalization, Eastern philosophy, the 1960's experimentation with psychedelic drugs, quantum physics, phenomenology, post structuralism and post-modernism have also had their impact on the changing relationship between spiritual experience and psychotherapy and heralded the emergence of the transpersonal movement. The work of William James (1902) however, stands out as one of the main contributions in bringing spiritual experience back to the everyday life of the individual. James demystified spiritual experience such as mystical states, viewing them as embodied or felt and sensed and therefore able to be observed and studied. The epistemological value of mystical states was acknowledged.

As well as demystifying mystical experience James (1902) made several observations about the psychological nature of religious experiences³. He argued that the source of religion lies within the individual and is embedded in experience. He also found that once an individual's inner world is opened up there are multiple states of consciousness and transforming experiences available that are beyond everyday identity and that impact on it (Scotton, 1996). James's ideas influenced the development of the transpersonal psychology of Jung, Maslow, Grof and others. However his notion of spiritual experience as residing in the individual does not account for similar experiences found in relationships, groups and communities world wide.

³ I use the term religious experience as synonymous with spiritual experience as this was the term used in the early part of last century.

Over the last century through the work of people such as Freud and Jung and their followers, the relationship between spiritual and psychological development and healing has continued to be developed and debated. Although psychotherapy continues to have a number of different views relating to spiritual experience there has been an increasing amount of literature that reveals an openness to including spiritual experience as an integral part of psychotherapy (Schermer, 2003, p. 21). Some of the contributing factors to increased openness may well be the influence of philosophical approaches derived from Eastern spiritual traditions and the various meditative practices that seem to support the development of therapists' attention and awareness, and the inclusion of indigenous cultural perspectives where spiritual experience is integral to all of life.

Another influence has emerged from discoveries in modern physics about the nature of the universe. These formulations bring an alternative view of the world as no longer solid and static. Einstein's work establishing matter and energy as interchangeable, along with time and space; Bohm's (1993) proposal that the universe is an interconnected whole from which everyday reality unfolds and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle imply that the universe is, in principle, fundamentally unpredictable (Schermer, 2003) and that nothing is entirely separate or autonomous. Schermer summarized where science has taken us:

Our scientific understanding has taken us full circle, from a universe in which we, our existence, our planet, were at the centre, to the Enlightenment view in which we represent small, insignificant manifestations of chemistry on the surface of a little ball whirling in space, to the modern and postmodern perspective in which our presence, our form, our selfhood, our gods, are an integral part of and a mirror for the universe itself. (p75)

This research is an attempt to explore current experiences and ideas about the place of spiritual experience within psychotherapy.

Spiritual experience in psychotherapy

In these next sections I focus in more detail on the literature relating to spiritual experience in psychotherapy and outline some of the philosophical and theoretical differences behind current debate.

Philosophy is the study of the fundamental nature of reality, knowledge and human existence (Oxford Dictionary on-line). I include philosophical perspectives in the literature review as they provide some theoretical understandings of spiritual experience and psychotherapy. They also inform the beliefs and attitudes that pervade clinical work and so have relevance for this study. I focus specifically on the philosophical schools of perennialism, positivism, and phenomenology as they underpin much of the thinking behind transpersonal psychology and psychoanalytic approaches to psychotherapy.

Perennial philosophy proposes an ultimate Reality, or universal set of truths and values that are common to all peoples and cultures. It asserts that the physical world is not the only reality, that there is another reality, or ultimate Truth which is the final goal and purpose of human existence (Ferrer, 2002). This ultimate Truth cannot be grasped with the senses but its essence can be known through human spirit and intellect. All major religions, although different, are thought to be characterized by these fundamental beliefs.

Huxley (1945) summarized Perennial philosophy as:

...the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar or identical with divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being; the thing which is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the perennial philosophy may be found among the traditional lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has its place in every one of the higher religions. (p.vii)

Although viewed as a way to bring all religious truths under one umbrella, perennialism has been criticized for its hierarchical ontology and reductionist approach to spiritual experience. Scotton (1996) pointed out that in Perennialism knowledge gained through spiritual experience is considered to be more real or advanced than that gained through rational means. It was one of the central ideas of Wilber (1986) that reality is multilayered and forms an ontological hierarchy of matter, body, mind and spirit or what he called the Great Chain of Being. Different levels of human development corresponded to the levels of the Great Chain of Being such as humans first identifying with the body then with the mind (cited in Scotton 1996). Scotton argues that one of the major problems with hierarchical systems of belief is that they are difficult to prove and tend to be associated with patriarchal

attitudes that devalue the lower end of the hierarchy such as the body and emotions.

However, Perennial philosophy does underpin much of transpersonal psychology where the idea of primacy of spirit is a central theme.

Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology places spiritual experience as central to psychological and spiritual development and regards it as a core aspect of therapeutic process. Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the study and development of transpersonal and spiritual dimensions of human nature and existence. The word transpersonal means beyond or through the personal and includes all experiences that encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche and cosmos (Walsh, 1993). The transpersonal movement has been influenced by the work of Carl Jung, William James, Sigmund Freud, Abraham Maslow, Roberto Assagioli, Stanislav Grof, and Ken Wilber. It is often referred to as the fourth wave of psychotherapy, the previous three being psychoanalysis, behaviourism, and the humanistic approach (Scotton 1996). It combines insights from psychology with those of spiritual traditions and is interested in exploring development beyond traditional understanding of self as separate. The aim of transpersonal psychology is to integrate spiritual experience into everyday consciousness as an integral part of the process of self development and spiritual growth (Capra, 1982).

By focusing on experience, transpersonal psychology is open to many interpretations of experience and the traditions and disciplines that inform those interpretations. These include spiritual traditions such as found in Buddhism, Zen, Taoism, Christian mysticism, alchemy, Hinduism, shamanism, and the arts. Although altered states of consciousness is a focus of interest in transpersonal psychology, so too is the ground from which these states emerge. This ground is called by many names including the collective unconscious (Jung 1960) unbroken wholeness (Bohm,1993), Tao (Lao Tzu., 1963) and the Dreaming (Lawlor, 1991) .

Process Oriented Psychology

One of the approaches that lies within the transpersonal framework and which informs my therapeutic approach is Process Oriented Psychology. Process Oriented Psychology or Process Work as it is more commonly called, is a phenomenological and multidisciplinary approach to psychotherapy which emerged out of the 1970's through the work of Arnold Mindell. Since its inception in the 1970's it has been applied to all areas of life including working with individuals, couples, groups, community and organizational development, as well as those in coma and near death. Process Work is based in the psychology of Jung, the philosophy of Taoism, and physics. Like many spiritual traditions, Process Work postulates that there is an underlying unity, unbroken wholeness or dreaming reality that is the source of all experience. This dreaming reality merges into consciousness through dreams, body symptoms, relationship conflicts and other disturbances to everyday life. In Process Work an individual's problems are viewed as not only something to be overcome or changed in some way but as containing potential meaning for the individual's life. Process Work suggests that by bringing awareness to disturbing and unknown processes their meaning can emerge which can be "useful in the creation of a diverse and inspiring life" (Schupbach, 2004, p.6).

Process Work is an awareness model meaning that it is interested in noticing how an individual uses their awareness. Therapists use their awareness to notice what is close to an individual's awareness and what is more distant at any given moment. One of the goals of therapists is to notice what is happening within themselves, the clients and the environment and to notice what they notice. In this sense Process Work can be experienced as a type of spiritual practice. Therapists use a number of perceptual and attitudinal skills to unfold what they notice in order to bring a depth of awareness and meaning to what is happening (Schupbach 2004). In Process Work there is no preference for how an individual should be as interest is on awareness of the evolving process and how it changes and flows.

Process Work is a useful paradigm for bringing meaning to momentary experience especially when confronted with effable phenomena or experiences that are too complex to explain in a causal or rational way. Process Work holds that all experience is equally important to the individual's process no matter how chaotic it may at first appear.

Mindell (2000) proposed a three leveled model of awareness that includes all experiential phenomena. The first level relates to awareness of the everyday material world that is generally agreed to be real and true. This level of awareness is termed consensus reality. The second level is where duality, polarities, conflicts, symbols and other disturbances occur. While experiences at this level of awareness can be talked about there is an element of mystery or the unknown, as in a dream, body symptom, or re-occurring relationship problem. There is no general agreement as to the reality of these experiences as they are subjective. These first two levels of awareness are most often the focus of psychotherapy.

The third level is sentient awareness. According to Mindell (2007) sentient awareness is similar to mystical experience described by James (1902) and has the following characteristics. "It is subtle, subjective, ineffable in that it is difficult to put into words, noetic in that it has a numinous quality and is filled with a kind of knowing, passive in that it happens to us, transient in that is fleeting, and non-local meaning that there is a sense of the interconnected of all things" (p.22). As is found in many spiritual traditions, sentient awareness is thought to permeate everything and be the source from which all experiential phenomena arise. This subtle realm of experience can be found in many cultures and peoples throughout time, such as the Tao that cannot be spoken, Aboriginal Australian's Dreamtime, and Zen Buddhism's no-mind.

Sentient awareness can be experienced as something like a force that moves us or an intentional field (Diamond and Spark, 2004) An intentional field is like a magnetic field or the gravitational pull of the earth. It is felt not as a personal phenomenon, a will or force, but rather as something impersonal that moves and guides us though life. It is often experienced more noticeably near death (Diamond 2004). Access to sentient awareness can be gained by catching and unfolding subtle signals or flickering tendencies, subtle feelings and vague intuitions that occur before experiences materialize or become clearly defined.

In Process Work the delineation of levels of awareness implies an expansion of the therapists' attention to include more subtle signals. The term first attention is applied to focusing on consensus reality. Second attention, a term used by Castaneda (1971), focuses on non-consensual phenomena of the second level of awareness. Third attention relates to the development of lucidity which is the ability to notice subtle tendencies before they materialize. All three levels of awareness and types of attention are relevant to this research. In Process Work all three levels of awareness are thought to be always present and interconnected. They correspond to the steps of perception found in the *Abhidhamma* texts of Buddhism, and quantum physics notion of parallel worlds which claims that there is a multiplicity of worlds that exist although we tend to focus on only one.

Spiritual Experience within psychoanalytic psychotherapy

Contrasting approaches to spiritual phenomena are found within the literature of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Freud developed his psychoanalysis within the positivist framework, differentiating between individual's conscious and unconscious experiences. Traditionally, the unconscious mind was viewed as a depository for unwanted ideas, wishes, dreams, painful feelings and traumatic memories (Schermer, 2003). Freud's topographical model of the psyche, the id, ego and superego, provided a way to explain the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind and the dynamics of repression. Ineffable experience was viewed as coming from the drives and instinctual impulses of the id and therefore needed to be controlled and integrated by the ego.

The reductionist approach made it difficult to distinguish between spiritual experience and neurosis as inside psychoanalysis, there was no language for them that did not relate to the irrationality of basic drives and instincts. Despite these difficulties Freud is viewed as influencing the development of a transpersonal approach to psychotherapy through such ideas as the oceanic experience and therapists' use of attention. These contributions are explained in more detail further in this chapter where parallels between spiritual practice and psychotherapy are outlined.

Further developments of psychoanalysis through Melanie Klein's object relations theory and Kohut's self psychology, has made it possible to see how the individual's spiritual core is something that evolves from birth. Wilfred Bion, a student of Melanie Klein, developed a theory of the mind which incorporated consideration of mystical experience into psychoanalysis. He thought that therapists who listen to their patients are mystics in that they "strive intuitively to ferret out something inherently unseen by the patient" (Bion, 1970, p. 110). Bion thought that new features of the human mind could be discovered through this mystical apprehension of the psyche. Therapists in touch with the unconscious of the patient could experience a God principle or what he called 'O' or Absolute. His work allowed writers such as Michael Eigen (1998) and Mark Epstein (1995) to address spiritual issues in psychoanalysis further (Schermer, 2003).

Phenomenology

One of the challenges to the reductionism of psychoanalysis and perennial philosophy's objectivism, can be found in the phenomenology of Heidegger (1953) and Van Manen (1970). Heidegger was interested in cutting through concepts and theories to get to the direct experience of phenomena and their meanings. He proposed that the human being is embedded in and engaged in the world affectively. By affectivity Heidegger meant the individual's emotional subjective experience, which is context dependent. It is "the felt sense of oneself in a situation prior to a Cartesian split between inside and outside" (Stolorow, R., Atwood, G, & Orange, D., 2002, p.10). By focusing on affectivity cognitive approaches to making meaning shifted to include the individual's subjective emotional experience. Stolorow suggested that Heidegger's influence can be seen in psychoanalysis' shift from a primary focus on drive theory to that of affectivity.

The influence of phenomenology can also be seen in some transpersonal approaches in psychotherapy. By focusing on direct experience Heidegger was able to arrive at what he thought was the core of spiritual experience what he termed the felt sense of Being or "isness", which he said was both emotional as in feelings of awe and ecstasy and cognitive,

that is, it is always about something (Crotty, 1998). Heidegger thought that religious dogmas, and ideas about God, Void or Tao were abstract concepts that, when deconstructed, revealed the potential for being present to Being itself. It is this experience of Being that is reflected in the spiritual traditions of East and West and indigenous cultures and has influenced more recent developments in transpersonal psychotherapy. By returning to the things in themselves, phenomenology provides a way to talk about and experience ineffable experiences within psychotherapy.

Spirituality in the Maori World View

The following outline from the literature provides a context for spiritual experiences of therapists associated with the Maori world view. Traditionally Maori perceive there to be two types of being, atua or supernatural being and tangata or people (Orbell, 1995). The tangata or people include humans who are alive as well as those who are dead or ancestors. Atua on the other hand include different types of supernatural beings or wairua. Wairua means “the soul that travels”(Orbell, 1995, p. 240). There is a belief among Maori that a person has two presences or souls, one is called the hau and the other the wairua. The hau which is associated with the breath which leaves the body at death and ceases to exist, while the wairua travels around not only after death but also during sleep and is viewed as being responsible for dreams. After death the wairua goes into the underworld but may come back in the form of an animal or insect. The wairua of the dead are also experienced as being helpful to the living such as in warning them of approaching danger.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the word kehua, meaning ghost, appeared. Kehua also referred to wairua or visitors from the dead. Orbell (1995) believed that there was some confusion as to the nature of these beings. She says that one idea was that wairua existed but could not be seen while kehua were merely figments of imagination. Orbell suggested that this distinction would have suited the orthodox Christianity of the times. As I write I am aware of some of the influences of colonization on traditional Maori society and their beliefs and the difficulty at times in distinguishing different traditions. However,

in his book *Tohunga Hohepa Kereopa*, researcher Paul Moon has endeavoured to capture some of the traditional beliefs and practices of a Maori tohunga.

Among other things, a tohunga or priest is someone who is able to see and interact with wairua or spirits of the dead. According to Moon (2003) the word tohunga came from two words, whakato meaning to plant or lay out the issue; and kahunga to take back or surrender any personal interest in the issue. So the aim of the tohunga is to “identify the issue and then let it be dealt with without any personal interest” (p.18). This is not unlike the role of a psychotherapist.

The ancestors (tupuna) or those who have died are regarded as “the source and substance of the world” (Orbell, 1995, p. 25) and of every human being. All life forms including the trees and the birds are regarded as being infused with the life of the ancestors. According to Orbell the ancestors have a continuing interest in their descendants’ wellbeing particularly to ensure the preservation of beliefs and practices related to tapu. This relationship is particularly relevant to the themes in this research. Tapu refers to things or people that are sacred, where access is restricted, such as the meeting house on the marae. Noa refers to things in everyday life where there is unlimited access, such as food. In Maori daily life there is a dynamic interplay between tapu and noa which is somewhat different to the tendency in Western culture to view material world of things as separate from spiritual.

Types of spiritual experience

This research investigates the spiritual experience of therapists. All experience, according to Gadamer (1960) is imbedded in culture and traditions. The literature reveals two traditions that are of interest to this research, the non-dual and the theistic-relational. Non-dual traditions refer to those spiritual traditions that view dualities such as mind-body, self-other, subject-object, as illusory. Reality is described as non-dual and is known by various names such as, the Void, Emptiness, or Tao. Meditation practices are designed to bring awareness of a deeper spiritual reality and the empty and illusory nature of the self

in everyday life. This awareness is perceived as freeing the individual from the limitations of habitual identifications with a separate identity which are the source of suffering (Cortright, 1997). Non-dual traditions are found in Buddhism, Taoism, Aboriginal Australians, and mystical traditions of Christianity found in the writings of Meister Eckhart, St John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and others.

Theistic–relational traditions are different from the non-dual traditions in that there is a belief in a divine other, such as God or other deity. These deities are believed to be immanent yet transcend the material world. They may be perceived as protectors and wise guides in everyday life. Belief in God or other deities is usually characterized by practices of devotion which are designed to open the individual to the deeper purifying power of the Divine. This connection to the Divine can bring a sense of peace, love and fulfillment (Cortright 1997). Theistic traditions are found in some of the world’s religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism

These different spiritual traditions provide various contexts for understanding spiritual experience. They are a way for me, the researcher to think about diverse experiences without losing the mysterious and ineffable qualities often associated with spiritual phenomena. In this part of the review I outline the different types of spiritual experience from both the non-dual and theistic-relational traditions and relate them to psychotherapy.

Spiritual experience as a non-dual state of consciousness

It seems important here to look briefly at what is meant by consciousness because this is where spiritual experience and psychotherapy intersect. It is through spiritual experience and the methods of psychotherapy that consciousness is explored, expanded, deepened and enhanced (Cortright, 1997) Consciousness means a state of being conscious, or the awareness or perception of something (Oxford dictionary on- line). More specifically consciousness refers to the ability to observe aspects or parts of reality and how these parts

relate to each other (Mindell 2000). Consciousness can take various forms. James (1902) states:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question, - for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality.(p.388)

From a transpersonal perspective the foundation of consciousness is spiritual and can only be fully understood when this spiritual dimension is included (Cortright 1997).

As James indicated in the above quote, consciousness has been found to have many levels and states that can be accessed through the use of awareness (James, 1902; Wilber, 1986) Non-dual states of consciousness are different from consciousness of everyday life in that they are ineffable, that is, they are usually difficult to put into words. In psychology non-dual or oneness experience is called by various names such as “the oceanic feeling” Freud (1912), “no-boundary state of consciousness” (Wilber, 1979), “peak experience”(Maslow 1964) “mystical or pure consciousness” (James,1902) the “collective unconsciousness” (Jung 1962) and “sentient awareness” (Mindell, 2000).

The literature reveals psychotherapy’s diverse understandings of experiences of non-dual experience. I next outline the literature relating to the oceanic feeling, peak and mystical experiences and sentient awareness. Especially since the 1960’s there has been much interest in studying individuals’ capacity for states of consciousness beyond the limits of everyday life and in determining how these experiences relate to individuals’ development and wellbeing (S. Grof, 1988; James, 1902; Jung, 1961; Maslow, 1964; Wilber, 1979). From its inception with Freud, psychotherapy has also been interested in non-dual experiences. Freud (1912) referred to oneness experiences as the ‘oceanic’ feeling. It was called the ‘oceanic’ feeling due to the feeling of merger or fusion with another and where

the ego seemed to be lost. Freud interpreted these experiences as the analysand's immaturity and longing for a past experience of infantile fusion with mother. He believed the 'oceanic' experience was also related to the analysand's fantasies of omnipotence, a form of ego inflation that was a defense against facing some of the responsibilities involved in being an individual. By viewing all oneness experience in this way however, Freud reveals some of his personal struggle with the limits imposed by his positivist methodology. As he could not experience these 'oceanic' feelings in himself, and since his theoretical formulations could not admit them in the rational areas of his schema, he judged them as illogical. He wrote about this struggle in the following way:

"The view expressed by the friend (Roland) whom I honour, and who himself once praised the magic of illusion in a poem, caused me no small difficulty. I cannot discover this 'oceanic' feeling within myself. It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings" (cited in Epstein, 1998, p. 1).

Later developments in psychoanalytic theory (Bion, 1970; Ogden, 1992; Stolorow, 2002; Winnicott, 1969) and studies of individuals with a developed sense of self, found the 'oceanic' feeling could also be experienced as "containing progressive, life enhancing components" much like those found in mystical experience and meditative states (Chirban, 2000, p. 254). The life enhancing components are associated with an intense encounter with the present timeless moment which can have a transforming effect on the life of the individual, indicating a different type of experience to the 'oceanic' feeling related to past deficits and comes closer to what Maslow (1994) termed 'peak experience' (p.6) or James's (1902) mystical experience.

A peak experience is a term used by Maslow (1964) to describe experiences where the boundaries of the self seem to spontaneously dissolve, and there is a feeling of being one with everything. Maslow found that during these experiences, what he called an absolute peak experience, the individual has a sense of being beyond linear time and space, concentration is heightened and there is a sense of detachment from everyday life. At other times a relative peak experience refers to moments when there may be an experience of joy, a heightened sense of beauty, or an insight about life. Both types of peak experiences are relevant to this study.

For Maslow (1964) peak experiences are not religious but secular. They can however have a numinous quality which could engender a sense of awe or sacredness. He believed the absolute peak experience occurred more readily in the mature or self-actualized individual and was known to bring meaning to individual's life. "So many people find this so great and high an experience that it justifies not only itself but even living itself They bring meaning to life itself. ...they prove it to be worthwhile" (p.62).

In Process Work, studies have shown how peak experiences can awaken the individual to the central issues in life. They are thought to be a way the individual connects with an eternal, cosmic and mythical part of the self (Mindell, 2000) and in that way are close to mystical experience. Mystical experience differs from peak experience in that it usually has spiritual significance where peak experience may not. Mindell refers to oneness experience as sentient awareness which is described in some detail earlier in this review. He develops techniques for developing sentient awareness and explores ways to make it useful to everyday life. Each of these ways of viewing non-dualistic spiritual experience is relevant to this study.

Spiritual experience and belief

As well as non-dualistic states of consciousness, spiritual experience is commonly thought to be connected to belief in divine entities, such as God, ancestors, spirit beings, or a greater presence. A belief or set of beliefs about life are constructs that inform the way we approach and interact with what we perceive. Beliefs shape experience and behaviour and are usually supported by a community or culture, religious or professional group. Beliefs are felt to be true based on experience rather than fact. Being subjective they are neither able to be controlled nor open to examination and so require what Eigen (1998) called an act of faith.

The psychotherapy literature reveals different and conflicting views as to how beliefs in deities such as God, spirit beings, and ancestors are understood. I next briefly outline these different perspectives in order to provide a context for this study. The literature reveals

spiritual experience in the West as being related to the notion of the individual soul seeking a relationship with the divine or God as is found in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. This search seems to provide a sense of meaning and purpose in life, where the individual, attuned to God, views themselves as being God's representative on earth and as such, as doing God's work. There is usually an element of devotion and personal sacrifice, putting aside a person's own desires in order to be available for whatever is required. Such a relationship can be found in mainstream Christianity, Judaism and Islam which all incorporate the notion of the human soul as existing in relation to the divine. When the soul is cut off from the divine, a sense of emptiness and existential alienation is felt. (Cortright, 1997).

This view contrasts with some indigenous cultures where there is not such a sharp distinction between human and divine. For example, in the Maori world view, as well as a belief in God or Io there is a belief in the spirit world of ancestors and wairua (spirits) which reveals something of a collaborative and reciprocal connection, where ancestors and wairua are perceived as assisting the living, intervening in their everyday lives.

Transpersonal theory posits that belief in divine entities or God can be interpreted as a connection with archetypal phenomena and is a means of getting to know the divine or eternal aspects inherent within all of human kind (Jung, 1961). Jung's experiencing of the collective unconscious made him think that God is synonymous with creation, that belief in God is a way of connecting with the divine within human nature. This idea is reflected in Mindell's (2000) observation that beliefs in divine entities such as Gods and Goddesses seem to occur at "the edge" where individuals face the universal nature of human existence. Like Jung, Mindell explored the idea of God as energy. He thought that as human beings we tend to get fixed on symbols and images and miss the essential quality of the energy behind the images. He suggested that if we could access more of the energy we might be less uncertain and more in contact with infinity.

In contrast to Jung's view of belief in God as an archetypal connection, the literature reveals the traditional psychoanalytic perspective of belief in God or divine deities as a

strategy for dealing with the fears and limitations that are associated with being human. These beliefs are thus seen as functioning to enable the believer to cope with issues of separation and loss, the fragility of the human body, and fear of mortality (Shaw, 2005). Freud (1912) thought that such beliefs were a strategy that was developed to deal with helplessness and dependence. From a developmental perspective belief in God is sometimes viewed as a transitional phenomena, serving much the same purpose as child's teddy bear (Winnicott, 1969). Transitional phenomena are like bridges between what is known and unknown, between subjective and objective experience, and are a way of discovering the self within the world.

These different interpretations of belief in a divine being or God reveal some of the diverse understandings and confusions within psychotherapy. Each interpretation reflects the philosophical perspectives of the different therapeutic modalities. What these differences mean for psychotherapy is explored further in the discussion chapter.

Spiritual experience within dreams and synchronicities

Dreams have long been viewed as the royal road to the unconscious (Freud, 1900), and also as a means of divine intervention in everyday life. When Jung (1961) studied the images in dreams, he noticed parallels within mythology and religious traditions that made him think that dreams contained more than the dreamer's repressed personal material. Jung also noticed how dreams over time not only mirrored the individual's growth in therapy but also could contain a life myth pattern that could be found in mythological literature. These life myth patterns within dreams were found to be especially evident around times of deep change such as occurs in life transitions, near-death experiences or at the onset of a major illness.

Mindell (2000) noted that much of psychotherapy's approach to working with dreams involves a process of the individual reassociating themselves with the feelings and actions of the dream that have been split off from everyday identity. Using the concept of lucid dreaming Mindell showed how it is also possible to connect with a pre-dream state or "the vague field of experiences" that occur even before the individual has a dream (p.28). Lucid

dreaming is a term used by Stephen La Berge (1985) which referred to the ability to notice when we are dreaming and provided a way to interact with dream images that brought meaning to the dream. Mindell (2000) expanded on the idea of lucidity to include the pre-dream state or what he called the Dreaming or sentient essence of life. By developing lucidity we can be aware of vague feelings, tendencies and intuitions that can barely be verbalized and before they are formulated into symbols and images. Mindell thought that by connecting to the pre-dream state the individual could understand the dream before it appears and before dissociation occurs. He said: “Lucid dreaming moves the concept of therapy closer to a spiritual practice. Instead of associating to dreams, we can learn how to contact Dreaming before it gets dissociated, thus learning to understand dreams even before they occur” (p.28). The practice of re-associating to dreams as well as lucid dreaming are relevant to this study.

Towards the end of his life, Jung influenced by his friendship with physicist Wolfgang Pauli, explored similarities between psychology and physics. Inspired by Einstein’s relativity theory, he developed the idea of synchronicity. Synchronicity is a term used by Jung (1955), to refer to meaningful coincidences in time that appear to have no causal links. For example: a client I was working with for some years came to a point in her work where she had an insight into how she could transform an old pattern in her relationships. On the day of this particular session the weather had been cold and wet, the sky grey with cloud cover. At the moment of her insight the sun broke through the clouds and streamed into the room leaving us in awe of its timing and significance. Such coincidences in everyday life create a sense of being part of something bigger than personal identity and separateness.

Therapists’ spiritual beliefs in psychotherapy

Within psychotherapy therapists’ beliefs, values and attitudes about life are generally accepted as being an important aspect of therapeutic encounter. The influence of therapist’s presence was brought to the forefront of psychotherapy with the work of Carl Rogers in the 1950’s. Rogers (1951) found that the person of the therapist was an important determinant

of therapeutic change and that there were certain attitudes and feelings that made a difference to clients' progress. These attitudes were therapists' unconditional positive regard, empathy, genuineness, and congruence. Experience of these qualities through the person of the therapist was thought to counteract earlier experiences of parental judgment and criticism.

Therapists' spiritual beliefs and attitudes are no different in terms of how they impact on client's processes. Amy Mindell (1995) coined the term metaskill to refer to the subtle feeling attitudes therapists bring to what they do that reflect their deepest feelings and attitudes about life. They are the ways we affect clients' development outside of the theories, models and skills we use. Mindell calls them skills because they can be learned and practiced. Therapists' feelings and attitudes complement and enhance their technical skills and have a deep impact on their work with clients.

“What a therapist feels and how she uses these feelings in her work defines who she is and how she responds to life. Her deepest beliefs and feelings are the Earth out of which all techniques spring.Her feeling interactions ...create lasting effects on the people she works with and their subsequent relationships” (Mindell, 1995a, p. 23).

I discuss the different types of metaskills as they relate to therapists' spiritual experience later in the study.

Transference, countertransference and dreaming up

Therapists' subjective experience within the therapeutic relationship has been of interest since the beginning of psychotherapy. Freud (1915) spoke of his fascination with what he observed as unconscious communication between two people.

It is a remarkable thing that the unconscious of one human being can react upon another, without passing through the conscious. This deserves closer investigation, especially with a view to finding out whether preconscious activity can be excluded as playing a part in it; but descriptively speaking, the fact is incontestable. (p. 194 cited in Field, 2005, p. 150)

This unconscious communication has been developed into what is called the transference and countertransference dynamic. In order to explore the different ways of thinking about and understanding transference and countertransference as they relate to the therapists'

spiritual experience I briefly outline some historical developments that impact on the different ways it is viewed today.

At its inception by Freud, transference was a term used to describe what he noticed as clients' unconscious material being projected onto therapists as the work progressed. It was at first thought to be an obstacle to the work, involving clients' distorted thinking and fantasies relating to the past. Freud thought that the past of clients was replicated in the present and transferred to therapists in the interplay between the conscious and unconscious. Over time Freud came to view transference as a powerful tool as it was found to be a means of accessing clients' unconscious subjective processes. The task of psychoanalytic therapists was to remain uninvolved in the life and mind of clients while explaining the transference to clients as it became evident (Etchegoyen, 1991).

Countertransference emerged a little later and described the feeling reactions therapists had to clients' transference. With his emphasis on the need for therapists to remain objective and provide a blank screen for clients' projections, Freud thought any reactions from therapists must be due to therapists' immaturity and neurosis and regarded them as an obstacle to progress. He recommended therapists sublimate or repress their reactions and do personal analysis to rid themselves of them. However, it soon became evident that therapists' reactions were inevitable and as an integral part of the therapeutic relationship they became an invaluable tool for understanding clients' unconscious processes. The belief that therapists could remain isolated and unaffected soon changed. More recent developments particularly with Intersubjectivity theory (Stolorow, R., Atwood, G., Orange, D., 1994) have recognised that transference and countertransference include the subjectivities of both therapist and client and form "an intersubjective system of mutual and reciprocal influence" (p.42).

Hartmann (1960) considered therapists' values in countertransference. He argued that therapists have a set of values regarding what they consider to be healthy and normal which guide the path of the work. These values are seen as potentially helpful particularly if they fit the clients' authentic nature (Cornett, 1998).

Jung's (1961) experience of a collective as well as a personal unconscious meant that he found there was a transpersonal aspect to the countertransference dynamic, particularly through the archetypal dreams of clients. Archetypal images in dreams as internal symbolizations were viewed as being projected onto therapists. Jung found that when exploring these archetypal aspects, there seemed to be a different outcome to that emerging out of a personal unconscious interpretation.

Jung found that the contents of countertransference and transference projections were not only related to or caused by clients' pasts but could also be viewed teleologically, this is as something new trying to happen. This teleological view is found in the literature of Process Work where there is a form of countertransference called "dreaming up" (Goodbread, 1997). Dreaming up refers to what happens when one individual's unintentional communication affects another with no awareness in either party of what triggered the response (Diamond, 2004). The idea of dreaming up means that therapists' reactions are not just personal or belonging to clients' unconscious processes, but also relate to a larger field organizing the whole process of their coming together.

Mindell (1985) stated:

If you consider dreaming up then you can no longer innocently feel that a collective or individual has done something to you. Such causal thinking no longer holds. If you direct your attention with precision to your own dreams and to the dreams of your partners, you are bound to get a glimpse of the objective pattern behind what is happening. The important questions are no longer 'who is doing what?' but 'what is trying to happen?' (p.54)

Mindell argued that dreaming up is a phenomenon that is happening all the time in everyday life. Therapy is viewed as a place to focus on it. The ideas and techniques associated with transference, countertransference and dreaming up are relevant to this study which explores therapists' subjective experiences when with clients that include a larger field dimension.

Parallels between spirituality and psychotherapy

Even though Freud (1912) spoke of his negative views about spiritual phenomena, the literature revealed some of the contributions he made to the development of transpersonal psychotherapy, apparently unaware of how close they were to spiritual traditions such as Buddhism. Epstein (cited in Scotton, 1996) identified three ways that Freud did this. These are the oceanic experience, the practice of evenly suspended attention and sublimation or withholding of the desires for pleasure or instant gratification.

Freud distinguished between the id and the ego but he did not see them as separate or that the ego was as autonomous and independent as one might be lead to believe. According to Epstein, Freud knew that the ego continues inwardly with no clear boundary, and that the ego was a façade obscuring the unconscious but not separate from it. In fact the ego was viewed as a tiny bit of an infinite unconscious, like a drip in the ocean.

Freud was unaware of the Buddhist view of the illusionary nature of self and experience of Emptiness or Void. He was able to understand mystics' experience by comparing it to the oceanic feeling. What he did not seem to understand however, is how all things in the external world could be experienced as all connected or that there could be a felt sense of a oneness with all of creation (Scotton 1996).

One of Freud's major contributions to psychotherapy is the practice of evenly suspended attention, an essential aspect of which is therapists' ability to suspend their critical faculty or thinking mind. This quality of impartiality meant that therapists "suspend judgment and give impartial attention to everything there is to observe" (Freud 1912, cited in Scotton 1996, p.33). Freud did not appear to be familiar with meditative practices in the East which incorporated this type of attention. He found the practice of evenly suspended attention tremendously useful in that it enabled him to discover transference which eventually formed the basis of his therapeutic technique. Another parallel with the Buddhist practice of bare attention is found in Bion's (1970) practice of being present without memory, desire or the need to understand.

Another area of contribution from Freud is found in the practice of sublimation. Freud, like Buddhists, thought that the cause of human suffering was the impulse for pleasure that could not be fully realized. Freud recommended the use of sublimation where “the energy of infantile wishful impulses is not cut off but remains ready for use”. It was by holding back these impulses that Freud proposed that the individual could come to “an ecstatic experience of mystical proportions” (Scotton, 1996, p. 37). Sublimation could be viewed as similar to the discipline found in many spiritual traditions as a way to enlightenment. Although there appear to be many techniques and practices that are similar in spiritual and psychotherapy traditions how they are understood depends on the world views of those experiencing them.

Previous studies of therapists’ spiritual experience

It is only in the last few years that there appears to have been some interest in the therapist’s spiritual experiences. This seems to reflect psychotherapy’s growing interest in this area. Recent studies (Rosenberg, 2005; Schupbach, 2004; Simmonds, 2004; Solomon, 2006) have focused on various aspects of the therapist’s spiritual experience and practice and how they are understood in the therapeutic relationship.

Schupbach (2004) studied one therapist’s spiritual experience in depth as he worked with groups and individuals within group settings. By using direct observation and interviews with the participant after the event, Schupbach was able to make detailed observations of the therapist’s spirituality at work. In her interpretation of the data Schupbach used Buddhist cosmology in a comparative analysis examining three aspects of enlightened mind, knowledge, compassion and wisdom. The results reveal various crossovers between spiritual practice and psychotherapy and suggest that spiritual aspects can potentially be accessed through the practice of psychotherapy and can bring greater meaning and inner fulfillment to the work.

Janette Simmonds in her qualitative research entitled “Heart and Spirit: Research with psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists about spirituality”, explored how 25 practitioners experienced, conceptualized and worked with spiritual issues. (Simmonds, 2004, p.951). The aim of the qualitative research study was “to give a voice to what has

been unheard” in the psychoanalytic tradition. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a narrative finding method. Simmonds used a coding and editing technique described by Crabtree and Miller (1992). Spirituality was interpreted by the participants as related to something beyond or ‘some sort of dimension that is bigger than my own experience ... something that is outside definition, or explanation, and larger than human experience’. (Simmonds, 2004, p. 956). The findings suggested that spiritual experience rather than an organized belief system is central to human development; that these experiences are accompanied by feelings of awe and a sense of belonging to a larger whole which gives meaning to life; that spiritual practice is important in order to develop spiritual consciousness; that for some there is a re-awakening of interest in spirituality at mid-life and at times of personal loss or being with death; that spiritual practices helped in the participants’ work when they needed to put theory aside and use a “quality of mind” or what participants likened to a meditative process (Simmonds 2004 p. 957). Overall, participants were found to experience a sense of comfort by including spirituality in their lives and work. Such comfort was related to having a wider view or a sense of being part of a larger whole. There was also an added dimension of challenge when relating to the unknown.

In a similar vein as Simmonds, Rosenberg’s (2005) “Knowing Reality: Psychotherapists’ and counsellors’ experiences and understandings of inexplicable phenomena while working with clients” set out to bring inexplicable experiences into the psychoanalytic community for the purposes of creating dialogue. The research explored the experiences of eight New Zealand psychotherapist and counsellors. Inexplicable phenomena were described as “those experiences that do not fit the Cartesian world view of cause-effect, linear time and three-dimensional space”(Rosenberg, 2005, p. 5). The findings showed that inexplicable phenomena were more likely to occur when the therapist was in a state of openness, and was receptive to whatever may happen, as in being in a meditative state. Inexplicable phenomena were perceived by the participants in many different forms, including knowing things ahead of time, hearing sentences, seeing subtle visual changes in clients appearance, interacting with multi-sensual moving forms and having intense body experiences. These experiences were felt to be real and appeared to have a life of their own (Rosenberg, 2005).

The meanings attributed to these phenomena varied according to the cultural perspectives and beliefs of the therapist and the client. Inexplicable phenomena were perceived as being more than the personal and the psychological, implying a transcendent quality. Rosenberg's study raises questions for the psychoanalytic community about how to view inexplicable phenomena, what to do with them in clinical work and how they could potentially influence the evolution of psychotherapy itself.

The influence of spiritual practice in psychotherapy was investigated in Solomon's (2006) recent study of the effects of vipassana meditation on the way psychoanalytic psychotherapists use their attention. The study revealed some evidence that meditation practice could be a way to enhance therapist's awareness of more subtle body phenomena within the therapeutic setting and could be useful to include in psychotherapy training.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some of the historical development and current thinking about spiritual experience and psychotherapy. Spiritual experience within psychotherapy is a developing area of interest for psychotherapists. I have outlined possible reasons for this interest referring to relevant research and literature of different cultures, and spiritual traditions and views about human potential and the existence of the universe.

I have explored different interpretations and understandings of spiritual experience within the literature of transpersonal psychology, psychoanalytic traditions and spiritual traditions revealing areas of crossover and some differences. Transpersonal psychology has endeavored to integrate spiritual experience as essential to human individual growth and development. Although there have been developments in the field with the inclusion of phenomenology, the literature reveals transpersonal psychology as tending to privilege spiritual development as being more advanced than psychological healing and growth. This tendency is perhaps due to the immense influence of perennial philosophy and the hierarchy found in the Great Chain of Being. Also being based in experience and its multiple interpretations and potential meanings has tended to make transpersonal psychology difficult to conceptualize in a coherent theoretical way. Process Work with its

phenomenological approach is presented as a coherent body of theory and practice. It is one way of conceptualizing and making meaning of ineffable experience.

There have been many developments in psychoanalytic psychotherapy since its inception with Freud, and it can be seen how it has influenced the development of transpersonal psychology. It does however remain within a Cartesian framework which means that spiritual experiences are viewed with some skepticism. While several parallels can be found between spiritual practices and psychoanalysis they would appear to currently remain parallel. I will bring the ideas found in this literature review into the discussion and explore how they relate to my findings.

Chapter Three Methodology

Phenomenological hermeneutics

I have chosen the methodology of phenomenological hermeneutics because it best fits my research which seeks to explore the essential nature and meaning of therapist's lived experience of spirituality. Phenomenology is the study of "the things themselves" (Grant, 2002, p. 15) The word phenomenon comes from the Greek word *phainomenon* which means "things appearing to view" (Oxford Dictionary on-line). It relates to phenomena as they appear and before they are interpreted and understood. As Marton (1986) stated: "It is the task of phenomenology to make us conscious of what the world was like before we learned how to see it"(p.40) Phenomenology provides the means of discovering and describing the essence of a phenomenon, its being-ness, what makes it what it is allowing it to speak for itself (van Manen, 1990). As such, it is the appropriate methodology for this research which seeks to explore the lived experience of participants.

In order to interpret and find meaning for therapists lived experiences I use the hermeneutic approach to analysis. Hermeneutics refers to the interpretation of texts and was used by the ancient Greeks as well as Christians in the interpreting of the bible. From a hermeneutic perspective texts are viewed as not just words but as containing hidden meanings and are a way meanings are transmitting between people and communities. The interpreter of the text takes into consideration the historical context of the text and its author as well as the relationship between the author and the interpreter. (Crotty, 1998).

Gadamer (1960) stated that we are thoroughly historical, that we stand in a tradition and that all tradition is embedded in language. What this means in hermeneutic analysis is that meaning emerges through the interplay between language and tradition.

The findings that emerge from this research are the result of participants' descriptions of their experiences and their reflections on what they described. The findings are also influenced by my reflections and reading of the literature, my pre-understandings and bias

as well as conversations with my supervisor and colleagues. This process of the coming together of different viewpoints to arrive at meaning is what Gadamer (1960) referred to as the fusion of horizons. An horizon refers to the range of vision the individual has that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. An horizon is not static but is in constant movement as it interacts with other horizons. In the discussion I reveal how the different horizons in the study interact or fuse, making it possible for the reader to understand how the findings were arrived at.

As part of this research I have made explicit my pre-understandings of the topic in question. These understandings have been developed and illuminated over time through the study of the topic as a whole, exploring meanings through the analysis of the texts, and reading the literature. This movement between the wider whole and the part is called the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is the dialectic that enabled me to understand the meanings implicit within the texts.

Hermeneutics is an interpretative methodology that provides a language for experiences that are difficult to put into words. Heidegger (1975) supported the use of poetry as a way to describe the being-ness or essence of experience without losing its essential quality. "Poetry can lead us to the place where Being reveals itself. It provides the 'clearing' where Being is illuminated" (p.289; cited in Crotty, 1998, p.99). During the interviews, while the participants were recalling their experiences, I was aware that there were times when we were both moved by what happened and some of the original feeling effects of the experience returned for the participant. Even though there were several comments as to how difficult they were to explain, there was something in the way they were described that brought the experiences alive. I believe this was due in part to how they were being described. The language used involved metaphor and simile, movement and imagery, and connected with the feeling reactions they engendered. It enabled me, as the researcher, to catch a feeling sense of the original experience and the meaning embedded within it, even though I was not present at the time. The theme titles in this research are created in a way that the reader can also gain a felt sense of the original experience.

In his research of the lived experience, Max Van Manen said that we will know when an experience has been adequately described in language “if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, 1990, p. 20). This is my endeavour in this research.

Rigour

Rigour in qualitative research refers to the trustworthiness and legitimacy of the study and its findings (Koch, 1996). It refers to the researcher’s ability to demonstrate that the research study is trustworthy and believable. Rice (2000) outlines three categories for the establishment of rigour in qualitative research. They are; consistency between the methodology and the focus of the enquiry; that the research design is documented in a clear and consistent way that the reader can follow; and that the reader is able to find a direct link between the data gathered and the researchers’ interpretation.

In response to the first category I have outlined the methodology and its appropriateness for the topic of this research. Phenomenological hermeneutics is consistent with exploring lived experiences and their meanings.

In relation to the research design, I have fully documented each stage of the research process including ethical approval processes, selection of participants, data collecting and analysis procedures for the reader to follow. I have stated clearly the strategies used for recruitment of participants. I have shown how I have used data from the participants descriptions and information from other texts to situate experiences within their cultural and professional contexts (Rice, 2000).

It is important in research that the reader can see a link between the data and the researcher’s interpretation of that data and can therefore have confidence in the truth of the findings (Rice, 2000). I have endeavoured to present the diverse experiences of the participants in all their complexity and meanings, having chosen those themes of interest to me. I have included a number of excerpts of participants’ descriptions of experience to enable the reader to make a link between the text and my interpretations.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the researcher's ability to stay true to what is being observed and experienced during the research process. It implies a level of self awareness and an ability to reflect on personal processes as the inquiry progresses. Being aware of and describing what is going on while researching, includes the researcher's ability to be reflexive about such things as decision making relating to methodology, sampling, methods and plans for analysis (Denzin, 2000) To assist me in being aware of my subjective experience and prejudgements in relating to the topic of the study, I first returned the typed transcripts of participants interviews to them to check for accuracy and to answer any of the points for clarification that emerged during the transcribing. I have undertaken a pre-understandings interview and kept a reflexive journal of the research process, the formulation of the research question, of methodological decisions and insights gained, as well as my subjective process.

Phenomenological hermeneutic methodology recognizes and values the researcher's subjective experience during the research. I have endeavoured to be transparent about my pre-understandings and how my horizon influences the study. I have been transparent in recording moments of insight, feelings, dreams, curiosities and inner conflicts in relation to the issues emerging from the research in keeping with what is required for trustworthiness and credibility. Being able to situate myself within the context of the research topic allowed me to be aware of how I influence the inquiry (Gadamer 1960) My influence on the analysis process has been in constant review both within myself and with my supervisor. It is important for trustworthiness and credibility that my prejudices are made explicit

To further enhance the credibility of the study I have engaged a reader to provide feedback on the process. This person has some understanding of the issue and is able to follow the methodological path even though it may not be their own. To assist me with the methodology of phenomenological hermeneutic research I attended a session with a small group of researchers from this particular methodology and engaged a supervisor who has some experience in this area.

By acknowledging my assumptions and pre-understandings relating to the question, I am able to be open to the experiences of the participants and provide a way to uncover the meaning of these experiences

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of the research can be transferred to another similar context while maintaining some of their meanings, interpretations and inferences (Bryman, 2004). By including as much diversity as possible in participants' therapeutic approaches, many of the findings will be applicable to psychotherapy in general as well as to therapists from indigenous cultures. Due to the personal nature of the experiences and their meanings however, some of the findings pertain only to those particular situations.

Ethical Considerations

Beneficence

The benefits of this research to the participants are found in the opportunity to talk about experience that is not so often spoken about amongst colleagues. There are benefits in participants and the psychotherapy community reading the findings and increasing their understanding of spirituality within psychotherapy. It may also bring increased awareness to other therapists in their everyday practice as well as supervision and training programmes.

Informed consent

Informed consent means that not only must the participants take part voluntarily, but they must be informed about all aspects of the research before making a decision to participate. On the consent form I have given a brief description of the purpose and procedure of the research study. I have been clear about any possible risks or discomfort associated with taking part. There is a statement emphasizing that participation is completely voluntary and can be terminated at any time. There has been every opportunity for participants to discuss any concerns they might have in relation to signing the consent form.

Protection of privacy

Researchers protect privacy by ensuring that participant's identities are not disclosed after information is gathered. This protection takes two forms, anonymity and confidentiality (Neuman, 1994).

Anonymity refers to the informants remaining nameless. To ensure anonymity all identifiable information relating to each participant has been changed. Due to small numbers in Auckland psychotherapy community I have paid particular attention to anonymity.

The process of confidentiality is already a well established norm in psychotherapy. Confidentiality means keeping information about certain individuals, events, experiences, secret from the public. From the beginning I have been clear about what happens to the information given to me. I have stored the data and consent forms securely in my supervisor's office at AUT where it will stay for 6 years after which it will be shredded.

Empowerment

Each of the participants was fully informed about the risks and benefits of participating in this study, their right to participate or not and to pull out at any time. As the informants for this research study are peers and colleagues I do not anticipate power issues that would be of concern if I were interacting with clients. However I am aware of my power as the researcher and the level of sharing and exposure that has occurred between us. I am particularly aware of the sensitivity of the information gathered and am paying careful attention to how I present it to the wider psychotherapy community. I have offered the transcripts of the interviews to the participants so that they could retain them if desired.

Justice

I have set out clearly on the participant information sheet the purpose of the study (Appendix A). I have treated the participants equally providing that same preparation and follow up opportunities in the process of gathering the data. Each participant has been given the time and opportunity necessary to go fully into all they want to say. They have had a chance to review the text after it has been transcribed and they have adjusted the text where necessary. I have endeavoured to be a fair observer, treating all information given to me with gratitude and respect.

Treaty of Waitangi

As a New Zealander I recognize the principles of partnership, participation and protection embodied in the Treaty of Waitangi as described by the Royal commission on Social policy (1988). In order to make this opportunity available and relevant to Maori therapists I have included two Maori participants in my sample. Another participant has an indigenous background and works with Maori/ Pacific Island clients. I have consulted with the NZAP Maori advisor about issues I need to be aware of when speaking of spiritual matters, e.g. the difficulty of speaking publicly about matters that are sacred or tapu, and have taken these into consideration. I also discussed with him ways that I could make this study useful to Maori and how to disseminate my findings.

Method

Sampling Strategy

I have used a purposive sampling strategy to acquire participants who have the information I require. The participants were six psychotherapists, two men and four women. Three have indigenous cultural backgrounds. The criterion of ten or more years experience as psychotherapists was adjusted in order to be able to include Maori therapists, reflecting psychotherapy's historical development within a Western framework and more recent shifts towards bi-culturalism. In order to include as much diversity as possible as is recommended for a hermeneutic study, I have approached therapists of different cultures, ages, gender and

psychotherapy training such as Psychoanalysis, Gestalt therapy, Psychodynamic psychotherapy, and Process Oriented Psychology.

Gathering the data

An invitation was sent through my AUT supervisor to psychotherapists in the Auckland region who were thought to have an interest in the area of spirituality. I also invited two international therapists to take part, one in Australia whom I visited and one in Portland Oregon who was visiting New Zealand. As the psychotherapeutic community is relatively small I have included some participants whom I do not know personally to ensure as much diversity as possible.

The data was gathered through unstructured interviews. These lend themselves to formal analysis while freeing the participants to respond in any way they wish. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by a transcriber. On one occasion the two tape recorders that I used to record the interview failed. This meant that I had to approach the participant for a second time. While this failure to record could be put down to my nervousness as an interviewer and not checking the tape recorders properly, the participant and myself were aware that some of the material covered in the failed interview pertained to experiences relating to Maori spirituality and as such may be best left unspoken.

Data Analysis

The data for analysis is in the texts of the interviews, as well as in my personal on-going reflections. Themes and meanings have emerged from my interpretation of parts of the texts as well as the text as a whole as they each inform and give meaning to the other (Smythe, 1998). “.. the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole.The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 291) Throughout the course of this research I have followed the process and endeavored to be true to the hermeneutic circle by focusing on different aspects of the texts and their content and then stepping back to view the text as a whole. I used

colour coding for various themes emerging as well as individual slips of paper that when placed on the floor could be viewed as a whole. This process enabled me to identify themes. This movement from parts to whole has meant that what was at first implicit could be made explicit and thematised. I have used a thematic analysis strategy which has uncovered themes that are embodied in the meaning. The essential themes have emerged from a process of writing and re-writing and have been compared to relevant literature. I have been assisted by the framework of the four existential life worlds of lived space, lived time, lived body and lived relationship suggested by Van Manen (1997).

Chapter Four Themes in the findings

Introduction

In this chapter I present the themes from the texts that relate to the therapists' spiritual experiences in the practice of psychotherapy. The interviews reveal the diverse ways in which the participants experience and understand spirituality. As prescribed by phenomenological hermeneutic analysis, each extract is described and analyzed in an attempt to reveal what it is that makes these experiences spiritual.

Therapists' awareness beyond the boundaries of linear time and space

This theme relates to spiritual experiences described as no-boundary states of awareness where there is a sense of oneness and interconnectedness with all things. How and when these experiences occur and some of their effects are described.

Embodying something beyond the self

Experiences interpreted as spiritual emerge out of an individual's spiritual and cultural beliefs. This theme describes how participants' interpretations of ineffable phenomena are reflections of their spiritual and cultural beliefs.

Being still silent and open

This theme focuses on participants' attention and the attitudes they bring to their work that reflect their spiritual beliefs. It also describes different ways of knowing participants use when relating to spiritual phenomena.

In order for the reader to gain an understanding of the meanings of the themes presented below I have endeavoured to stay true to the aim of phenomenology which is "to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is both a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful"(van Manen, 1990, p. 36). While there are many themes in the data, the scope of this research made it necessary to study only a selection. I chose those themes that were

of interest to me as well as those I thought could be of interest to the wider therapeutic community.

Therapists' awareness beyond the boundaries of linear time and space

Being separate with individual boundaries is basic to how we perceive and experience ourselves in the world. Consciousness of our separateness is so basic to our identity that we seldom question it. Yet as William James, an influential psychologist from early twentieth century stressed, "our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, while all about it parted from it by the filmiest of screens there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different"(cited in Wilber, 1979, p. 2). This theme explores different types of consciousness that involve the therapists letting go the sense of a separate self and the boundaries that define who they are.

Feeling awe and reverence

In the following extract John describes his experience of being in a state of awareness that is beyond the boundaries of the self and linear time and space. He says it happens immediately before sensing another presence in the room while working with a client as well as in moments of creative expression. In this instance he describes what happens when he writes.

The closest I can come to describing it is a kind of disappearance of confinement, and the disappearance of some of the boundaries we assume, something else opens up, it is connected outside my five senses, and it is timeless in a way as well. It does feel free. Awe is a feeling, and we do not talk about awe as a feeling very often. It really is about awe..... and flying or floating, or something like that, which is not exactly a feeling, but yes it is!

John is particularly interesting in the way he describes his experiences, as if in the description the experience is re-created. The difficulty describing it and the gaps that were left as he sought to find the words, left room for my own imagining. I felt that I too was momentarily transported into a no-boundary state. This is a spiritual experience for John due to its inexplicable quality and the feelings of awe that it engenders. By being connected

outside his five senses, John implies that his usual way of interacting with the world does not apply suggesting something that he is simply aware of. By timeless John is referring to being in a state where there is no sense of past or future. His subjective experience of lived time (van Manen, 1990), appears to be totally in the present moment, where John's sense of himself as being situated in the world in an historical sense is no longer in his awareness. Similar timeless, awe-inspiring states of awareness are found in the literature of mystical or non-dual traditions of the East as in the Buddhist notion of the Void, and in psychology as no-boundary experiences (Wilber, 1979), peak experiences (Maslow 1964) or sentient awareness (Mindell, 2000a).

John's response to his experience is to feel awe and a sense of freedom. Awe is a feeling of great respect and wonder mixed with fear (Oxford Dictionary on-line). It implies a reverence for the mystery of what is happening in the moment. It seems to capture something of the essence of what John felt. Awe is a word that is not much used within psychotherapy. The psychoanalyst Shaw (2005) however, suggested that emotional responses such as a sense of awe seem to be present when something is happening that is related to spirituality. John also says he was aware of *flying, and floating* as in being free of the confines of the body and the laws of gravity. The sense of floating or levitation is described by Laski (1961) as an aspect of experiences involving ecstatic states of consciousness.

John reports:

I have no idea where I am except I don't know where I am. I could be everywhere or nowhere. It is grand! It cannot be manufactured either, in my view. It surprises me!If you worked to create it, it just doesn't happen.....there is something quite magical.

John says that he is aware that he does not know where he is implying his sense of self as an individual. He is not worried about not knowing where he is, indicating that this is perhaps not a new experience for him. In some instances not knowing where one is can be frightening and somewhat dangerous to our sense of wellbeing. However, John reports feelings of enjoyment, delight, and even ecstasy. By saying that it is something that cannot be made to happen, he implies that it is somehow already there, something he can use his

awareness to step into and experience the magic and surprise that it brings. Even though he says he does not know where he is, he does notice this and can remember and reflect on what happened at a later time.

Anne also describes a feeling of awe when experiencing moments in her work that have a numinous quality.

Using the word 'numinous' is my attempt to describe what is happening.... I feel awe, and a sense there is something opening up here, there is something bigger something other than the both of us and what is happening in the session, that is related to soul. The numinous for me is about the spiritual moment. Numinous brings light into experiences. It is mainly about the mysterious, the unknown. I think the main word in all of this would be mystery. The numinous is that which inspires a sense of awe.

I can remember quite a few times when I experienced the numinous and I wondered about what that might mean for the client. Most times the client will also comment on what is happening for him or her so there is an affirmation of a shared client and therapist experience. Sometimes in therapy I am aware when the client comes to a satisfying resolution of a long standing block and there is a shared sense of work well done ...there seems to be a special transcendence present when a client comes to experience deeper levels of self-loving and a new found compassion where there has previously been hate or indifference.

By using the word *numinous* Anne is referring to something happening that has a strong religious or spiritual quality (Oxford dictionary on-line). It is a word used by Otto (1958) to describe the felt core of religious experience, a sense of the sacred. Anne confirms this sense of the sacred by referring to the experience as relating to soul. Anne's feeling response, like John, is one of awe. Having a sense of something opening up implies an intuitive or sixth sense experience which is subjective rather than something that involves objective intellectual knowledge. By something *bigger* and something *other* Anne implies that what is opening up is something she does not identify with as belonging to her or the client, that it is something happening to them that is mysterious. It has an effect on what is being experienced as in bringing light. By light Anne implies a sense of something visual as in brightness or clarity.

Anne discovers that her clients can be having a similar experience at the same time. This information confirms for her that these experiences are not just personal, but shared in that both she and the client are feeling it.

Anne says she is aware of when these moments occur in the therapeutic work. They can happen at particular points in the work with a client especially when there has been a resolution of long standing issues and a shift in client's attitude.

Experiencing oneness

As well as experiences that engendered awe the participants described experiences of oneness where the sense of separateness and difference from one another is somehow dissolved. When describing spiritual experience Jane says:

What comes up for me first is this big space where whatever differences we have on the surface this is where we are all connected.

Jane refers to a big space where there are none of the usual differences that are experienced in everyday life. By a big space she does not appear to be referring to three dimensional space, in the physical sense, but space in the phenomenological sense of the lived or felt space (van Manen, 1990). What Jane describes as the big space could be what Jung (1961) meant by the collective unconscious, Wilber's (1979) unity consciousness, and Bohm's (1993) undivided universe. By being all connected Jane implies the non-local nature of this big space meaning there is no differentiation between separate individuals.

Bob implies something similar to Jane's big space when he describes spiritual experience as involving an Absolute or oneness we all participate in.

It takes a certain type of contemplative activity to try and grasp it..... It means that, although there is great variety in the world, there is also a oneness you and I both participate in.

Contemplative is a word used to refer to the act of looking steadily at or thinking profoundly and at length about something (Oxford Dictionary on-line). It is associated with a form of meditation which Bob says is how the Absolute can be known. By an Absolute Bob says he is referring to what Bion (1970) termed 'O', or infinite formlessness. Bob spoke personally to me, referring to a oneness that he and I participate in, as though this oneness was in his awareness as he spoke and he was teaching me about it. He implies that

it is something other than us yet something we both participate in. He went on to give an example of how the experience of oneness changes perspectives of someone's behaviour.

...if you speak to most people about guilt they will speak of it in terms of like me doing something damaging to you. But if you think that you and I both participate in being, then you think of guilt as being something that is damaging to that, that you and I are both affected. I think that is quite important that the notion that the guilty act is something that damages me as well as you. So I think that is quite crucial actually because it changes, to my mind, a whole way of looking at things from being moralistic.

Rather than describing his own experience Bob uses a general example to show me how a felt sense of oneness can change how one feels and thinks about another's action. He says that if we believe we are not separate but one, then his guilty act affects him as well as me which changes his approach to what he does. Bob reveals the potential of spiritual experiences to change our world view or what is called in the literature our assemblage point (Mindell, 1993). An assemblage point refers to beliefs, principles and values around which we organize our lives. Bob spoke conceptually and was enthusiastic about teaching me what he thought. There was a genuineness and congruence in his manner that left me in no doubt that he lived what he taught.

Summary

The participants described no-boundary experiences where they felt awe, ecstasy, reverence and a sense of oneness. These experiences contrast with awareness of self as separate and bounded by the structures of the physical world. Participants revealed an openness and trust in states of consciousness beyond these limits, seeing them as being potentially useful for the therapeutic relationship as well as everyday life. Experiences of no-boundary awareness or oneness were sources of creativity. They confirmed the therapeutic work and brought about a shift in world view. As the texts have revealed something of the nature of non-dual experiences, in the discussion I will focus on how these experiences of no-boundary awareness relate to psychotherapy where traditionally the focus has been on the development of the self as separate.

Embodying something beyond the self

In the extracts that follow the participants describe experiences in their work that reflect their belief in something bigger, a greater presence, spirit beings or ancestors. In the literature, such a belief is viewed as coming from theistic traditions (Cortright, 1997). The extracts reveal therapists feeling love and being of service to or guided by something bigger than the self. They also show therapists' attunement to dreams and synchronicities as pointing to something beyond the self influencing the therapeutic work.

Feeling a big love

The participants describe spiritual experiences involving an attuning to and connection with something beyond the self. Participants' beliefs in something beyond the self meant that for some, what was experienced gave a sense of meaning and purpose to their work as psychotherapists.

Anne is just one of the participants who view her work as a psychotherapist in the following way: *I feel I am being available to a loving presence.*

Anne says that she knows she is being available through how she feels. It is something that involves her emotions rather than reason. Being available means, 'open,' 'ready for use' or 'not otherwise occupied' (Oxford Dictionary on-line). Making herself available implies openness to be used by another.

In the following extract Anne describes an extreme situation where she experiences a feeling of being loved. She talks about a time when she was with a client who was going into a psychotic state. The client was about to strike Anne's face when she suddenly stopped. The client's face changed expression. The client said later that her intention had been to tear the skin off Anne's face but as she was about to do it she saw her surrounded by light which stopped her. Anne says:

She came out like an animal. I pulled back but not enough to have fully protected myself. Then she stopped as if she was frozen and her face had a total change in expression. Okay my heart was beating, but at the same time I felt perfectly calm.

*. the moment when she saw the light was when I became unafraid. I felt loved. I felt loved that at times of extremity that something else was taking place. It drew us both a lot closer together and I guess from that moment there was a whole new depth in me and in the psychotherapeutic relationship.
..... I don't know what the explanations are of that, but that was an example of something that was beyond.*

Anne describes her response to what happened in an extreme and frightening situation with a client. She says that the moment the client saw her surrounded by light her feelings changed and she was less fearful. The client seeing her surrounded by light had a profound effect on Anne. She felt loved in a real sense as in it being an embodied feeling reaction to the experience of something else happening that was beyond her control. It was not of her doing but emerged out of the event itself giving her the feeling of something else looking after her. Anne views this incident as an expression of something that went beyond normal or physical human experience. She is unable to explain what happened in psychological terms such as the countertansference, inferring that it came from somewhere other than the clients unconscious process. She knows it was a spiritual experience due to its timing and the effects it had on her, the client and the therapeutic relationship. It would seem that in this extreme situation the only way the client could connect was through something spiritual as seeing Anne surrounded by light. This connection brought new depth and intimacy to the relationship and to Anne herself.

In the following story Carol describes how she felt a transpersonal love when working with a client.

*The other week a client came in and she brought me a rose. With this client my intuition is especially strong. When she brought me the rose my first thought was will I put this in a vase, or not? My intuition or my guidance said 'No, you have to hold it for the whole session.' So I held the rose for the whole session, smelling it lots, and really, really admired its beauty. It is something which is hard to explain. Something changes in the energy. It is very subtle. It is like my energy field lights up and expands. I feel happier.
For me the transpersonal that I felt was just an incredibly gentle big love. It is there all the time a little bit, and it feels big and beyond her and I. Really it almost felt like a meditative space, even though we are really connected..... I just held this rose and smelled it..... it went to very subtle levels.*

Rather than putting the rose in the vase as she usually would Carol, following an intuitive hunch, checks inside before deciding what to do with it. Intuition refers to the ability to know something directly without conscious reasoning (Oxford Dictionary on-line) The strength of Carol's intuition on this occasion seemed to be connected to her relationship with the client. Carol received direction from what she called her guidance who spoke to her as though separate from her. A rose has a long tradition in the West, as being the flower given to someone you love and care about. Perhaps this was also related to how the client felt towards her therapist or even how the client was feeling towards herself. Carol entered into the experience of holding the rose which could be seen as a way of acknowledging and holding the love between them. As she did that she noticed her energy becoming lighter and she felt happy. Carol interprets this experience as a feeling of transpersonal love, something that went beyond the feelings shared between herself and the client. This interpretation reflects Carol's spiritual belief in a larger transpersonal presence. By comparing it to a meditative space Carol implies something of a spiritual quality was present which made the experience feel as if it went deeper than it normally would in psychotherapy

Surrendering to something bigger

In the following extract Jane describes how her belief in something bigger enables her to surrender control and go into the unknown.

To me it is like an engagement with the unknown and surrendering into it.... to have that trust paid back over and over in a bigger way ...it is like I receive threefold because in the scary moment of letting go the reins of control or even the illusion that I have it the process takes over and there is an inherent structure of interaction within that I can follow with the signals and feedback..... I don't have to put feelings aside or I don't have to put my brain aside. We can step through different realities and that is a feeling thing too.

Jane describes letting go control as involving an engagement with the unknown as something like a reciprocal relationship that she surrenders into. By surrender she implies letting go as opposed to holding on. Originally surrender came from the Latin *redder* meaning to 'give back' (Oxford Dictionary on-line). In some cases surrender has an implication of giving up or submission to an authority. In some religious traditions surrender is viewed as an aspect of devotion (Trungpa, 1976) For Jane, surrendering to the unknown seems not to be about submission or defeat but more like subjectively opening to

something bigger, what she calls the process that takes over. She talks about the moment of letting go as scary implying courage. When she surrenders she finds not an empty unknown but something with structure that she follows and trusts. By inherent structure she is perhaps referring to the subtle clues or signals and feedback system of information within the momentary experience between herself, the client and the environment which reflects her Process Work approach to her work.

Jane reports that she does not have to put anything aside such as her feelings or thoughts, suggesting that the experience is embodied and something she can participate in. She is fully present and engages with what is happening. In stepping through different realities she is perhaps referring to something other than everyday reality of duality and material objects that can be felt. The idea of different realities is found in shamanic traditions and physics theory of many- worlds.

Jane goes on to describe how surrendering to something bigger impacts on her.

I feel humbled and rewarded. It is like in that surrender a greater richness comes back even if there are bumps and inner freak outs in between. There is a constant knowing that it comes around in a wholeness itself that makes me sink deeper and deeper into a place of trust. The word is grace. For me grace is when I feel like I am a bird in the sky (waves her hands like a birds wings) and I am really held by the power of the invisible wind. Then when you feel connected to that larger current and it is wonderful, it is like being in the sea and you are being held and being moved but not being ripped out by an undercurrent. It is not stagnant as in still but there is a state that comes from going with what is.... makes working with people if "working" is the word, in this way a pleasure and really a great privilege because it is bigger than all of us

Jane describes how trust is developed through surrendering to the process. She says there are rewards such as in being given something in return for doing something difficult. By grace Jane infers something unearned or given freely as in the feeling of being held by the wind or the waters of the ocean. Jane uses nature metaphors as a way to describe the essential quality of how she feels. Jane's act of surrender engenders reciprocity in the form of rewards as in a richness of experience and an increase in trust that allows her to go even further into the experience. It is as though the more she surrenders the more she receives. She compares the feeling state of being held and being moved to that of *being ripped out by an undercurrent*, the contrast providing a felt sense of the essential quality of the

experience. Not ripped out but held, not stagnant but going with what is and being moved by it. Jane says that her experience means that her approach to her work with clients becomes effortless, pleasurable and an honour.

Hearing, seeing and feeling spirit beings

Participants' beliefs in spirit beings meant that some experiences were interpreted from spiritual and cultural perspectives. Anne describes what happened to her when she was surprised and challenged by what she heard when working with a client who had lost a child in very tragic circumstances. Due to the client's traumatic upbringing it had been very difficult for her to grieve. As part of the work they set up a ritual whereby the client could acknowledge the dead child and farewell her. Anne says:

...I was a participant but not an active one. I was an observer of what was going on..... I was, in myself, a silent witness. I can remember how still it was all around us. Then there was an insistence that started quietly, from within me. To my horror, if horror is the right word, I realized that I was hearing the child speaking.

By being a non-active participant Anne implies being part of something by her presence rather than by doing anything. She describes what happened as she was observing what the client was doing. Anne's disposition of stillness, non-active participation and silent observation is found in psychotherapy traditions as a way of being with a client that creates a space for the client's process to reveal itself. The first signal or inkling of something happening came from within Anne rather than from the client. By *an insistence* she implies something that was continuing to make itself known, as if it had a life of its own. She identifies what she hears as the voice of the child. By horror Anne implies shock or astonishment, at the realization that this was happening. Anne then describes how she reacted:

I squashed it down because I thought it was my imagination. I tried to switch my thoughts elsewhere, but there was nothing that I could do. It was out of this very silent place, that the child's voice said these words: "I am okay and I am happy, don't cry for me", and words like that. I was unable to keep them back. They just came out. They flowed out! I shook because it felt contrary to my role as a therapist.

Anne's immediate reaction is to interpret what was happening as her imagination so she tries to push it away. By doing this Anne implies that her imagination is somehow not valid or true and therefore of less value to the work at hand.

Her attempts to get rid of the voice fail. It would seem that Anne momentarily, experienced losing control, the child's voice being too strong for her to hold back. She is somehow caught up in the client's process. She recognizes what was happening as being beyond her role as a psychotherapist. Anne recalls how her body shook as a result of the words coming out, implying a physical reaction to going beyond her limits. It is as if her body went into something like a state of shock. Anne goes on to say how she knew this was something spiritual.

I was in turmoil! It was spiritual in the sense that it extended me.I was not prepared for it. It had a transformative effect, so I guess in that sense it is spiritual.

By describing herself in this way, Anne indicates the power the event had to disorientate her. Anne goes on to explain that this was not something planned. It surprised her. She says she knew the experience was spiritual by its effects on her. She implies that it took her further than she would normally go as a person and a therapist. By transformative Anne implies a deep and lasting change in how she experiences herself. It is this transforming nature of the experience that meant she interpreted it as spiritual.

For some participants, particularly those from indigenous cultural backgrounds, there is a belief in an immanent ancestral world. The ancestral world is viewed as being an integral part of life and also of the therapeutic relationship.

In the following extract John describes what happened when he experienced a feeling sense of the presence of someone else in the room.

The first time it happened was when I could feel, or suddenly felt as if his (the client) mother were there, and he talked about his mother a lot but I had never actually felt her presence in the room. Suddenly she was there and I thought, as we do sometimes as psychotherapists, I am going to say this but I might be 'crazier' than the client. I said 'Is there someone else here in the room?' 'Yes', he said. 'Can you tell me who it is?' 'Yes, it is my mother.' And I said, 'I sense her as well, and where is she standing?' He said 'Straight over there.' We talked about what she was wearing, which was really ironic because we were both sensing very much the same kind of presence in the room.

John describes a time when he felt the client's mother or Tupuna (ancestor) present in the room. John says it was a sudden feeling implying something unexpected and surprising. It was not something he planned. He says he hesitated telling the client what he sensed as

from a psychotherapy perspective he could be thought of being somewhat delusional, drawing attention to some of the confusions within psychotherapy as to the difference between spiritual and psychological phenomena. John is able to hold the doubt as he checks with the client's perception.

The client confirms what John is experiencing which meant that they could go further into the experience by going into more detail about place and colour of clothes. John identifies this experience as reflecting his and the clients spiritual and cultural beliefs.

It is a spiritual experience, I am naming it as such and the clients always recognize it as such, and we can use that. We can use it to talk about what that person is here for, what is that person came to say to you, or to oversee in our relationship because there is a whole Maori philosophy of kaitiaki taonga, a sort of guardianship, as though one goes through life with a guardian around, right?

It seems to happen more often when I have a kind of peripheral awareness that almost comes out from the side of my head in the direction my ears point rather than straight ahead kind of focus. And there is a little bit of my needing to remember to keep that turned on because as you will know we focus quite strongly on our clients, or I do anyway, focus quite strongly on my clients and sometimes I can forget to be aware of what is happening in the larger space in which we are sitting.

John reveals how he was able to use the spiritual experience in the therapeutic work implying that what happened emerged out of it and was instrumental in taking it further, adding meaning to the everyday life of the client. This process seems to be a reflection of the belief in the interplay of tapu and noa, the sacred and the mundane as well as the belief in ancestral guardianship of the living.

It would seem that John's approach to this experience emerges out of his personal experiences and values, his experience as a psychotherapist as well as his understanding of Maori culture. John goes on to make specific reference to a type of peripheral awareness that he says enables him to sense what is happening beyond the usual client focus. As he has to remember to turn it on it would seem to be something that takes a conscious act rather than something that happens naturally, at least in the therapeutic setting. By keeping it turned on he is able to sense and pick up on subtle feeling reactions in the atmosphere which indicate the felt presence of another. Attending to more subtle tendencies in this way is referred to in the literature as second attention (Castaneda, 1971; Mindell, 1993)

John makes further comments about his psychotherapy training.

So I really do like to identify that as a primary experience, a primary spiritual moment when working with clients, that is unlike anything I was trained for, anywhere in my training.

.....And it does seem to happen more, or a lot more often actually, with Maori and Pacific island clients than it does with the white clients. ..cultures in which the connection with the spiritual is much closer to awareness ...in which the divide between the living and the dead is much more porous than it is in traditional white construction of living and dying.

By *primary experience* John refers to something primordial, an experience that comes before the structures we put in place for everyday functioning, which is referred to in the psychoanalytic literature as secondary experience (Appel, 2000). John says that his training in psychotherapy did not prepare him for the spiritual experiences he now has with clients implying that cultural and spiritual perspectives were not included at that time and was perhaps thought to be outside the framework of psychotherapy. It would seem that he had learned about how to work with such experiences from other sources such as cultural traditions and beliefs about spirits and ancestors.

Moi, a Maori therapist described a more direct and conscious connection with the ancestors.

There is a Maori womanshe is not listening to her tupuna,(ancestors) and they are really trying to connect with her. All sorts of stuff is happening to open that up because she is very spiritual in that she sees and hears, has prophetic dreams, has psychic children, and has always known when things are going to happen. She is very angry that they haven't protected her from certain things. So I often hear the korero (conversation) in my ears that there is a man on her father's side who is wanting to connect with her about what happened when she was a child. That is not something I would do with every client. Often I have seen clients' parents who have passed over early, and when it feels appropriate I might say something like 'Your Dad is right here beside you now and he is really supportive in what you are doing.' I have to be careful how I language that too. With Maori clients it is often easier because they have a sense of their tupuna, their ancestors walking with them.

Moi says she is able to hear the ancestors in conversation within her which seems to be something she takes in her stride as if it comes naturally and is expected. It also reflects her spiritual and cultural beliefs in kaitiaki taonga or the role of guardianship of the ancestors.

Moi appears to hear things that the client does not and that seem to be somewhat distant

from the client's awareness implying something psychic, like a type of clairvoyant role, or being an intermediary between the living and the dead. By seeing the relatives of the client who have died, Moi implies that she has the ability to see beyond our everyday life into the realm of the dead. The dead also seem to use her to make themselves known to the living. In Maori culture where the divide between the living and the dead is more porous than that found in Western society, the dead are experienced as being actively involved in the lives of the living in the role of guardian (Orbell, 1995). Being able to see and interact with those who have died is an ability that is found in the literature of many shamanic traditions and indigenous cultures (Narby & Huxley 2001; Eliade 1964; Moon 2003; Castaneda 1971). Moi says she is careful how she brings what she sees into the therapeutic relationship, implying that it is not something normally expected from a therapist. A client with an appreciation for a Maori perspective makes it easier for her to bring in what she sees.

Moi reports that being able to see in this way, not only the dead but other figures, is something that is not always easy:

At times it is bloody scary because some people carry some nasty stuff around with them that they are not aware of. I had a few years ago, a client who was Dutch. She was so angry! I saw another face coming out of her face, and that was scary! It was not pleasant. That is what we would call someone who was carrying a kehua, a ghost, a nasty. They can take all shapes and forms. They might be in the form of an animal, or a reptile, or a person. So the experience with that woman was scary, really scary.

In this story Moi describes a time when she became aware of another face coming out of the client as in a vision or image. Moi makes meaning of that experience through a cultural interpretation relating to the Maori belief in ghosts or kehua, that are invisible to the human eye and yet are present and influence us (Orbell, 1995). Moi was frightened by what she saw perhaps viewing it as potentially dangerous to herself and the client. Although in the text there is no actual description of the other face Moi implies that it was related to the client's intense anger which the client disavowed. In the literature seeing disavowed experiences in other forms is found in shamanic traditions (Eliade, 1964), and in Process Work where it is associated with therapist's second attention.

When asked what happened after she saw the face Moi goes on to say how she was able to use what she saw in the work with the client.

I think because I noticed what was coming out of her, we were able to talk about what she might need to let go of in metaphysical terms. A lot of it was rage towards a certain person in her life. Then you question yourself whether you are going mad or not, because if I were to talk to a mental health professional, they would probably say I need some anti-psychotic medication.

By noticing the face and bringing it into the relationship Moi describes how she and the client were able to talk about the experience and use it in the therapeutic work by relating it to the client's everyday life. Making known what she sees to the client brings with it some doubts. Like John, Moi's role as psychotherapist means that the tendency to interpret what happened as the individual's neurosis is always present and may conflict with cultural significance. This conflict is perhaps one of the reasons many such experiences stay hidden within therapeutic circles.

Attuning to the guidance and wisdom within dreams and synchronicities

Dreams and synchronistic events have long been associated with spiritual phenomena. The view of dreams as containing information for the person's life and as wisdom and guidance from something beyond everyday life is found in a variety of literary sources since Biblical times and in the psychology of Jung (1961), Perls, (1969), Mindell (2000) and many others. Synchronicity is a term coined by Jung (1955) to refer to 'meaningful coincidences in time' (p.144). It refers to events that appear to have no overt causal links and were thought to be connected to the collective unconscious.

The texts reveal that just as some therapists are guided by the ancestors and spirit beings in their work, some are also guided by the client's dreams and synchronic events.

*I know that dreams that clients bring to work with in therapy frequently offer wonderful opportunities to invite the spiritual dimension and presence of the numinous.....
...especially arising out of the very first session, I will have a sense of being guided by the greater Other. The dream, the unconscious, the message bringer from the subconscious areas, is like an aligning and attuning. As a therapist I seek to stay aware of that guidance and wisdom.*

Anne views dreams as opportunities for guidance from a subconscious source, meaning a source of knowledge that is not yet available to everyday consciousness. By knowing about dreams in this way she implies knowing from experience. Anne seems to hold a belief that

dreams can emerge out of what she calls *the spiritual dimension*, that they are available as opportunities to experience something spiritual which she can choose to utilise. Anne has an intuitive sense of being guided by the information in the dream and uses this information to align and attune herself to something in the client's process that has a spiritual quality. Doing this is part of what it means for her to be a therapist. In the literature (Jung 1961, Mindell, 2001) dreams are well documented as containing information on a psychological as well as a spiritual level.

Jane goes on to say how she experiences dreams as something like a doorway into an experience of a big space where everyone is connected. She describes how this belief influences how she prepares herself for her clients.

....especially if I have not met them (the client) before ...is there anything in my night time dream, any pattern that might show up, relating to my relationship with the client? It is about trying to be aware of what is trying to wake up in me and what would be useful for the person I am working with. We share the same atmosphere ... and it is not just chance. There is a meaning to it that we don't yet know until we engage

One of the ways Jane connects with a new client is to check her own dreams the night before she meets them. She says her night time dreams are one of the ways she is able to discover the patterns present in her life that may also be present in her relationship with the client, implying that there is some connection between her dreams and the clients process, and that on some level they are all one. The information in her dreams is thought to be linked to the reason behind the client coming to see her. The idea of night time dreams as connecting to something spiritual is found in Jung's notion of dreams as emerging out of the collective unconscious and Freud's view that dreams were a royal road to the unconscious. By *shared atmosphere* Jane refers to the idea in Process Work of a larger dreaming field, or universal mind where all things are viewed as interconnected (Mindell 2000). It finds parallels in physics with Bohm's (1993) undivided universe and its implicate order.

As well as dreams, Anne added:

I notice how external circumstances, books that a person picks up, or comments made by clients and friends, and how it all starts to come together moving towards healing. This is what I believe to be divine intent. When I say healing, I mean wholeness."

Anne reveals her attitude towards events that exhibit synchronicity by coming together in a spontaneous and meaningful way. Anne interpreted these events as coming from a divine intention inferring something godlike with a particular purpose of bringing things together as in a process of healing. It is as if by being aware of synchronistic events Anne views herself as being open to and participating in larger divine purpose.

Summary

Participants' spiritual and cultural beliefs reveal how meaning is made of what is felt, sensed, heard or seen. Belief in something bigger than self is revealed as a reciprocal connection where participants felt loved, held, protected, challenged and guided by something other. The doorway into such a connection is through awareness of subtle body phenomena such as a feeling sense, inner hearing and images which reveal spiritual experience as embodied (Lakoff, 1999). This is different from spiritual experience as disembodied and transcendent found in some Western spiritual traditions. Participants revealed an openness to participating in and being affected by what happens. What happens seems to be intrinsically linked to the therapeutic work.

Participants' use of awareness and felt quality of experiences appear to be different to that normally experienced in traditional psychotherapy, in that they involve something like a third dimension or presence, which is interpreted as something divine, the bigger process or ancestor. This third dimension or presence is perceived as having an intention or life of its own which participants attune to. Experiences are described as being out of participants control and as something that happens to them. Being attuned to something bigger is not always easy. It involves personal courage and the development of trust in the unknown. A common belief about spiritual experience is that it is personal and private. What is noticeable in the extracts above is how often participants spoke about how the client confirmed what was happening revealing a shared subjective experience, even though in some cases there were different cultural beliefs.

Being still, silent, and open

Psychotherapy acknowledges the importance of therapists' quality of presence and the attitudes that they bring to their work as essential to the development of the therapeutic relationship. The ability of therapists to create a safe and holding environment for the client is at the core of the therapeutic process. This theme focuses on participants' attention and the personal qualities and attitudes they bring to their work which seem to reflect their spiritual beliefs. Anne describes ways of being present with the client which she said enabled her to be more aware of spiritual or numinous moments when they occurred.

I recognize they have been times when I have been inwardly still and more than usually open to the client's experience.also having no personal investment in the client's process but just waiting to see what will evolve ...Another word fundamental to the process is silence. I find that unless there is a silent... place between the client and me as a therapist these numinous moments don't seem to occur. ...

Anne says she notices four things in relation to spiritual phenomena and her presence with a client. These are: being inwardly still, being more than usually open to the clients experience, having no personal investment in the client's process, and having a silent space between herself and the client. By being inwardly still, Anne implies a lack of inner movement or thought, and being present with what is there. Being more than usually open to the client's process refers perhaps to her perception that spiritual phenomena require something more than usual attention, such as being open to something different from the norm. Perhaps there are other, more subtle things to be aware of that could otherwise be missed. By saying she has no personal investment in what happens, Anne implies a sense of detachment and a trust in a process that seems to have a direction of its own. Anne insists on the need for a silent place between her and the client as a prerequisite for numinous moments. A silent place refers not so much to physical space but rather to the intersubjective felt space between them, what Van Manen (1990) might call lived space. The silence of the lived space perhaps indicates a lack of disturbing emotions and thoughts within her and between herself and the client.

Anne goes on to say:

The process has been about gradually getting rid of limitations, expectations, and finding the eternal in the moment, not wanting to shift the client anywhere, but just allowing what is. It feels authentic.

Being present in the ways described above has been a gradual process of dropping things that would prevent Anne from finding *the eternal in the moment*. By *the eternal* she means that which exists forever (Oxford Dictionary on-line) as in not being bound by the limits of linear time. Finding the eternal in the moment seems to reflect Anne's spiritual belief in an immanent divine presence that infuses all things. This means that there is nothing to do but stay with what is present in the moment. By authentic, Anne implies genuineness or something that she feels is congruent and true for her.

Anne's belief in the value and potential of the present moment is found in the literature of psychotherapy (Perls, 1977) and also in spiritual and indigenous traditions where all of life is viewed as emerging out of and interconnected a greater Other, God, Tao, and Dreamtime. The process of attending that Anne describes is similar to that found in meditative practice, such as the Buddhist practice of mindfulness or bare attention where there is not so much thinking about what is happening but more attention is being given to what is happening in the present moment. It is also found in the Taoist notion of wu-wei or non-doing.

As well as stillness Moi describes how she attends to the client's process by using internal ears.

Just being still and listening and being really present and in the moment with the person, and whatever is going on for them..... Often it is just about turning on another set of ears. I often think of it as internal ears. So listening not only to yourself but what else is going on around you.In that stillness come the words, the clarity, the picture or the colour, yes!

Like Anne, Moi states the importance of being present to what is happening in the moment with the client, whatever that might be. When referring to spiritual phenomena Moi says she switches on a set of internal ears implying attention to inner voices. By attending to inner voices Moi refers to her attunement to guidance from ancestors. Moi uses the second person pronoun *you* when describing what she listens to, as if distancing herself from it or perhaps it is something she is shy to talk about in the context of psychotherapy. It is in the

stillness and the listening that Moi says different things come to her. Here, she refers to intuitive insights which appear in various ways such as through visual and auditory modes of perception.

In the following extract Jane reveals some of the attitudes she brings to how she attends to what is happening in the moment.

*I am a bit like a detective following these clues and am engaged in the mystery and I love that. ... following the mystery in the moment is what is exciting to me
.....Absolute curiosity I feel like a cat, curious as a cat. I want to know where this is taking us, what is the meaning trying to make itself known here?
It is very subtle...totally watching the feedback ...Looking and listening and feeling for what he is saying other than through words. Skimming the eyes, where are they looking? Are the eyes going backwards and forwards? everything is a potential doorway into dreaming ...lets go there, go into the unknown and bring the information in and use it. Everything is important, everything is valuable, nothing is a waste of time. ... This is my approach.*

Jane looks for clues that will reveal a way to go. It is the mystery, the not knowing that she loves and finds exciting in her work. Curiosity refers to a strong desire to know or learn something of an unusual or interesting nature (Oxford dictionary on-line). It is an attribute often associated with cats but is also related to the Zen notion of beginners mind. Jane describes how her curiosity enables her to explore answers to her questions about what is happening and its meaning. The sense of excitement and enthusiasm that she feels came though as she talked. It was reflected in her language, facial expression and body movements. By noticing and following client's non-verbal clues and paralanguage such as tone of voice, Jane implies that they are important sources of information for her. Rather than trying to make something of what comes up she seems to participate in unfolding it by following minimal clues and feedback. The ability to notice and follow clues in this way is also an important feature of Buddhist studies of perception.

Jane states that she views everything as a *potential doorway into dreaming*. By *dreaming* she refers to Process Work's term for sentient awareness which is associated with spiritual experience. Jane goes on to describe her approach as one of attending to all aspects of experience where everything that happens is of value to her and the client, implying that even the most difficult or outrageous experience is important and of interest. In Process

Work this refers to therapists' attitude of compassion and comes close to the notion of equanimity found in Buddhist Vipassana meditation. Equanimity refers to the ability "to accept whatever nature is pointing to in a given moment with a neutral and fair heart" (Goldstein, 1976 cited in Mindell, 1995, p.75).

Knowing with certainty

As well as attending, the texts reveal participants' different ways of knowing and making meaning when relating to ineffable experience. Carol said:

It goes with the real deep knowing, and certainty, yes!We just know, with certainty.I don't hear things or see things like others do. I sense things and trust them. I have a sense of the transpersonal in myself, and between myself and the client. I know that it is there always, but that it is especially present, is something that I simply sense. It is an experience that I have in my body. It is a certain state that my body is in, that I can sense and feel it..... It is like I have more sun, more light. I feel less dense and centred (as in feeling more centred as she becomes less dense). In that state there is no fear..... It is also something that happens in my aura which I can also sense.

Carol describes a way of knowing that is defined in the literature as synaesthetic experience that is, an experience of knowing that is located in the body senses (Abram 1997). It is different from intuition in that it is a body experience of simply knowing. Intuition refers to knowing something directly with a degree of certitude (Maclaurin 2005). It is not clear who Carol refers to by *we*. It could be referring to all therapists or perhaps to those who have an awareness of something spiritual. She identifies how she is different from others in that she senses things, rather than hearing and seeing things as perhaps a clairvoyant might do. Clairvoyance is the ability to see beyond normal sensory contact (Oxford dictionary on-line). Carol goes on to say that she knows something spiritual is present by a certain state her body is in. She is aware of subtle changes in her body, on a physical and energetic level which she interprets as something transpersonal. It is not separate but somehow infuses her senses and her energy field or aura. It is a state which holds no fear implying a familiarity and trust in what is happening.

Anne describes intuition as intrinsically linked to spiritual experience when she says:

It does mean that I need to trust my intuition as part of the spiritual process with a client. Heart intuition rather than the mind chatter I have in my head, which comes from a deeper and surer place. I trust its knowledge of timing and waiting.

Anne is emphatic about the place of intuitive knowing in spiritual processes with clients and the importance of trusting what she knows. She implies that thinking processes are insufficient when it came to spiritual processes. Rea (2001) found in his studies on intuition that using intuition implies a silencing of our thoughts and efforts and is dependant on our sensitivity to our internal experience. Anne inferred that her intuition has its own impulse or rhythm that she can trust. She trusts it because its source is within her as opposed to knowledge from external sources. Anne implies that intuition is more applicable to spiritual or ineffable experiences due to the subjective nature of such experiences. Anne associates intuitive knowing with the heart implying that intuition for her is about having a feeling sense about something, much like Carol described.

Summary

Participants describe the various ways in which being attuned to spiritual phenomena impacts on how they are present with clients. They speak of being in the moment with feeling attitudes of openness, detachment, curiosity, compassion, courage and trust, all of which are supported in the literature of spiritual traditions. Some can also be found in the psychotherapy literature and reflect similarities between psychotherapy and spiritual practice. It would seem that at times the practice of psychotherapy can look very much like a meditative practice as is acknowledged by some participants. Paying attention to the momentary experience is something that is practiced in both spiritual traditions and psychotherapy although their stated goals are different. I explore the idea of psychotherapy as a spiritual practice in the discussion chapter.

Participants reveal how experiencing involves intuitive and synaesthetic ways of knowing and understanding rather than intellectual knowledge and reasoning. These ways of knowing and understanding are different from knowing and understanding arrived at conceptually. In the discussion I explore the different ways of knowing and making meaning associated with spiritual experience and what they might mean for psychotherapy.

Summary of the findings

The findings revealed participants' spiritual experiences as involving the following:

- Experience of non-dual, no-boundary states of consciousness which engendered feelings of awe, reverence and delight where there was a feeling sense of oneness and interconnectness with all things. These experiences often had a numinous quality.
- Feeling guided, protected and loved by something bigger than themselves.
- Unexpected, surprising, and mysterious experiences that seemed to have a life of their own

Some of these experiences were described as they occurred in the personal life of participants, while others occurred within the therapeutic relationship. The experiences were considered to be spiritual due to their numinous quality and the feelings of awe they engendered, the spiritual beliefs of participants, the manner in which they occurred and their effects on the participant, the client and the therapeutic process.

The participants' responses to experiences varied. There were feelings of awe, freedom and ecstasy. Some spoke of feeling loved, held and unafraid while others were initially scared by what they saw and heard. Some were astonished at the unpredictable and psychic nature of events occurring within the psychotherapy setting, and were left a little disoriented, feeling as if they had to step out of their role. There was always the element of surprise and a sense of mystery. Some participants initially doubted what they were hearing or feeling, interpreting it as imagination or fantasy, but then went ahead into the experience itself. The initial hesitation seemed to be related to going into the unknown and feeling momentarily out of control as well as to possible interpretations of being neurotic. The events were experienced as being real in that they were embodied and could be felt by both participants and clients. Experiences seemed to emerge out of subtle changes in the body senses and the environment that were non-verbal. Participants were able to notice and pick up on subtle tendencies, using their awareness and intuitive or synaesthetic knowing. They believed the

feelings they were experiencing on a subtle body level originated from or pointed to something beyond themselves.

Participants describe particular dispositions and attitudes when relating to spiritual experience. These include being still, silent, and open to what is happening in the moment within themselves, the client, the relationship and the wider space or atmosphere. Participants described a sense of detachment from personal goals, surrendering the need to know and understand, enabling them to flow with what was present in the moment. Experiences associated with something spiritual seem to emerge after a period of waiting and observing with undifferentiated attention, not focused on anything in particular, much like that experienced in meditative states. This attention enabled participants to be present and connect more deeply with the client's process in the present moment.

Spiritual experiences appeared to have a timing, an energetic force or intention of their own that was beyond the everyday identity and control of participants. This was thought to be related to something like an intentional field that had information central to what was happening. The information took the work further and at times transformed participants' view of themselves and their practice. Being able to pick up on and use information within experiences meant that some participants viewed themselves as being of service to a larger whole or intent. In the course of this service, they had the ability to bring in what was yet inaccessible to the client, participating in an evolving process.

Phenomena central to the focus of this study were described as spiritual due to their non-linear, non-dual, non-physical, non-local, sentient nature, and the intense emotional responses of those who experienced them. They were experienced by some as having profound effects on both participants' and clients' lives and relationship. Experiences interpreted as spiritual reflected participants' beliefs in a divine presence or ancestor that was perceived as a source of knowledge and wisdom. Some also saw themselves as something like intermediaries bringing information from the dead to the living and facilitating communication between them.

Participants were able to describe what happened in detail even though the interview took place some time later. Spiritual experiences were felt to be real, to hold a depth of feeling and connection between client and participant and to bring meaning to the work.

From the findings, participants' spiritual experiences and beliefs appeared to influence the quality of their presence and the values they brought to their clinical practice. By paying particular attention to momentary experience, by a feeling sense of detachment, curiosity and compassion for all experience, participants revealed possible influences of spiritual beliefs and practice. It would seem that participants' spiritual experience and beliefs do influence how they approach psychotherapy. Issues relating to how spiritual phenomena are perceived and understood within the context of psychotherapy are the focus of the following discussion.

The themes outlined above reveal participants' spiritual experiences within personal and professional contexts. These experiences showed participants being aware of and using what was happening on subtle levels of body sensing. This meant that they trusted their intuitive knowing as a way to engage with meanings within dreams and synchronicities and were able to use their awareness to see how these meanings related to clients' processes.

Therapists' felt sense of something bigger than self meant that they were interested not only in the psychological level of the work, but also felt they were attuned to something more than everyday reality. The extracts revealed how they were able to engage with and make meaning of what happened and integrate it into their work with clients. How participants made it possible to integrate spiritual experience into their practice irrespective of their particular modality is explored further in the discussion chapter.

Chapter Five Discussion of Findings

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss how the spiritual experiences in my findings are supported or not supported in the literature. I explore the different philosophies and theories that influence the way we understand and make meaning of spiritual experience in psychotherapy and how these understandings and meanings can support and also limit the full experience of spiritual phenomena within psychotherapy.

The following discussion brings together the themes of the findings, relevant information from the literature, and my own thoughts and ideas that have emerged through discussions with colleagues, my supervisors, my dreams, that all those things that have been part of the unfolding process of this research. The discussion covers the following topics:

Therapists' awareness: in and out of time and space

Experiences of being beyond the boundaries of linear time and space are interpreted as spiritual due to certain qualities found in the experiences and their effects. Different interpretations of oneness experiences are explored and what they might mean for psychotherapy where the focus has traditionally been on the self as separate.

Being of service to a larger presence

Therapists' spiritual and cultural beliefs mean they are attuned to a larger presence, spirit beings or ancestors as they work. Different interpretations of experiences of being held and guided by a larger presence are explored in the literature and related to my findings. How therapists' spiritual beliefs are reflected in their practice is revealed and discussed in relation to the literature.

Finding eternity in a moment

Attending to what is happening in the present moment is essential to unfolding therapeutic process. How therapists' use their attention when attuning to spiritual phenomena is discussed using the delineation of first and second attention found in shamanic traditions.

Igniting the fires of creativity

Ineffable experience lends itself to many possible meanings and forms of expression. How spiritual experience relates to therapists' creativity and what that might mean for psychotherapy is explored.

Being in the flow of the river

Phenomenology invites us to return to the things themselves, to momentarily put aside cultural and social interpretation and be in contact with direct experience. I discuss the role of experiencing in bringing about meaning and how it relates to psychotherapy where meaning is also arrived at through conceptualization.

Therapists' awareness: in and out of time and space

The findings reveal therapists' experiences of non-dual states of consciousness or oneness experiences that are different from the experience of self as individual and separate. Such experiences are interpreted as spiritual due to their numinous quality, the feeling of awe they engender and the feeling sense of oneness with all things. I was interested in what oneness experience as described in the findings might mean for psychotherapy where the focus has traditionally been on the development of self as separate.

Phenomenological studies of oneness experiences as described in the findings are well documented in the literature where they are experienced by artists, lovers, and meditators, and are known to be at the heart of spiritual or mystical experiences (Eigen, 1998; Epstein, 1995; James, 1902; Mindell, 2000a; Underhill, 2002; Wilber, 1979). From a phenomenological perspective oneness experience occurs naturally and is part of what it means to be human. In the following discussion which relates to my findings, I explore the different meanings of oneness experience found in the literature of psychoanalysis and transpersonal psychology.

In the findings therapists described experiences where they were aware of the boundaries of self dropping away and of being momentarily in a state of oneness or no-self.

This movement from self to no-self is referred to in the literature as a shift in consciousness (Chirban 2000). The shift in consciousness from self to no-self is thought to be an experience where

“All activities that serve to define oneself are suspended, yet awareness remains open, clear and vibrant. For the duration of such experiences there is no self-consciousness, no self/other distinction, no trying to do or not-do, no aspiration, labeling, judgment or differentiation” (Gerald May cited in Chirban, 2000, p. 251).

There are different meanings made of the shift from self to no-self in psychotherapy. As mentioned earlier, Freud (1912) viewed experience of no-self or oneness as a regression to infantile helplessness which he thought emerged out of an individual’s fantasy and longing for objects from the past. Oneness experience was viewed as a merger with another where the sense of self and other dissolved into what Freud termed the ‘oceanic’ feeling. Chirban (2000) in her studies of oneness experience in non-clinical situations with meditators, artists and poets, added the idea of progressive oneness experience which is perceived as involving a shift in consciousness that enables the individual to be fully in the present moment without reference to longing for the lost past. Progressive oneness experience is thought to be related to ‘the capacity of a well integrated structured self being able to rescind its boundaries’ (p. 248). The stronger the boundaries the more capacity there is to drop them. She thought the movement between self and no-self can be a transformative process that is progressive, that is, it brings greater strength, resilience and cohesion to self. The individual may feel more alive. Progressive oneness experience may be one way to explain experiences in my findings where therapists reported such effects. Oneness experiences as relating to a well developed sense of self and as having positive effects are also found in the literature of transpersonal psychology (Maslow, 1964; Wilber, 1979)

Studies by Ogden (1992) on how experience is generated in infancy found oneness experience to be an essential aspect in the development of a sense of self. Ogden pointed to oneness experience as being located at a pre-symbolic sensory mode of experience which he termed the autistic- contiguous position. Oneness experience is thought to be “the sensory floor out of which the experience of self is generated” (p.4) Ogden thought oneness

experience was integral to the development of self throughout life, and shifted from being purely physiological in infancy to an experience that transcended the more organized and established aspects of self in adulthood (cited in Chibran 2000). By focusing on the pre-symbolic mode of experience, or the “sensory floor out of which experience is generated” Ogden comes close to similar descriptions of pre-symbolic experience found in spiritual traditions and transpersonal psychology but he does not place them within a spiritual context, perhaps due to the reductionism in his approach.

Ogden (1994) also studied oneness experience as it is perceived in the process of analysis. He drew on Winnicott’s (1969) ideas of oneness experience as occurring in the space between the self and other. Winnicott posited there is no such thing as a baby only a mother- baby entity. In the analytic setting Ogden (1994) thought that oneness experience occurred as the “the experiential base to which both analyst and analysand contribute and from which they individually draw in the process of generating their own experience of the analytic relationship” (p. 4) This form of oneness experience is called the analytic third. In the analytic third there is no separate analyst or analysand but an experience of “being simultaneously within and without of the intersubjectivity of analyst- analysand” (Ogden 1994, p.4). Making meaning of what happens in the analytic third is an essential part of the analytic process.

These different ways of thinking about the role of oneness experience have made important contributions to our understandings of how the individual can change and develop within therapeutic process. However the Cartesian view of reality as dualistic means that experiences are interpreted reductively and do not explain what is described in the findings where there is no ‘other’ and where awe and a sense of oneness with everything was felt. Contrasting meanings of oneness experience and self as separate are found in the literature of transpersonal psychotherapy which places the development of self within the context of the wider cosmos.

Wilber (1979) posited that oneness experience or what he termed “unity consciousness” is the original or basic ground of existence, the fundamental reality. He thought that the

boundaries that we form around ourselves are the way we learn to function in the everyday world of consensus reality but in doing so we become separated from the basic unity which is all around us. The self as separate is viewed as only one aspect of the totality of what it means to be human.

“When a person rediscovers that his deepest nature is one with the All, he is relieved of the burdens of time, of anxiety, of worry; he is released from the chains of alienation and separate-self existence. Seeing that the self and other are one he is released from the fear of life....” (Ken Wilber cited in Mindell 2000 p.545).

Wilber thought that in the process of developing our separate boundaried world of inside and outside, self and other, experiences of pure awareness or oneness become marginalized and left to the domain of mystics, drug addicts, artists or the mentally ill.

Similar ideas are found in both modern science and Eastern philosophy where fundamental reality is perceived as being not about boundaries and separate things but as “a non-dual network of inseparable patterns, a giant atom, a seamless coat of no-boundary” (Wilber 1979, p.40). From this perspective what John experienced may be interpreted as an experience of pure awareness or unity consciousness (Wilber 1979), quantum consciousness (Wolinsky, 1993), the Tao that cannot be spoken (Lao Tzu, 1963) or sentient awareness (Mindell 2000). It is possibly how experiences in the findings were felt as awe-inspiring and as having a numinous quality.

In Process Work experiences of self in everyday life and experience of sentient awareness or oneness are viewed as an awareness process, meaning that movement from self to no-self are aspects of a process. While both are always present one may be more in focus at any one time. The idea of self and no-self as always present is supported by Merleau Ponty (1968) who said that from a phenomenological perspective self and no-self are the obverse and reverse of each other that one does not exist without the other. It could be a way to understand how John was able to move beyond the boundaries of linear time and space while being aware of not knowing where his sense of ‘I’ was in that moment.

This movement between self and no-self comes close to Buddhist studies of what happens to the 'I' in a meditative state. From a Buddhist perspective there is no 'I' in the first place, no fixed or separate way of being. There is however a sense of an 'I' that arises and then dissolves (Lancaster, 1997 cited in Mindell, 2000. p.222). Buddhism believes the self is fluid, arising and then dissolving through a movement of awareness between self and no-self. Buddhists believe no-self is the fundamental reality out of which the self arises and then dissolves. The goal of oneness experience is to transcend the self rather than develop it and make it stronger. The reasons for this relate to the view of self as illusionary and the cause of suffering. By transcending self suffering is relieved.

While different world views mean that there are diverse ways of approaching experiences of oneness and separateness in psychotherapy, the findings and the literature suggest that they may be more complimentary than contradictory. Therapists interpreted moments of transcending self as spiritual without seeming contradiction to their particular modality perhaps indicating they were guided more by the nature and quality of the experience, the context within which it occurred and their beliefs about the nature of reality than by staying close to the orthodoxy governing their practice. Being guided in this way seemed to open therapists to diverse ways of understanding experiences that may otherwise not be available to them. It could also be seen that oneness experience viewed as only related to self and self in relationship to other, may limit the emergence of other possible meanings inherent within such experience.

There are many reasons for the world view that we hold. For example, the tendency to focus on self as separate could well be a way for some to avoid the perceived chaos and disorder within experiences of oneness even though spiritual traditions and phenomenology do reveal an inherent structure within direct experience. Focusing on self as separate may mean we lose touch with potentially ecstatic or terrifying experience of being connected to a larger whole. In the same way focusing only on the larger whole means we can lose touch with knowing and feeling our uniqueness and this can be a way to avoid the pain and uncertainty of human existence (Mindell 2000).

Oneness experience is viewed with some caution in psychotherapy where it is also associated with psychosis. Psychosis is an extreme state of consciousness where the individual experiences a loss of connection to everyday reality as well as to their bodies, and where their individual identity and autonomy is in question (Grof 1989). In such extreme states the individual not only loses a sense of self, but also an awareness of what is happening, living the imaginary as if real (Mindell 1988). Psychosis can be approached from many perspectives, biological, medical, psychological and spiritual. The extensive and groundbreaking work of Stanislav Grof and R D Laing (1989) into extreme states of consciousness, such as psychosis, means that these experiences can also be perceived from the perspective of spiritual awakening and as holding potential meaning for the individual's life.

Perhaps as practitioners, we could benefit from exploring our different ideas and beliefs about the nature of reality and how consciousness is formed rather than focusing on differences in theoretical backgrounds and techniques. Exploring diverse ideas about 'being' itself may invite deeper debate that relates to some of the beliefs that inform what we do. Perhaps one of the main reasons to explore spiritual experience further is that it can involve stepping through different realities and ways of understanding that may bring added richness and diversity to the practice of psychotherapy.

Being of service to a larger presence

The findings reveal therapists' spiritual and cultural beliefs as giving meaning and purpose to their work and influencing how experiences are understood within the therapeutic relationship. Therapists' beliefs meant that experiences were interpreted from spiritual and psychological perspectives. Spiritual experience was identified as a felt sense of a larger presence or God, wairua or ancestor, which reflected therapists' spiritual and cultural traditions. These traditions seemed to provide an added dimension, rather than a replacement for, psychological understanding. For example, Carol 'knew' that the feeling of love she felt for her client belonged to her mother countertransference but also felt a

particular quality that she interpreted as spiritual. While psychotherapy is a way of making meaning of experience, spiritual and cultural beliefs also seem to provide constructs for meaning and change within the therapeutic relationship. I next discuss the literature that pertains to the different meanings of therapists' spiritual and cultural beliefs in psychotherapy and how these meanings relate to my findings.

My findings reveal therapists' spiritual and cultural beliefs as attuning them to spirit beings, God, ancestors, larger presence or the process itself. Therapists' beliefs in something other than themselves and their clients meant that they were open and willing to be influenced and guided by what was perceived in the moment as is characteristic of relationships of devotion in spiritual traditions. Being available for what emerges in the moment is not new for psychotherapists who are moved and guided by clients' unconscious process through the dynamics of projection, projective identification and countertransference. It made me think about how therapists' availability to ancestors, spirit beings or larger presence relates to therapists' and clients' unconscious processes.

Some of the therapists described how their spiritual beliefs in a larger presence meant that they were attuned to the wider atmosphere and were like intermediaries or conduits for something to work through them. This was particularly evident in Moi's seeing and hearing ancestors who were perceived as having information for the client's process. Moi's beliefs in ancestors guiding the living meant that she could use what she heard and saw in a particular way to bring meaning to the therapeutic work just as therapists would normally use what they felt and sensed subjectively. One of the differences would seem to be that Moi's experience of and belief in the guidance of ancestors expands the meaning of clients' unconscious processes into the wider context of Maori culture. In the literature of Process Work this wider context is viewed as being a 'world channel experience'. The world channel is a term used to describe experiences that happen to us which relate to collective, social, cultural, environmental and political dimensions of life (Diamond and Spark 2004). The idea of world channel means that what is experienced is viewed as not only relating to individual psychology but is connected also to the wider field or atmosphere within which the work occurs, such as a cultural or spiritual context.

The idea of a wider field is perhaps a useful construct for considering experiences in the findings. Scientific studies in the nineteenth century included the discovery of electric and magnetic phenomena that could not be explained by the Newtonian mechanistic model of the world. Michael Faraday and Clerk Maxwell studied these magnetic forces and found they were more like fields of force, or electromagnetic fields, that had their own reality and could be studied without reference to material bodies. Later Einstein also recognized these electromagnetic fields as physical entities in their own right which could travel through empty space. They replaced Newtonian mechanics as the ultimate theory of natural phenomena involving ideas such as evolution and new ways of thinking about change, growth and development (Capra, 1982). Force fields are also found in Chinese tradition where they are referred to as dragon lines. In Australian Aboriginal culture they are called dream lines and in Maori tradition song lines. In spiritual traditions, phenomenology and psychology, fields are thought to be intentional and as generating experience. They can be experienced as creating and organizing us as much as we can organize them. They manifest in experiences such as dreams, body symptoms as well as through beliefs. Mindell (1992) said:

A field expresses itself in its beliefs, which create individual and groups identities. Even though a field is invisible and much larger than the people it moves, it manifests itself quite practically in our beliefs. We experience our values and visions as pressing us to do certain things, and we sense these values as grouping us together, creating identities. (p.16)

The concept of field is one way to view collective, social and spiritual elements in the therapeutic work that do not belong purely to individual psychology. It is perhaps a useful way to view experiences in the findings.

In the findings therapists said they could not explain what happened within the terms of the transference / countertransference dynamic. From the field perspective there is no conscious and unconscious, subject and object. Fields are unified and non-local, that is, all the elements of fields are entangled and cannot be located in any one place. From this view, in the therapeutic relationship it is impossible to know who does what to who as on a deeper level both therapist and client are intrinsically connected. One of the ways to include

the idea of force fields in therapeutic relationship is found in the literature of Process Work and the idea of dreaming up. Mindell (1987) developed a form of countertransference called 'dreaming up' based in the belief that a larger pattern or force is trying to express itself through our experiences as if what happens is governed by a myth or dream of its own. Dreaming up can be triggered by either therapists' or clients' edges which means that the distinction between transference and countertransference dissolves (Goodbread, 1997). Unlike countertransference in dreaming up nothing needs to be done about it, feeling it is enough. Perhaps dreaming up is a way to view the transpersonal love felt by both Carol and Anne in the findings.

The ideas of world channel and field as found in the literature of Process Work can be contrasted with interpretations of therapists' spiritual beliefs found in the literature of psychoanalysis. From this perspective seeing and hearing ancestors or spirit beings may be interpreted as visual or auditory disturbances relating to occult communication, uncanny experience or the individual having the gift of telepathy (Appel, 2000). Being of service to a larger presence may be perceived as the individual being delusional and as a way of avoiding responsibility and facing the realities of a difficult therapeutic process. Silverman (cited in Field, 2005) spoke about spiritual beliefs that can be used as a defense, a means 'to keep terror, hurtful or distressing thoughts at bay' and a way to avoid agency of one's actions (p.87). She warns against spiritual beliefs, as a quality residing in therapists which may impact on the goal of therapy where therapists make themselves available to be used by the client ruthlessly. Silverman said therapists in an analytic situation need to be able "to put the unbearable and unthinkable into language to enable understanding, thus allowing the unknowable to become known and understood" (p.87).

Silverman reminds us that therapists' spiritual beliefs can be problematic in therapy. She says they can leave the individual somewhat detached, soft and lacking robustness when confronted with distressing issues of the realities of everyday life. Individual bias means that just as psychological approaches can disavow spiritual beliefs so spiritual beliefs can disavow psychological development. These views contrast with those found in Simmond's (2004) study. Simmond's found that therapists' spiritual beliefs were not only a source of

comfort and a means of feeling held but also seemed to enhance therapist's courage to be with the harsh realities of everyday life and the unknown. This is reflected in my findings where therapists revealed a capacity and willingness to experience things that took them further than they normally would in their role as a therapist. It is as if their beliefs and sense of being of service to something larger than themselves enabled them to develop trust and participate in unfolding clients processes not knowing where they would lead. The findings reveal therapist's interest and curiosity in all the different aspects of clients' experiences as they revealed themselves in the moment. The different effects therapists' spiritual beliefs can have on the therapeutic work described by Silverman and Simmonds make me think about the connection between spiritual and psychological development. It would appear that it is where one aspect is somehow separate from the other that difficulties arise.

Although different interpretations of experience relating to spiritual and cultural beliefs have emerged since Freud, as is evident in the literature and the findings, therapists' reticence to talk about their spiritual beliefs is evident in the findings. The fear of criticism and being pathologised means that many spiritual experiences in psychotherapy remain hidden. Being of service to a larger presence means that therapists were aware of a larger intent incorporating what I have referred to as field phenomena into their work. By including a field dimension in their work there is a shift in the focus of therapy as being only on the individual and what happens between therapist and client.

Therapists' spiritual beliefs reflected in practice

The findings reveal therapists' spiritual beliefs as bringing certain qualities or attitudes to their work that may not otherwise be present in the practice of psychotherapy. These attitudes include patience, surrendering personal agendas, detachment from having to do something or achieving a goal, curiosity, fluidity, and compassion. These feeling attitudes are found in the literature of spiritual traditions and psychotherapy. In Process Work they are referred to as metaskills, or the deep spiritual attitudes and beliefs about life that permeate what we do as therapists (Mindell, 1995a). Metaskills are thought to influence the

atmosphere that is created as we work. In this discussion I explore some of the metaskills relating to spiritual experience and what they might mean for the practice of psychotherapy.

The findings revealed therapists waiting patiently for something to emerge. Therapists who discount spiritual experiences as pathological also commonly wait for something to emerge, but the findings reveal a difference in approach and outcome when therapists believe in the reality and usefulness of spiritual guidance. Patiently waiting includes a sense of detachment from having to achieve something. It implies having a still centre and being open to what is present in the moment. As therapists we can often feel the pressure to know what to do or to make an accurate interpretation and be successful in our work. This pressure can make it difficult to be still and to not know (Diamond and Sparks, 2004). The findings reveal that spiritual beliefs may assist therapists' ability to be still and patient, which seems to free the therapist from the pressure of having to know. Diamond and Sparks (2004) thought that by being less solution or outcome focused the therapist is able to surrender or give way to "the more meandering nature of the process" which allows for solutions to arise out of the momentary experience (p.117). Surrendering and being open to solutions that emerge out of experiences is reflected in my findings.

Stillness implies temporarily suspending thoughts about what is happening, and creating an open space to notice subtle phenomena as they appear. Stillness as creating an open space, rather than an empty one, is an essential element in the development of awareness in Taoist tradition (Mindell 2007), and is something that is also valued by therapists in the findings. As therapists, being still and waiting may mean we can experience ourselves as passive recipients of what happens, or as something being done to us perhaps leaving us with a sense of not being in control. The feeling of not being in control was spoken about by some therapists in the findings. From one perspective, being passive or losing a sense of control could be interpreted as related to personal incompetence or more frequently countertransference responses. In some spiritual traditions such as Taoism, passivity or non-doing (wu-wei) is a way to become empty, open, and receptive to whatever emerges and seems to be close to experiences in the findings.

Some therapists described how they let go their initial clinical interpretations of what was happening with clients and followed a more unknown path revealing fluidity or the ability to move, adapt, and flow with the process as it reveals itself (Mindell 1995). Fluidity is an ability that is associated with spontaneity and with not being too bound by programmes and ideas about how things should be. Being fluid is a way of being in life that is recommended by the Taoists, who suggest we become “fluid like a river in order to connect with the essence of change” (p.152). Having a fluid nature implies an inner stillness that allows the therapist to ride the waves of experience much as described in my findings. This does not mean that programmes and theories are not important, but rather that therapists have the capacity to drop them when necessary so as to experience something different or new.

The findings reveal therapists having different types of experiences that might in other circumstances be overlooked or interpreted as fantasy and delusions. These included more unusual and mysterious phenomena such as therapists feeling a sense of a larger presence or hearing inner voices. Noticing and valuing all experiences, both those that seem real, and those that seem dreamlike and ineffable and giving them equal attention, is what is termed in Process Work deep democracy, or compassion for all experience. This is somewhat different from the concept of empathy which is the ability to feel with someone or to feel into another’s position or story. In Process Work compassion is based on the idea that only when all aspects of experience are present and unfolded can an individual, relationship, or system work wisely (Mindell, 1995a). It implies not only an openness to all experience but also an ability to notice aspects of experience that we are normally not aware of, which are further from our everyday identity. Mindell thought that there needed to be a degree of accuracy in this awareness which could differentiate the various aspects of experience such as what is closer or further away from awareness. This is found also in Buddhism where compassion is not always about feeling warm towards another, but is rather an ability to be totally open to whatever is there (Trungpa, 1976), even if that means being challenging and direct.

Jane described how she was as “curious as a cat” and like a detective looking for clues which reflected her belief that something meaningful was trying to happen. Curiosity is

often associated with child-like questioning and being open to what is happening without pre-empting what it might be. It is a way staying present to the evolving experience or process of the moment. It is found in the Taoists notion of “beginner’s mind” which is developed through spiritual practice. Curiosity relating to a larger process and something trying to happen could be seen as an aspect of therapists’ spiritual practice.

The metaskills mentioned in this discussion relate particularly to therapists’ spiritual beliefs and experiences as revealed in the findings. They are also found in spiritual traditions as qualities and attitudes that are associated with spiritual practice. While it can be argued that stillness and patience, detachment, passivity, compassion, curiosity and fluidity can also be found in psychotherapy, therapists’ spiritual beliefs do seem to bring a different quality that may otherwise not be present. How these qualities and feeling attitudes are recognized and developed may make some differences to the atmosphere that is created within therapeutic relationships as well as to the effectiveness of therapeutic techniques.

Finding eternity in a moment

Although in psychotherapy the past is recognized as having an enormous influence on the present and is therefore the focus of attention for many therapists, the present or ‘the here and now’ has in more recent times become acknowledged as having the greatest power to bring about change (Stern, 2004, p. 3). Awareness of the potential richness of the present moment finds resonance with my findings where therapists focused their attention on what was happening there and then. Attending to the experience of the present moment is also central in the literature of Gestalt therapy, psychoanalysis, Process Work, and many other approaches. I was interested in exploring how therapists who have an interest in spiritual experience use their attention in the present moment, and how it might be similar to or different from attention that is usually found in psychotherapy.

The findings reveal therapists’ spiritual experience as emerging out of noticing subtle body experiences as they occurred. It is as if by catching these subtle or flickering experiences they became like a doorway to deeper meaning and change. How psychotherapists use their attention is an essential tool in unfolding momentary therapeutic process. Freud (1912) was

the first to recommend that analysts suspend the critical faculty of the mind and develop an evenly suspended attention as the technique that allowed analysts' unconscious processes to emerge. Freud admonished analysts to "suspend...judgments and give...impartial attention to everything there is to observe" and said that the analyst "should simply listen, and not bother about whether he is keeping anything in mind" (Freud, 1912 cited in Epstein 1984, p. 194) However the practice of suspending attempts to understand what is happening and giving equal and impartial attention to all experiences, is not so easy to achieve and it would seem that Freud did not devise a method for developing such attention. Bion (1970) thought "the capacity to forget, the ability to eschew desire and understanding must be regarded as an essential discipline for the psychoanalyst" (cited in Epstein, 1984, p.193) Bion did develop a series of exercises in an attempt to create a disciplined approach to attending which he viewed as essential to therapists maintaining their powers of observation. However the obvious difficulty of learning how to attend in a sustained manner is one of the reasons Epstein (1984) thought the development of therapists evenly suspended attention has been neglected in theory and practice.

It is interesting that what both Freud and Bion recommended comes close to meditative practices in spiritual traditions, more specifically the Buddhist practice of bare attention. Bare attention is defined by Epstein (1995) as "the clear and single minded awareness of what actually happens *to us* and *in us* at the successive moments of perception" (p.110). It is a way of paying attention to momentary experience where we focus on bare facts, allowing things to speak for themselves rather than focusing on our reactions to them or thoughts about them (Epstein 1995). Bare attention finds resonance in my findings where therapists noticed subtle phenomena happening to them, in them and around them without attempting to understand them. This attention meant that there were times in the findings when therapists spoke of being in something like a meditative state as they attended to what was happening in the present moment. This meditative- like state meant that they could be open to everything including experiences that emerged on subtle feeling levels. Mindell (2000) thought that opening up and being aware of everything is a way to experience the total Self and compared it to being able 'to detach from being only one little fish in the

pond and begin to identify with all the other fish as well as the process of change itself' (p. 34).

In many ways it is difficult to know from the findings if therapists' capacity to attend to the momentary experience is related to their training and experience as therapists or to their spiritual practice. Their cultural and spiritual beliefs however, meant that what they noticed and responded to may be different from the noticing and responding of those who do not have such beliefs. For example attending to subtle feelings, inner voices and images, and going further with them as Moi and John described, and interpreting them from a cultural perspective has a different outcome to inner voices that are interpreted clinically as relating to individual fantasy and hallucination. Both clinical and cultural interpretations were present and meant that therapists were able to describe their ineffable experience in terms of pathology as well as in cultural terms. While the experience may be described in the same way there are different and alternative interpretations and meanings made of them, as happens when present with momentary experience. How therapists chose which interpretation to take further seemed to be related to the client's feedback.

I was interested the number of times therapists described spiritual experience as emerging from attention to subtle, flickering sensations and body feelings, images and inner voices. By noticing these more unusual, ineffable and dream-like phenomena, therapists revealed a type of attention that is found in the literature of indigenous cultures and shamanic traditions which is called second attention (Castaneda, 1971). Second attention refers to the ability to notice the unusual, irrational and dreamlike aspects of experience that in everyday life tend to be overlooked. This type of attention is thought to enable the individual to catch subtle flickering experiences before they reach everyday consciousness and brings the individual closer to the essential quality of what is emerging (Mindell, 1993). In Process Work subtle feelings and flickering experiences are thought to be a doorway into a larger process. There is a belief that what comes into momentary awareness is potentially meaningful. Second attention could be how Moi was able to see another face coming from the client which she interpreted as a kehua (ghost). The findings and the literature reveal that developing something like second attention is useful in bringing awareness to relatively unknown, dream-like phenomena and following them.

It would seem from the findings and the literature, that attention to the moment is experienced as a rich source of information and meaning. Therapists' capacity for accessing this richness seems to be related to spiritual and cultural beliefs about the meaning of momentary experience as well as their training as psychotherapists. It would seem that with the influence of spiritual traditions and indigenous cultures, therapists are finding new ways to develop their ability to attend to what is emerging in the moment. This perhaps provides a pointer towards useful methods for the development of the techniques recommended by Freud and Bion, as a way to be fully present with the things themselves. It would seem that by turning to other traditions and learning from them, psychotherapy is generally being enriched.

Igniting the fires of creativity

One of the challenges for therapists in the study would seem to lie in translating what they experience non-verbally and subjectively into a form of expression that can be felt and understood without diminishing its essential qualities. The different ways they expressed what they experienced made me think about spiritual experience and its relationship to creativity. The findings reveal the numinous, noetic, and inexplicable qualities in spiritual experience that could only be pointed to through the use of language. In an attempt to capture the essence of what was felt, therapists used poetry, movement, imagery, and metaphor as a conduit through which the ineffable could be expressed. As the researcher I also turn to metaphor and poetry in an attempt to capture the essence of what emerged in the findings. Lakoff (1999) stated that metaphor is the means by which spirituality becomes passionate, that through metaphor "the vividness, intensity, and meaningfulness of ordinary experience becomes the basis of a passionate spirituality" (p.567). This vividness and intensity was something I experienced as I read and re-read the data in the texts and considered links between spirituality and creativity. I also thought that the way therapists expressed their experiences perhaps reflected the contribution of the humanities, literature, and the arts to psychotherapy in recent times. In this part of the discussion I explore the

place of spiritual experience in supporting therapists' creativity and what that might mean for psychotherapy.

How does spiritual experience relate to creativity? The findings reveal therapists' capacity to join with momentary experience and participate in the creation of something new such as an insight, or an expansion of awareness. This process is supported in the literature where spiritual experience is thought to provide a means by which individuals can connect with the creative energy that flows through all of life. Jobe (1995) pointed out two of the ways in which spiritual experience relates to creativity. The first is where the individual becomes a conduit for 'creative spirit', by stepping out of the way and allowing "divine inspiration" to do the work (p.34). Jobe noted how this approach has a long tradition in Ancient Greece and in Medieval European churches where artists created their work while regarding themselves as an agent of God, and never signed what was created. The sense of personal identity is somehow withheld in the attempt to make space for something unknown to emerge. Awareness is maintained to notice, shape and express what is emerging. This form of creativity and awareness reflects the relationship between the individual and the energy or spirit that is being expressed and is captured in the words of D.T Suzuki (1973) when referring to the Chinese artist:

"To become a bamboo and to forget that you are one with it while drawing it – this is the Zen of the bamboo, this is the moving with the rhythmic movement of the spirit which resides in the bamboo as well as in the artist himself" (p31).

Jobe (1995) believed that spiritual experience and creativity are also related through the desire to connect with a greater spirit or source. This other view refers to the individual's identity remaining in focus, and creativity emerging out of something like a meditation. Both of these ways of connecting with creativity through spiritual experience are reflected in my findings. They indicate that there is a rich resource inherent within therapists' experiences which could be helpful to use in psychotherapy where we are inclined to focus more on client's creativity while we engage with more linear methods of listening and interpreting.

While listening and interpreting are important for analyzing and understanding experiences, engaging in experiences and having them speak for themselves could contribute to a more congruent relationship with clients. In this study, both therapists and clients were changed as a result of what they experienced. By focusing too much on naming experiences there may be a tendency for therapists to relate to things as fixed and we may forget or miss the energy that permeates them and the creativity that lies within them. Mindell (1995a) stated that the tendency to miss the energy could make therapy seem somewhat static and dull. Therapists' spiritual experiences could be seen as a way to keep therapy and therapists alive and vital and be an antidote to burnout. Just as Lakoff (1999) thought that metaphor makes for a passionate spirituality, perhaps spiritual experience can contribute to a creative and passionate psychotherapy. As Mindell (1995a) stated:

...since healing, therapy and medicine continue to play important if limited roles in our interactions with people, they must combine with art, music, clowning, politics, group and religious experience to be useful and meaningful. Let's face it, anything less than fun burns out and bores creative therapists, driving them to give up a profession which could easily be exciting! (p.140)

Being in the flow of the river

As psychotherapists we have been trained to listen deeply to clients' processes in order to discover patterns that are emerging as clients talk and relate. By conceptualizing or using words to symbolize and represent what we notice and experience, meanings are constructed which over time bring about change. This process of making meaning is based in the belief that language is the way we give shape to our existence (Zeddies, 2000). The findings reveal therapists being involved in ineffable experiences where meaning also emerged from within the experience itself. Zen Buddhist, Suzuki (1973), believed that some experiences 'cannot be explained from the outside and indeed do not need to be explained at all. Meaning emerges from getting into the current of the experiences and allowing them to explain themselves' (cited in Mindell, 2000, p. 85).

Experiencing and conceptualizing what we experience can happen so quickly that it is often difficult to see any difference between them. They can also stand independent of each

other. We can conceptualise about something without experiencing it and have experiences that require no explanation. They are two different ways of symbolizing and making meaning of experience (Gendlin 1962). In this discussion I focus specifically on experiencing and meaning as they relate to my findings. I was interested in the nature of experiencing and what it might mean for psychotherapy

Experiencing refers to the subjective feeling of having an experience. It is “the raw, present, on-going functioning in us..... the concretely present flow of feelingthat can be accessed by turning our attention inward”(Gendlin 1962, p.10). In Process Work experiencing refers to being in the momentary process. Being in the momentary process can be like being in the flow of a river while at the same time standing on the banks observing how the river flows. Being in the flow of experience and being aware of what is happening is perhaps what Jane meant when she said that letting go and stepping into momentary experience involved her feelings as well as her thoughts about what was happening.

The literature of phenomenology reveals an interest in the nature of direct experience as it is perceived before being filtered through cultural and social influences and interpretations. Merleau-Ponty (1964) thought that by focusing on ‘the things themselves’ the world could be experienced as ‘a seething cauldron of potential meaning’, which ‘awakens a wild-flowering world and mind’ and is ‘a rediscovery of that brute mind which untamed by any culture, is asked to create culture anew’(p.181). These evocative metaphors evoke a sense of the unpredictable, unformulated nature and creative potential of direct experiencing which may be somewhat daunting as well as exciting for some therapists. It may also remind us of the potential danger and chaos often associated with mental illness and may be one reason therapists may more inclined to interpret experiences from the outside.

The transcripts reveal therapists’ capacity for direct experiencing and for participating in its unfolding. They did this by picking up on subtle feelings and allowing them to go further as if they had a life of their own. Jane spoke of being like a detective and having the curiosity and openness of a ‘beginners mind’ to follow and go more deeply into what was happening,

revealing specific qualities for being in experience, as is found in many mystical and shamanic traditions. What is the purpose of experiencing in this way?

Van Manen (1970) stated that being in direct experience with the world 'awakens the soul to its primordial reality', not so that we can explain it away, but 'to bring the mystery more fully into our presence' (p.50). By 'bringing the mystery more into our presence' Merleau-Ponty is perhaps implying that being aware of the mystery in everyday life is all that is required. Explaining it conceptually would be to diminish it much like the Tao that cannot be said. Another reason to value experiencing in psychotherapy can be found in shamanic traditions as Mindell (1993) discovered. He said:

Indigenous healers have taught me that the quality of life depends upon body sensations that are linked to dreams and the environment what I call the shaman's body. According to medicine people living in native settings around the world, and to mystical traditions, the shaman's dreaming body, when accessed, is a source of health, personal growth, good relationships and a sense of community. (p.3)

This is echoed in the transcripts where several therapists spoke of how what they experienced changed them and furthered the clients' process in immediate, unpredictable and transforming ways. Being in direct experience may seem contrary to our tendency as therapists to explain what we are experiencing making sense of it for ourselves and the clients process. While this is an important and effective way to work therapeutically we may tend to discount meanings that can emerge from experience. Some of the reasons for this could be the nature of experiencing itself.

Gendlin (1962) outlined some of the characteristics of experiencing that are pertinent to this study. In experiencing, meanings are subjective and felt. Being felt means they are not as precise or as easy to put into words as meaning arrived at through conceptualization. Experiencing implies any meaning is viewed as being one of many possible meanings which means putting aside preferences for certain outcomes and staying open to all possibilities. Experiencing implies that some meanings are fleeting or relevant for that particular moment. At another time similar experiences may mean something different. Also, the on-going and unfolding nature of experience can confuse theoretical discussions and may be one reason why the findings reveal therapists' experiences as holding a sense of

mystery as to how they came about. Therapists expressed an inability to place what happened within a theoretical context. Changes that occur experientially, such as a shift in consciousness, can happen quickly and have transforming effects that may take time to integrate. They may not be so easily observed from the outside. They can be missed or not valued as much as more observable behavioural changes.

Experiencing and conceptualizing can be viewed as different but complementary ways of bringing meaning and therapeutic change. One of the questions arising from this discussion is how much to conceptualise and when. Any tendency to conceptualise what is happening in the moment as a way of making meaning may result in loss of potential to perceive other possible meanings (Merleau Ponty, 1964). In many cases how much therapists conceptualize or experience may be related to preferred style of working. While some may prefer a more analytic style, others may have a more experiential style. Many may use a combination of both, as is observed in the findings.

Therapists' awareness of their subjective experiencing has become increasingly recognized as important in therapeutic relationships as a means of accessing clients' unconscious processes and bringing about change (Stolorow, R., Atwood, G., Orange, D., 1994). The findings suggest that therapists' spiritual and cultural beliefs meant that they went further into experiencing than they normally would, although it is unclear how much of their ability to do so is also related to their experience as therapists.

Ethical Considerations

This research, which focuses on spiritual experience of therapists in the therapeutic relationship, raises several interesting ethical considerations. Some of the difficulties in this area seem to arise especially in the West where spirituality remains separate or split off from everyday life, and is often exclusively associated with dogma and access to God or other divine entities. Some of the ethical questions that emerge from the findings relate to the way therapists make their spiritual beliefs and practice explicit to the client; and may extend to the way the therapy room is decorated; the dual roles of therapist and spiritual guide or teacher; and the appropriate time to work on a spiritual level with the client.

Other issues, which are not so specifically mentioned in this study, but which might be important, might concern the way the therapist relates to the client's spiritual world view and practice and whether it is appropriate for the therapist to prescribe meditation, chakra balancing and other alternative healing methods (Cortright, 1997). These are some of the issues that are part of on-going dialogue amongst psychotherapists and I will touch on them only briefly as they relate to my findings.

The transcripts reveal how some therapists were more explicit than others about their spiritual orientation. While some made it part of their introduction to new clients when appropriate, others had a photo of their spiritual teacher or guru in the room, or a crystal on the table. Some were more private and personal such as wearing a special ring, or meditating between clients. It would seem important to consider how far the therapist should go and the effects on the client who may have different spiritual orientation to the therapist

Cortright (1997) thought that being private or public is a personal responsibility of the therapist who needs to be alert to issues their disclosure might raise in the transference and countertransference. Much would depend on the client's spirituality and how they view the role of therapist as spiritual guide or teacher. Being more explicit perhaps means that the therapist needs to be more alert to possible transference issues relating to the therapist being seen as a spiritual authority, or being more advanced spiritually than the client.

It is not uncommon for a therapist to momentarily be in a teaching role with a client. Is this appropriate when the issue relates to something spiritual? Schupbach (2004) outlined several differences between the roles of therapist and spiritual teacher. She suggested that when they are viewed as roles they could be seen as emerging out of the momentary process, just as the therapist / client relationship can become parent/child when needed. The idea of different roles is a useful way to work with momentary experience. Schupbach stated that there was a need to rely on the therapist's integrity and state of awareness as to when these different roles were needed. My findings support her suggestion that one way to know when to work on a spiritual level would be when it is indicated by the client's process

and feedback as was revealed in Anne's experience with a client who was in a psychotic state.

Transpersonal psychotherapy with its holistic approach to clients' process raises questions about the usefulness of prescribing practices such as meditation and energy work such as chakra balancing or Reiki. Cortright (1997) suggested that the lack of clarity and rigor in transpersonal research and clinical practice could be one of the reasons that at times some prescriptive practices are experienced as a means of by-passing the hard work of depth psychotherapy. While this may be found in some cases my findings reveal therapists' interventions as emerging out of and adding depth to the therapeutic work.

The literature reveals several parallels between psychotherapy techniques and spiritual practice some of which are outlined in the literature review (Eigen, 1998; Epstein, 1995). I think the different ways spiritual experience emerges within psychotherapy as found in this study, mean that there will be on-going ethical issues to debate and discuss which contribute to our on-going learning. Each new situation or experience tends to bring with it different considerations which are not always covered by the established rules. Different paradigms imply different values and ways of thinking. As Grof (2000) stated in relation to transpersonal approaches to therapy:

"We develop asystem of values that is not based on conventional norms, precepts, commandments and fear of punishment, but on our knowledge and understanding of the universal order" (p.287).

It would seem from the ethical issues related to spiritual experience in psychotherapy raised by this study and in the literature, that it could be useful for therapists from different therapeutic approaches to have a forum to talk about concerns that emerge from what we experience, without fear of judgment and criticism. This would provide one way to further support new developments and uphold the integrity of the profession.

Summary of discussion

In this discussion I have explored relevant literature in relation to my findings. I have discussed how different world views mean that oneness experience is understood in various

ways which while contributing to diversity may add to some of the confusion amongst therapists as to their place in psychotherapy. Therapists seemed less concerned with orthodoxy or how things should be and more attuned to the momentary experience. I have explored how therapists' spiritual beliefs in a larger presence mean that what was experienced involved more than individual psychology. The idea of an intentional field was introduced as a possible way to perceive and understand what happened. There is an implication that the countertransference dynamic in therapeutic relationships may not go far enough to explain ineffable phenomena that can occur. The discussion points out how spiritual experiences serve to enhance therapists' creativity and may be a mean of keeping the work and the therapist alive and vital. Spiritual experience and beliefs mean that therapists bring different types of attention and specific attitudes to what they do that seem to enhance their ability to be open to momentary experience. I have briefly discussed how experiencing in psychotherapy can complement conceptualization as a way to bring about meaning and change. Finally, I outlined some of the ethical considerations involving therapists' spiritual experiences and beliefs.

Although there are diverse views within the literature as to the nature of spiritual experience and its origins, the findings from therapists with different therapeutic backgrounds reveal spiritual experience as being integrated into their practice. Therapists' spiritual experience and beliefs bring attitudes and techniques to psychotherapy that were not part of therapists' training. These include a development of a more lucid awareness that picks up subtle flickering tendencies of experience before they become known to the conscious mind and having a capacity to enter the flow of experience, supporting it to speak for itself. The literature reveals spiritual experience as described in the findings is reflected in other disciplines such as quantum physics, Eastern philosophy and shamanic traditions. In many ways it could be seen that spiritual experience in psychotherapy can be a bit like adding colour to black and white images. The image does not change but the addition of colour changes how it is experienced.

Chapter Six Conclusion

Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study is the enormous breadth of the topic of spiritual experience in psychotherapy. The scope of this research demanded I leave aside a number of interesting issues. I was interested to find that although there were several recent studies within psychotherapy that were a useful resource, all but one related to psychoanalytic psychotherapy. There seemed to be very few research studies available on spirituality from a transpersonal perspective although ideas and theories about it were plentiful, even overwhelming. This large amount of literature and few studies meant that I was in some ways covering new ground which may have limited the depth and scope of findings. The scope of the study meant that I was unable to do justice to spiritual traditions, psychotherapy traditions, physics or philosophy.

The participants were chosen for their interest in spiritual experience. They represented spiritual traditions of the East and West as well as indigenous cultures. Therapists from religious groups such as Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism or Islam were not directly represented, and could only be referred to in a theoretical sense. I do not discuss the literature of many other spiritual traditions, including the traditional understandings derived from my own Celtic origins. These groups may have added to the diversity of the experiences studied. By not including them however, it was easier to focus on spiritual experience from an individual's perspective, as secular and universal.

The meanings that have emerged from experiences in this study are only some of many possible meanings. These meanings will accordingly be understood in different ways by different people. This is an inevitable consequence of experiencing in this way, and is both a limitation and strength. It is a strength in that it makes the study an on-going evolving process rather than something finished and fixed. It may raise questions from which further

studies can be carried out. The limitation is that the findings may not be so readily applied to other situations.

Implications for supervision and training

One of the ways therapists said that they are able to make sense of what they experienced is to be able to talk to someone who could understand and assist them go further with the experiences. Many spoke of the difficulty of finding supervisors who had the awareness, attitudes and skill development to help them. Therapists' spiritual experience is often thought to be separate from the practice of psychotherapy and is sometimes viewed with mistrust and suspicion. Therapists withhold their experiences to avoid criticism and being pathologised. Some, who are supervisors themselves, spoke of how they enjoyed supervisees who were open to bringing spiritual experience to their sessions. There was an implication that having a supervisor who was open to all experiences was relieving and added to the quality and enjoyment of the supervisory process and the work with clients.

When therapists commented that what they were experiencing was not covered in their training, they seemed to be referring to training that would assist them to connect with, understand and use what was happening in the moment on an experiential level, particularly in situations that emerge out of a cultural context. They express a wish for training that is not only cognitive but includes ways of experiencing it directly. This would support current trends towards a multi-cultural approach to psychotherapy. What the findings reveal also implies therapists develop their awareness and ability to go further into experiences and unfold them. This may involve training which helps students explore their own altered states of consciousness. It also provides an opportunity for exploration of students' world views and discussion of different theories about reality in an open and trusting environment of learning.

The findings reveal that therapists from different paradigms: psychoanalysis, psychodynamic therapy, gestalt and transpersonal therapy were able to integrate their

spiritual experiences into their lives and work, perhaps reflecting growing trends for therapists to find ways to include spiritual experience while still maintaining their essential theoretical background. Perhaps what is happening in practice has yet to reach the minds and pens of theorists. Our thinking and understanding of spiritual experience is certainly changing and seems to be more accessible and appreciated now than ever before.

With the increased focus on phenomenology, the ideas in modern physics, more access to knowledge contained within the mysticism of the East and West, and the shamanic practices of indigenous cultures, more possibilities are available from which to view spiritual experiences in the therapeutic setting differently. However, we may have the tendency to approach ineffable experience that which is unknowable and mysterious, from the same need to know, understand, and conceptualize psychological phenomena. How we study and talk about spiritual experience so that the mysterious and unknowable is not reduced to concepts and formulations is one of the challenges for supervision and training in psychotherapy.

Possibilities for further research

This study focused on issues relating to the influence of therapists' spiritual experience and beliefs in practice. A further study could be comparative. It might examine and compare the work of therapists who have no interest in spiritual experience with the work of those who do.

I have touched on the nature of experiencing, what it means for therapeutic change and how that experience interfaces with languaging experience in an analytic sense. Further research into direct experiencing perhaps through studies of shamanic traditions, could be of interest in developing the scope of psychotherapy. Exploring ways to develop therapists' skills and capacity for experiencing could be of interest as well as studying the effects and benefits of having experience speak for itself.

I have explored the importance of therapists' awareness of process as they relate to spiritual and cultural perspectives. Further research into the development of therapists' awareness could be an interesting topic for further research. It may also assist clinical training programmes to review the place students' spiritual experience and beliefs have in the training.

Part of my interest in undertaking this study arose from wanting to know what was happening for therapists who, like myself, were in the middle years of their lives and who had practiced psychotherapy for more than 10 years. I was intrigued by Jung's assertion that successfully navigating the path through the middle years meant an encounter with spirituality and such things as our mortality, the meaning of our existence, and our relationship to God or spirit (Jung, 1961). Further research into ineffable experiences as we age and how they can be used to further the processes of transition remains of interest.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*

T S Elliot, Four Quartets:

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MEMORANDUM

Academic Services

To: Josie Goulding
From: **Madeline Banda**
Date: 6 April 2005
Subject: Ethics Application Number 05/52 «Project_Title» **Dream weaver: A hermeneutic enquiry into how spirituality influences the work of psychotherapists.**

Dear Josie

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

(AUTEC) at their meeting on 14 March 2005. Your ethics application is now approved for a period of three years until 6 April 2008.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit to AUTEC the following:

- A brief annual progress report indicating compliance with the ethical approval given using form EA2 which is available online at http://www.aut.ac.nz/research_showcase/pdf/appendix_g.doc , including a request for extension of the approval if the project will not be completed by the above expiry date;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3 which is available online at http://www.aut.ac.nz/research_showcase/pdf/appendix_h.doc . This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on «Expiry_Date» or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that any research undertaken under this approval is carried out within the parameters approved for your application. Any change to the research outside the parameters of this approval must be submitted to AUTEC for approval before that change is implemented.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all written and verbal correspondence with us. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 917 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of the Committee and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely



Madeline Banda

Executive Secretary

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: «Copy_Correspondence_to»«Student_Name» «Student_Email_Address»

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: March 2005

Project Title: The Dreaming Therapist: An investigation into how spirituality influences the work of psychotherapists

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study which focuses on the spirituality of the psychotherapist and the place it has in their work with clients. If after reading this sheet you find you are interested in being part of this inquiry please contact me by email Kayr@xtra.co.nz before the first of September.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to gather information about psychotherapists experience of spirituality and its place in the therapeutic relationship. Although there is an increase in literature about the spiritual aspects of our work as therapists, there appears to be little qualitative research in this area. I see this as a way to open to a part of psychotherapy that has been on the margins of the mainstream approaches. Also by brining in spirituality we may be assisted in developing a more multicultural psychotherapy in this post modern era.

How are people chosen to be asked to be part of the study?

I need to involve 6 – 8 psychotherapists, men and women, Maori and Pakeha, who have had 10 or more years experience as a therapist. All those who show an interest will be considered. I will choose some that I know and some I do not know. I am particularly interested in those who have a different focus to mine.

What happens in the study?

You will be asked to take part in an interview which will take approximately 1.5 hours at a time and place that is good for you. There may be a follow up interview to go further with some points. The interview will be taped and then transcribed. The text will be returned to you for review. You will be able to change whatever you are uncomfortable with at that time. The text will then be analyzed to discover emerging themes which will be compared to existing theory. When all participants' texts have been through this process the writing of the thesis will occur. A copy of the completed work will be made available if you wish to read it.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The main area of risk as far as I can see will be around the area of your anonymity. With a relatively small psychotherapeutic community in NZ you may be able to be identified by what you say. I realize too that some of you may wish to be known.

Also talking publicly about subjective experiences that are normally not so acceptable may cause some distress.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

I will to the best of my ability take care to disguise your information without destroying the meaning and context of what you say. I will consult with you about this at the first interview and again when you review the transcribed text. Confidentiality will also be a priority. If you have any discomfort after talking about your experiences, AUT provides three free counseling sessions

What are the benefits?

Besides giving you the opportunity to talk about your experience, you will become more aware of how your colleagues view this issue and what their experiences are. It may provide you with deeper understanding and insight into the place of spirituality within your work and how it impacts on you personally. I believe it will also contribute to the development of our thinking and understanding about the place of spirituality in psychotherapeutic practice and add to the scarce amount of research in this area.

How will my privacy be protected?

All identifiable names and details will be changed. You will be able to choose your own pseudonym and together we will go over your details to ensure privacy of information. I will take all possible measures to protect your anonymity and minimize the risk of recognition.

How do I join the study?

Let me know of your interest by using the contact details below and I will contact you.

What are the costs of participating in the project? (including time)

The only cost involved in your participation will be your time. However if we decide on a suitable place for the interview which you need to travel to I will reimburse your petrol expenses.

Opportunity to consider invitation

Please take your time to consider this invitation. I would be very happy to hear from you if you wish to go further.

Opportunity to receive feedback on results of research

As mentioned earlier you will have the opportunity to review the script of your interview and then the completed work will be made available to you if you wish.

Participant Concerns

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the project supervisor.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz , 917 9999 ext 8044.

Researcher Contact Details: Kay Ryan. C/- Aut Division of Public Health and Psychosocial Studies. Private Bag 92006 Auckland 1020. Email: Kayr@xtra.co.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details: Josie Goulding josie.goulding@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on
.....
AUTECH Reference number

Consent to Participation in Research

Title of Project: The Dreaming Therapist: An investigation how spirituality influences the work of the psychotherapist.

Project Supervisor: Josie Goulding

Researcher: Kay Ryan

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project (March 2005)
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that the interview will be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research.

Participant signature:

Participant name:

Participant Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on

AUTEC Reference number

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Typist Confidentiality Agreement

Title of Project: Dream Weavers: An investigation into how spirituality influences the work of psychotherapists.

Project Supervisor: Josie Goulding

Researcher(s): Kay Ryan

I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential. I understand that the contents of the tapes can only be discussed with the researchers. I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them while the work is in progress.

Typist's signature:

Typist's name:

Typist's Contact Details:
.....
.....
.....

Date

Project Supervisor Contact Details: josie.goulding@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on
<click here and type the date ethics approval was granted> **AUTEC Reference number**
<click here and type the AUTEC reference number>

