**St. Stephen's College**

# LIVING THE TENSION: DEEPENING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE THERAPIST'S EXPERIENCE WITH SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND POWER RELATIONS

by

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## Abstract

Research on therapists' experience of their own social identities and power relations in the therapeutic space is limited. This study provides an opening into the experience of three therapists who described living the tension of their own social identities and power relations so that space is created for the meeting of other. The researcher was also included as a coparticipant in the study. A hermeneutic phenomenological research approach was used to explore the psycho-theological layers in the research question and to deepen understanding of how therapists come to a practice attuned to the depth of meaning in this experience of meeting other. The existential categories of body, space, time, other, and selfhood were applied as a soft structure for shaping the semistructured interviews and for synthesizing and interpreting data. Findings are discussed as they relate to the existential categories and to the multidimensionality and complexity of power relations and social identity. Results also demonstrated that living the tension requires an ability to live in the vulnerability and strain of the tension. As a result of this study, therapists are encouraged to consider the meeting spaces and movements of social identity and power relations intrapsychically and interrelationally; as well as to consider how the meeting spaces and movements are sieved through these five existential categories. Insight into the meeting spaces and movements requires further complicating multicultural and cultural competency models in counselling so that tension in the therapeutic space can be embraced with flow and movement.

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## Chapter One: Roots of the Question

> [Feminist work] risks being undone and undermined by . . . young white privileged women who strive to create a narrative of feminism . . . that recenters the experience of materially privileged white females in ways that deny race and class differences. (bell hooks, 1994, p. 119)

> A researcher is called into his or her work, and that calling is through his or her complex, unconscious ties to the work, to those ties that have already made their claim upon the researcher. (Robert Romanyshyn, 2010, p. 284)

The above quote from bell hooks (1994) connects to an inner tension that I have been sensing for many years now: the tension wraps around both a fear and a desire. The fear is that my own social selves re-entrench systemic oppression within the therapeutic encounter. The desire is to create a therapeutic space that is not sterilized by the confines of static, socially constructed ideas of other and me. As a white, middle-class, Canadian, heterosexual, nearing middle-age woman striving to be a therapist in the world, I recognize I have certain power and privilege because I am a member of dominant social groupings. If unaddressed and misused, power and privilege have the potential to deny other's sense of self and power. To mitigate any such unconscious misuse, I seek to be vigilant to the social and power relations at play and the conditions that create a connection with the other.

Even so, in considering and owning potential misuse of power and privilege, I wrestle with the meaning of empowerment and the way it is realized. I never want to assume others are powerless and somehow disinherited from sources of power because of

their own social identities. This would be paternalistic and unethical. Burman's (2004) words set off the inner tuning fork: "Empowerment is a paradoxical enterprise that can function to empower the already empowered more than those positioned as in need of empowerment" (p. 297). In this way, attempts to empower others and manage power relations can be acts of domination cloaked in subordination.

Mixed in with my desire for creating a connection with other, I wonder where my own sense of self and power lies in this meeting space with other. The above quote by Robert Romanyshyn (2010) taps into a deeper layer of my concern for this research topic. I see that what drives my anti-oppression practice is complex. At times I hold an anxious sense of responsibility and feelings of shame and doubt in the encounter with other. I notice that I have a need to ensure others feel power so they stay safe in some way; and for me to feel safe, others need to feel power and also approve of me. If they are feeling powerful and equally approving of me, I feel harmony in the world. I am aware that these dynamics may influence the therapeutic space and potentially re-entrench privilege and inequities, and I want to address my privilege and inequities without what feels like an overcautious attempt at connecting with other.

These underlying needs point both to theological and psychological tasks. The tasks require cultivating an ability to move out of scripted patterns of relating to self and other, therein deepening my own understanding of how I show up in the therapeutic space. I am cautious in making these experiences transparent, as I do not want to centre attention on my privileged social identities. Nevertheless, I seek to understand what has at times become a taken-for-granted experience of my own social identities, and I have a

desire to deepen my understanding of the intrapsychic and interrelational dynamics at play in order to decentre my privileged social identities in the therapeutic space.

**Research Question and Choice of Methodology**

With the purpose of gaining insight and new ground in the midst of this wrestling, I specifically focused on the lifeworld[1] of therapists as they experience their own social identities and power relations in relationship to those of the other. What happens internally and externally with the other? More specifically, my primary research question asked the following: What is the therapists' experience of living the tension within their own social identities and power relations so that space is created for meeting of the other? I used a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach to explore the psycho-theological layers of this question and to deepen understanding of how therapists come to a practice attuned to the depth of meaning in this experience of meeting other.

The hermeneutic phenomenological method was a way to tap into understanding an experience that is often not talked about openly. A plethora of writing, research, and approaches about ways to work with diversity and difference in therapy exists. However, less literature seemingly exists that looks at both the inner experience of the therapist and its effect on creating a meeting space with other. I wanted to understand what is happening when therapists are experiencing their social selves and the power relations within the therapeutic encounter. Phenomenology offers a way to peer into the lived,

[1] The lifeworld is "the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations" (van Manen, 1990, p. 101) and "is the natural attitude of everyday life" (p. 7). There is debate about the ability of the researcher to "reveal the world as it really is"; however, investigating the lifeworld remains a "valuable method for uncovering at least some of the ways in which the natural attitude conceals our understanding of human nature" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 23).

everyday experience; hermeneutics invites reflection on the meanings inherent in that same experience.

I had the great privilege of interviewing three therapists—Anna, Claire, and Elena (pseudonyms)—who gravitated to the research question and exploration. I included myself as a coparticipant in this exploration and recognized that this research is deeply personal and connected to my desire to gain insight and shift my way of being. Thus, the research study was a journey and moving dialogue with the coparticipants, their stories, voices from literature, imagery, dreams, and daily interactions. A cyclical learning and wondering about this lifeworld of the therapist revealed the interrelational and intrapsychic movements and meeting spaces of social identity and power relations.

Throughout this study, I experienced the movements and creation of meaning in dialogue. Max van Manen (1990) stated,

> To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p. 18)

His statement sums up my research experience. Witnessing and giving voice to this lifeworld is not a finite experience. I hope that the following research offers the reader a glimpse into a certain aspect of the therapist's lifeworld and, at the same time, recognition that the therapist's engagement with this experience is a complex, unfolding process.

## Definition of Terms

The research question referenced terms that are used in a variety of contexts and interpreted in a plethora of ways. I have provided definitions of these terms as a way to clarify usage.

**Social identities.** For the purposes of this research study, I was interested in those social identities that are highly stigmatized and considered conventional. I am referring to "the 'big 7' stigmatized identities" (Moodley, 2007, p. 13). These are race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and age—those identified aspects of self that have been attributed with certain inferior or superior aspects by society, both historically and contextually. I recognized that oversimplifying identity by its social constructions could potentially reinforce the negative stereotypes that I aimed to see through; reinforcement was not my intent. The literature clearly indicated that identity is something to be looked at as dynamic, multidimensional, and shifting. In practice, however, I noticed how social identities are attributed with fixed descriptions and meanings that can serve both to uphold social justice causes and equally to re-entrench oppressive social locations. Catrina G. Brown (2012) recognized that the usage of social identities is inevitable and stated, "Although we need to avoid using categories of social identity as though they were natural, ahistorical, essential or unified, it is important that we preserve a tension between accepting, valuing, and rejecting these categories as they now exist" (p. 49). There is a tension in holding social identities as being both unified and porous. Gary Younge (2010) captured the tension of both the unified notion and the porous notion of social identities in his thoughtful questioning:

> At what point does refusing to acknowledge the importance of difference become a callous denial of human diversity, and when does stressing it become an indulgent and insidious obstruction to what could potentially unite us? When can identity inspire, how can it inflame, what drives it, whom does it empower and what does it enable them to do? (p. 5)

This refusing or overstressing of social identity captures a dynamic in living the tension.

Every discipline has something to say about the nature and make-up of social identities. Korostelina (2007) highlighted that this is a subject of immense controversy in social science: "Social identity has become a prism through which the most important aspects of social life are explored and assessed. At the same time, it is one of the most diffuse and loose concepts in social research" (p. 15). Jenkins (2004) even found the use of social identity redundant and out of date. In his view, "All human identities are by definition social identities" (p. 4); he prefers simply to use the word "identity" in his work. Recognizing the complex and at times contradictory definitions of social identity, I continue to find it a useful definition for capturing those aspects of identity that are commonly addressed and referred to through an anti-oppression lens and in my everyday life. It is these notions of social identity, and the manner in which they rub up against one another, which speak to the inner tension.

**Power relations.** The use of power relations in my research question recognizes power as being both relational and contextual. It is relational in the Foucauldian sense in that "power is productive, not possessed but exercised by individuals" (Levine-Rasky, 2011, p. 244). Foucault (1982) defined the nature of power as

> [A] total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions: it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. ("What Constitutes the Specific Nature of Power," para. 1)

This description of power highlights the complex relations of power and implies that power exists as a phenomenon in itself.

Contextually, Brown (2012), influenced by the field of social work, called for a further rethinking of how power is conceptualized. Traditionally we have looked at someone as either having power or not having power. Such duality can subjugate individuals who have been categorized with social identities linked to marginalization. In Levine-Rasky's (2011) words, "The problem is not what has power, but how power is practiced so as to effect political and social advantage" (p. 245). From a social justice lens, however, my interest is also "what and who have power"? The point here is that, given the complexity of power relations at play, equal playing fields rarely exist, which makes the focus on power's usage in our relations most poignant.

In this research study, I paid attention to how therapists experience their own power relations. As my locus of study was the interior experience of the therapist, I considered the intrapsychic and interrelational nature of power that is encountered. The contextuality of power was also necessarily integrated given that individuals, groups, and structures live certain power relations. Adherents to an anti-oppressive practice recognize that structural and historical hierarchies have given rise to extreme inequities in power.

This is no less true in the therapeutic encounter. According to Watts-Jones (2010), "Good therapy includes a lens for seeing the legacy of wounds and entitlements that run underground as well as those that surface in relationship" (p. 411). As well, Guilfoyle's (2003) exploration of power in therapy highlighted that though resistance or domination may not be overt in an encounter, this does not mean there is an absence of power because power is ever present (p. 334). Similarly, Levine-Rasky (2011) noted that power is contextual and complex and is accessed by members of both dominant and nondominant groups (pp. 244–245). As well, privileges are afforded to those who have a social identity attributed with power, such as white identity. Rather than trying to decontextualize power from its social and cultural environment, a futile exercise that masks deep inequities (Guilfoyle, 2003, p. 340; Watts-Jones, 2010, p. 411), my purpose was to gain insight into the essence of power, the circulation of power, the capacity of power to transform the therapist within, and the ways this then translates to the therapeutic space.

**Other.** In choosing the term other, my intention was not to create a separation or to engage in an act of "othering" or objectification that creates an "us and them" dichotomy. I used other to define the person(s) in the social context that I meet them. I resonate with Kluckholn and Murray's (as cited in Lartey, 2003) threefold statement, which reads, "Every human person is in certain respects: 1) Like all others; 2) Like some others; 3) Like no other" (p. 34). We are all common, different, and unique.

When reflecting on Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship, Linda Finlay (2011) captured the essence of the relationship of therapist and other:

> The *I-Thou* relationship is mutually revealing because recognizing the value of the other's personhood helps one's own authenticity and personhood come into renewed being . . . The direct experience of such "presence" of ourselves with another, is both comforting (in showing us we are not alone) and threatening (because we are challenged to be more). (p. 58)

There is mutuality in relationship. As well, recognition exists that both comfort and threat come with presence to another.

I appreciate Milton Mayeroff's (1965) usage of other. In his article, "On Caring," he noted, "The other in any particular instance of caring is always someone or something specific and not some 'generalized other'" (Mayeroff, 1965, p. 463). He clearly recognized mutual relationship. This moves away from seeing other as object and as something to be acted upon. As well, I do not simply define other as the client in the therapeutic context. Other could be a cultural context, an organization, an individual, or a global cause that faces the therapist head on within social circumstance.

**Therapist.** As alluded to above and for the purposes of this study, I defined therapist in the broader sense. I do not imagine my own professional work to be conducting therapy in a one-on-one setting or even in a group counselling endeavour. I see myself potentially in the role as a global therapist living in cross-cultural contexts, working in organizational development and community development, and building the capacity of organizations and communities to be responsive to social change. I deeply resonate with John Paul Lederach (2005) as he challenged notions of his own vocation in peacebuilding:

> What happens to peacebuilding practice if we shift from a guiding metaphor that we are providing professional services to one that we are engaged in a vocation to nurture constructive social change? . . . Rather than narrow and specialize, we expand how we view "services" in the context of the wider society and social change processes. Our designs and interventions are not defined so much by the parameters of particular process management skills but rather our technical skills are defined and fit into the horizons of wider change and the potential for building transformative relational spaces. (pp. 173–174)

Adapting this view to the definition for therapists, the therapist then relates to other with the desire for creating fertile space that moves collectively toward broad and transformative change. The vocation of therapist interfaces with global shifts and changes and requires whole new understandings of what it means to respond to the tensions that arise intrapsychically and interrelationally.

**Researcher's Leanings**

I recognize that I have a critical epistemology and that I hold a strong interest in structural analysis and social justice. I am conscious of how this orientation has potential to reduce a relational encounter to a highly individualized scientific act that sleuths out domination and subordination. Yet, anti-oppression practice remains a theological response to the inequities that exist; it is the primary lens that supports my way of being in the world. I believe that it is my responsibility to bring this critical lens to my therapeutic practice so as to remain congruent with my own evolving understandings of power, identity, and social justice. In addition to a social justice lens, I draw from Jungian theory as a way to know meaning by engaging with myths, dreams, and symbols. I

appreciate the mystery and the depth this lens provides. Image and art making are a means for integrating insights and for accessing inner wisdom.

Identification of these leanings draws attention, once more, to the tension that I noted at the outset. I yearn for social justice that brings equity and full participation for all; I also honour the unfolding power of Mystery. My desire for meeting the other in a space that is both active and mysterious is rooted in my theological beliefs. To be in authentic relationship with other is my deep desire; I accept that real encounters demand an aspect of challenge and risk.

My epistemological, ontological, and theological leanings can rub up against one another when working with power relations and social identities. By identifying and bringing forward my preunderstandings, I hope to open space wherein these rubbings and tensions can agitate the deeper and broader understandings and practices of the therapeutic encounter that I seek. In reference to hermeneutic researchers, Finlay (2012) highlighted the difficult process of identifying preunderstandings. She noted how researchers must "examine how their attitudes/values/behaviors affect the research process . . . and how their role as embodied researchers co-constitutes meaning" (Finlay, 2012, p. 179). Yet she wisely identified how "it is not enough simply to acknowledge and be aware of one's own preunderstandings and to somehow bracket these. The process is more complicated, paradoxical and layered" (Finlay, 2008, p. 17). Chapter 2 follows with my attempt, before gathering my data, to practice transparency and openness with my preunderstandings, even while recognizing that this practice is an ongoing and layered process. I attempted to continue with this practice throughout the research study by naming the preunderstandings that were driving various thoughts, beliefs, and actions.

## Chapter Two: Theological Reflection and Literature

My personal theology shapes the way I think and feel about living the tension within my own social identities and power relations, and it influences how I create space for the meeting of other. W. Paul Jones's (1989) book *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief* offered a helpful lens to understand my personal theology as it relates to this tension. Jones (1989) gave shape to five distinct theological worlds, which characterize an individual's theological underpinnings. According to his assessment tool, I resonate most strongly with Theological Worlds One and Two. Considerable oscillation can exist between these two worlds. In moments, I am in loyal service to my self-righteous anger about injustice (World Two), and in other times, I am in loyal service to my ethereal longing for reunion (World One). This swinging back and forth characterizes my functional theology. I struggle for balance and for making sense of the Mystery, my own deep longing, and of my search for that which underlies the injustice in the world. I will be building off this framework of the World One and World Two orientations, and in reflecting on the theological literature and on the theological task within my research question, I will try to gain sense of what is potentiated as these worlds rub against each other.

### World Two: Addressing Structured Inequity

When I engage with the other, I often begin with my World Two lens. I am drawn to social analysis that considers the ways in which relations of power result in either destructive or constructive change. Jones (1989) noted that the sociological term for World Two's conundrum is "structured inequality" (p. 59). In this view, society is structured by power imbalance, oppression, and conflict. World Two's greatest pain is

being caught and intertwined with "principalities and powers" (Jones, 1989, pp. 58–59), and if there is a belief in God, that "God knows, with special care, the orphan, the widow, the poor, for these are the expendable" (p. 66). This God favours good over evil and "clearly prefers the losers" (Jones, 1989, p. 66).

This theological view is also at work intrapsychically. Marjorie Hall Davis (2008), a pastoral counsellor, explored "how social systems can be a source of evil and how this affects the inner psychological systems of individuals" (pp. 665–666). She defined evil as "anything that is destructive of life or health or impairs potential, functioning, relationships, or creativity" (Davis, 2008, p. 666). Although social systems have the potential to do good, they often abuse power in favour of their own needs, which further structures inequality within society. Her work is, in part, inspired by the political theologian Walter Wink. I was first introduced to Walter Wink's work through my Mennonite education, which embedded the imperative of standing on the side of the oppressed and marginalized. Wink (2004), like Davis, believed in the possibility of the powers to be transformed. He wrote,

> It is tempting to regard these "principalities and powers" as simply evil. The good news is that God not only liberates us from the Powers, but can liberate the Powers as well. The gospel is not a dualistic myth of good and evil forces vying for ascendancy. It is a sublimely subtle drama about the intertwining of good and evil in all of historical reality. In their good aspect, the Powers are a bulwark against anarchy. They are a patron, repository, and inspirer of art. They inculcate values that encourage interdependency, mutual care and social cohesiveness. They encourage submission of personal desires to the general good of everyone.

> Their evil is not intrinsic, but rather the result of idolatry. Therefore they can be transformed. (Wink, 2004, p. 297)

Wink (2004) highlighted the potential for transformation within the annals of systems and powers. This potential transformation is further extended to the potential for transformation within the client (Davis, 2008). In her words, "Through engaging and transforming our inner systems, we also can access the insight, compassion, and courage to name and engage the external systems of our world that are sources of evil and suffering" (Davis, 2008, p. 680). It is a way in which the inner power imbalances are addressed so that one is able to engage the external power imbalances. This view of the "intertwining of good and evil in all of historical reality" (Wink, 2004, p. 297) aligns with the World Two lens and the structured power imbalances at play. It is thus World Two's theological task "to *know* reality and to *change* it" (Jones, 1989, p. 68) and to work for transformation.

The danger within the World Two orientation is that it can spawn a plethora of interpretations, for one can ask: Who are the oppressed? David W. Augsburger (2004) stated, "Hate is an equal opportunity obsession . . . We rarely see our own hate with objectivity, and we loyally refuse to see that of those we value and emulate" (pp. 28–29). This is where I must continually question righteous anger rooted in personal interpretations of structured inequity. Although I fully believe there are power imbalances, pointing the finger can also be an act of violence.

In my eagerness to pull apart systems and ideologies, I am not fully creating the space to meet the other. A continual state of analysis can reduce a relational encounter to a highly individualized scientific act that sleuths out domination and subordination. When

I wear my analytical hat, I can lose sight of the human being in front of me and instead move down a checklist—white/person of colour, male/female, rich/poor, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal, Christian/non-Christian, home-owner/homeless, and the list goes on. Once the internal or external imbalances have been labelled and critically analyzed, I am often left with a static, hopeless feeling, as well as a feeling of shame and anxious responsibility.

This managerial style links to Holland and Henriot's (1980) interpretative models of change, which include traditional, liberal, and radical approaches (p. 32). These models highlight my inclination to address power imbalance largely aligned with a liberal approach, one that emphasizes balance and the management of different parts to mechanically hold something together (Holland & Henriot, 1980, p. 36). My emphasis on differences between self and other may in fact be simply achieving a "stabilized resolution" (Holland & Henriot, 1980, p. 37), one that pacifies and accommodates as opposed to transforms. I realize that in the meeting space with other, I hold back from personal power in hopes of giving more power to the other. This attempt to manage power differentials can serve to address power imbalances; however, it may also be patronizing and disempowering to other. It is this managerial style that I want to transform into something new and useful. Recognition of the humanity in all of us may bring us closer to transformational justice and relationship.

**World One: Longing for Reunion and Belonging**

My World One residency also presents challenges as I live the tension in my social identities and power relations. In World One, Jones (1989) painted a picture of one who is caught by melancholic longings and haunted by isolation due to being "[c]aught

arbitrarily between two besetting realms, [where] we are *in* but not *of* either" (p. 46). Jones further described, "Life on such an in-between planet is a lonely affair" (p. 46); "such separation haunts one with a sense of dualism" (p. 49). In this sense, World One's dilemma is the pain in the very structures of existence (Jones, 1989, p. 51).

A predominant feeling throughout my life has been one of intense longing—an anxious homesickness and desire for belonging. I have a constant yearning for a harmonious place to call home. This struggle for reunion and urgent longing can, at times, be difficult to manage emotionally and sadly can be seduced into surface manifestations. The longing can become an addiction rather than a source of movement and energy. Mario Jacoby (1985), in his book *Longing for Paradise,* provided examples of rich archetypal imagery and myths surrounding this experience of separation from the Holy, or the Cosmos, and between heaven and earth. He wrote, "The break between the two realms is generally described as having been caused by an ethically dubious mythic event, which is nonetheless usually presented as necessary" (Jacoby, 1985, p. 18). The biblical Paradise, on an archetypal level, captures this harmonious state—a place free of conflict and in complete union with God. The idea of paradise having been lost then creates the longing within to be reunited with this peaceful existence.

My desire for a peaceful existence, free of discomfort, impedes an ability to meet other. I have a fear of conflict and rejection. I generally want to avoid activating unpleasant emotional responses and instead search for a harmonious balance. A peaceful outcome is preferred over agitated discord. Rita Nakashima Brock (1998) shone a light on how "theological systems that carry a longing for an unreal past tend to prohibit our honest grounding in and real acceptance of our life experiences" (p. 54). This desire for a

static paradisial-like state can lead to polite accommodation when engaging with the other. It may also lead to deference to ideas and opinions that do not resonate with my own values and experience. Thus, the theological task of World One is to seek a change of perspective, which would enable participating in life (Jones, 1989, p. 51). My participation would require living the tension of the "in-between-ness" of realms even though I experience the feeling of homelessness.

**Imagery Mirroring Theological Worldviews**

As a way to give visual expression to these theological orientations, I share imagery below that captures the essence of these experiences.

The image of Christ that captures the essence of World Two is one of strength and solidity. When travelling in Guatemala many years ago now, I was struck by the imagery of Christ depicted as a man of the people—strong, committed, and hard working. I recall one wooden carving in particular of Christ on the cross. His arms were boldly outstretched and his hands firmly planted were nearly the size of the head of the figure. In no way did this image conjure up sentiments of a weak man, but rather a figure of strength and earthly justice (see Figure 1).


*Figure 1*. Crucifix in Guatemala.

This image of Christ, which I encountered 15 years ago, continues to inspire me as I connect to my social justice values. In contrast, the ethereal figures in Byzantine icons capture my World One theological leanings. The elongated features and figures in icons reach for another dimension and capture holy, otherworldly longing (see Figure 2). Modern paintings often use a vanishing point to convey the message that objects become smaller and closer together with distance. Unlike modern paintings, the inversed perspective used in Byzantine icons do not create a vanishing point or reflect what our eyes see in the living world; instead, the lines and perspective used in the icons point to the viewer of the icon. Sendler (1981) wrote,

> The icon is the opposite of a Renaissance painting; it is not a window through which the mind must go to where a presence is encountered. In the icon, the represented world shines out toward the person who opens himself to receive it. (p. 127)

Icons are an invitation to gaze at beauty and also to be gazed at by the Spirit. While painting the icon below of St. John the Baptist, I embodied the longing and experienced the draw to a paradisial-like state. The differences between the wooden carving and the Byzantine icons capture the dualism in my theological thinking and expression.

*Figure 2*. Saint John the Baptist, by Tracy Wideman.

The antithetical imagery demonstrates how I tend to keep World One and World Two isolated from one another. In my reflection over the past years, I have been led to ask: What potential might be created if a stronger relationship existed between these two worlds in my vocation as a therapist who is seeking to be in touch with my experience of social identities and power relations? In their unredeemed dimensions, I see where World One requires a harmonious outcome and where World Two requires a removed scrutiny—which then leads to polite accommodation and paralytic, depressive shame. How can I integrate these worlds and ways of being so that my desire for both harmony and justice lead to a meeting space with—rather than a disconnection from—the other?

**A Third Way**

My fluctuations between World One and Two and the inherent theological tasks point to the need for an alternate approach. When reflecting on this polarity, I realized this tension of opposites also prevented me from considering the presence and purpose of a creative or spiritual dimension in encounters with other. The presence of creative and spiritual energy in the space offers additional layers to the encounter with other.[2] The idea that there is a life-giving presence in situations such as this pulls the intensity of the struggle between individuals and theologies into a larger context and sphere—this idea offers soulful purpose and imagination.

Dorothee Sölle (1990) stressed that dialogue must be without domination and must include mutual sharing of experience and risk the possibility of change (p. 178). Mutuality and engagement with other without domination are familiar practices to me. Risk, on the other hand, is a less utilized tool on my part. Risk carries an element of the unknown, similar to the concept of a creative and spiritual force. It offers a sense of mystery and imagination. Risk taking cannot be managed or kept in safe manageable parts. Risk requires an openness to creativity and spontaneity in the moment.

The idea of conscious risk taking and of the presence of a creative, spiritual presence captures me. I am inspired by John Paul Lederach's (2005) writing on imagination and risk in peacebuilding and social change processes. Although his field of work differs from the therapeutic realm, I found his writing related to the research question insightful. His experiences in peace building and conflict situations highlighted

[2] Usage of "creative and spiritual energy" is my attempt to convey my relationship with a life-giving, empowering and imaginative force. This energy calls for participation and commitment to liberating the past, engaging the here and now, and creating a transformational future. Creative and spiritual energy inspires me to live openly and relationally.

a transcendent function that does not rely on learned technical skills. In Lederach's (2005) words,

> Commitment to relationship always entails risk. Sitting in the messy ambiguity of complexity while refusing to frame it in dualistic terms requires risk. Belief that creativity can actually happen is an act of risk . . . But what exactly is risk? Risk is mystery. It requires a journey. Risk means we take a step toward and into the unknown. By definition, risk accepts vulnerability and lets go of the need to a priori control the process or the outcome of human affairs. (p. 163)

Risk taking provides no assurances. "Taking" in the risk requires a space where mutuality exists so that vulnerability can be given and received. How can one engage in connection if the conditions for openness and vulnerability are not present? In circumstances like this, the risk taking would involve being open and trusting of the creative spirit in the conversation. In John O'Donohue's (1999) words, "We should not see our vulnerability as something we need to hide or get over. The slow and difficult work of living out your vulnerability holds you in the flow of life" (p. 154). Missteps and discomfort are sure to accompany the path of vulnerability and risk taking, but maintaining the status quo in fear of upsetting the balance closes the door firmly to opportunities for movement.

I studied Byzantine iconography for a period of 5 years during a chaotic time in my life. I found the structure highly comforting. The practice had clear rules, and I followed the tradition by the book. When I entered the Art Therapy Master's program at St. Stephen's College, I began to loosen myself from the highly structured rules of iconography. It was difficult at first, but I recall my rite of passage into risk taking through art. This practice of vulnerability and risk taking has expanded my imagination

and created possibilities in my art making as represented by the mythical phoenix, which emerged in one of my studio classes (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3*. Phoenix, by Tracy Wideman.

> Reach out to those you fear.
>
> Touch the heart of complexity.
>
> Imagine beyond what is seen.
>
> Risk vulnerability one step at a time. (Lederach, 2005, p. 177)

In my search to understand the tools and approaches required to create a meeting space with other, I often do not give conscious consideration to the presence of an intangible mystery or to the role of risk taking. Whether individuals are similar or different in their social identities, positions, and experiences, risk taking has the potential

to create a space of greater depth and understanding. A mysterious creative force expands the experience beyond self and other. What happens in the encounter, whether deemed positive or negative, is not held captive in a time and place; something is freed and becomes an experience in the larger story. Considering mutuality in relationship with this spiritual and creative energy begins to open up a pathway wherein a deeper level of trust becomes known. This trust allows me to be with this energy in life, further shaping my encounters with the other.

The idea that a creative force is present in situations such as this pulls the intensity of the inner experience and the meeting space between individuals into a larger context and sphere. It imbues the situation with a sense of timelessness and places the encounter in a larger story. As a therapist in training, I have had to hold a tendency towards wanting to achieve a peaceful and harmonious resolution in that specific time and place with other. This desire for time-bound resolutions cuts off the presence of creative and spiritual energy in these situations and prevents me from seeing the other.

I see where my perceived differences and overly scientific analysis have burdened the meeting with other with inaccuracy, and thus prevented mutuality. The radical model proposed by Holland and Henriot (1980) emphasized creativity and powerful participation: "As a work of art, society is constructed in dialogue, shaped by community, and grows out of its members' dreams, myths and visions. Such an emphasis opposes the bureaucratic management and administrative values of mature liberalism" (p. 39). Transformational justice calls for creativity, new imagery to be created, and old associations to be challenged. Holland and Henriot (1980) further noted the potential of analytical tools stripping away life force:

> [I]f the analysis breaks a living body into its component parts, it risks destroying its creative life. If a social analyst takes away life, what will return it—at least in social terms? That task falls to the *artist* . . . We believe that the artistic impulse is the creative force in modern civilization. It is the spiritual force from which vision and energy flow. While we need to analyze society with scientific rigor, we must be wary of destroying that impulse. (p. 90)

Creative acts are not bound by managerial and scientific techniques. Rather, they have the potential to bring about raw transformation. My growth in belief around that statement has increased through the creative acts undertaken for this thesis. The creative process asked that I suspend the analysis and be open to new interpretations. I appreciate Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer's (1994) approach in their book, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, which begins with feelings and imagery. They wisely stated, "When the cultural imperative to be in control grabs hold of our interpretive processes, we are susceptible to two feelings, anger and depression" (Killen & De Beer, 1994, p. 31). I would also add that overindulgence in social analysis and desire for pacified states also leave one with anger, depression, and little opportunity for movement.

Vulnerability is not easy. Venturing into the unknown triggers fear and discomfort. I fear offending, making mistakes, being discounted, hurting someone, and/or being hurt. But all of these fears maintain static relations. By limiting my voice and playing safe, I abdicate responsibility.

Risk taking and imaginative engagement includes incorporating one's personal theology. Although my theology can create limitations, there are also redemptive qualities to my World One and World Two inclinations. I can bring these seemingly

conflicted parts of myself into the space with other and join both my loyal service to equity and to longing. Equity keeps me committed to justice, and longing keeps me searching for soul. Exploration of alternate starting points for theological reflection, while being mindful of my World One and World Two residencies, creates the potential for fresh interpretations; this thesis is a way to circulate my preunderstandings and prejudgments. The solid, wooden Christ figure in Guatemala and the ethereal saints of Byzantine icons in dialogue can bring about new ways of seeing, relating, and growing. The addition of a human-legged phoenix to the dialogue loosens the dualism between the theological worlds. Herein lies the potential of something new to emerge within the experience of self and other.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

Minimal literature was found about the interior experience of the therapist and about how therapists experience and navigate their own social identities and power relations in efforts to create a meeting with other; however, significant material was found about how these two factors relate generally to the therapeutic context and social work practice. These specific references to issues of power relations and social identity were included in this review. As well, attention was paid to implications of power relations and social identity for professional and ethical practice in the therapist–client relationship.

### Literature on Subjects Related to the Research Question

Generally, the literature focused on the dynamic and ever-present nature of power and on the multidimensionality and complexity of identity—all highlighting the need for a more complex approach to problems often stymied by oversimplified notions of identity and power. Topics within the literature also pointed to ways in which therapists engage with their social identities and power relations in creating a meeting space for other. Intersectionality and postmodern theory, in particular, were at the forefront in the literature as they tend to the multidimensionality of identity and interplay of power relations in psychotherapy. In particular, intersectionality and postmodern theory challenged objectifying notions of social identity and shone a light on the subjugated realities that counter totalizing narratives (Burman, 2004; Burt, 2012; Chantler, 2005; Cheshire, 2013; Collins, 2014; Levine-Rasky, 2009; Moodley, 2007; Salem, 2014; Talwar, 2010). Social justice philosophy and practice were also themes threading through the literature, and these themes offered general insights into how therapeutic practice can

bring about authentic relationship (Brown, 2012; Reynolds, 2014; Watts-Jones, 2010). It is my hope that this research study will add to the literature by offering insights into the complexity of the therapists' interior experience, thereby contributing to therapeutic practice in a way that transforms manners of being in relationship with both self and other.

**Power relations.** A primary theme in the literature was the historical and current role of power and misuse of power in therapeutic encounters with clients. As per the definition provided in Chapter 1, power in a Foucauldian sense is seen as "always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (Foucault, 1982, "What Constitutes the Specific Nature of Power," para. 1). Lynch (2011) wrote, "[Foucault] observed that in actual fact, power arises in all kinds of relationships, and can be built up from the bottom of a pyramid (or any structure)" (p. 13). It is not a static energy. Sparks (2014) also looked to Michel Foucault to define this relational view of power:

> In this relational view, power is not necessarily bad, but neither can it be dissolved "in the utopia of completely transparent communication" (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 298). Rather than attempting to "flatten" hierarchy or eliminate differences in power, Foucault urges explicit negotiation of power by developing "the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible" (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 298). (p. 18)

This theory of power posits that we are embedded in a dynamic and interconnected web of relations: "Power is not a monolithic entity, but a relational transaction embedded in

discourses that may support or inhibit dialogue" (Sparks, 2014, p. 18). This draws attention to the way in which power lives within. Paulo Freire (1970) drew attention to the way in which oppressor–oppressee relations live within us as well as in the outside world (p. 48). In this sense, power is not something that happens only between beings, but it is internalized and plays within the intrapsychic space. This psychological dimension is explained by Anderson and Galinsky (2006):

> Because power, by definition, is a structural and relational concept, the sense of power is anchored in relational experiences and is a psychological extension of the socio-structural landscape. The sense of power can be activated whenever cues to the possession of power are implied, consciously or non-consciously, in the environment or when past experiences with power are recalled (Chen et al., 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003). Once activated, the sense of power has been shown to influence individuals' behavior in meaningful and predictable ways. (p. 514)

The experience of power is thus activated through relations, which has an impact on how persons perceive their sense of power and ability to act.

This view of power has implications for therapeutic practice as it recognizes a living interplay of power relations and the way that the therapist lives with these relations. Roberts (2005), informed by Foucault, explained how knowledge in the mental health field is "not to be understood as universal, atemporal and objective; they have not emerged from within a 'neutral space' that is somehow 'outside' of the history of a particular culture and society and therefore divorced from the political concerns" (p. 37). Experience of power and relations of power are embedded within a context.

The therapist–client relationship is a structured power relation within a particular context. Chantler (2005) stated, "The power differences between therapist and client are an inherent part of the relationship—despite attempts to equalise it" (p. 247). Guilfoyle (2003) shared his concerns about concealing this power relation:

> Power is concealed when it is discursively detached from the socio-political and cultural context, seemingly something an individual (i.e., the therapist) can choose to avoid or eject. By mis-locating power between local speaking participants, the inheritance of power—and the therapist's status as heir—is concealed. (p. 340)

As the therapists are heir to this power, he stated, "Therapeutic participants inherit a power relation that cannot be undone by local intentions or practice" (Guilfoyle, 2003, p. 340). Privileges are afforded to those who have a social identity attributed with privilege and misuse of power, such as white identity. Thus, any attempt to decontextualize power from its social and cultural environment in therapeutic practice is dangerous and potentially masking deep inequities (Guilfoyle, 2003, p. 340; Watts-Jones, 2010, p. 411). In Besley's (2002) view, "Therapy has not considered the more general problematics of power, both its repressive and constitutive aspects" (p. 133). Further to this, she wrote,

> Therapists must always assume that they are participating in domains of power and knowledge and are often involved in questions of social control. On this view, therapists must work to demystify and unmask the hidden power relations implicated in their techniques and practices. (Besley, 2002, p. 134)

Decontextualization of power in the therapeutic space can lead to therapeutic transgressions. The therapist must be attuned to the workings of social control, which are masked and even normalized through a decontextualization of power.

I have often heard therapists say that they make aims to level out the power dynamic in the therapeutic context. My interpretation from the literature, however, is that this has a detrimental effect. I appreciated Chantler's (2005) clarity around this dynamic in her statement about ways to address power relations in therapy: "There is no neutral position—for neutrality is often confused with a tacit acceptance of the status quo and existing power relations" (p. 254). By claiming neutrality, the therapist may in fact be dismissing the contextual factors that continue to perpetuate clients' views of themselves and that cement the power relation between therapist and client in a way that does not allow for power to be exercised in its relationality.

This structured power relation, however, does not mean that the client is powerless and "subjugated to a therapist's preferred discursive practices" (Guilfoyle, 2003, p. 341). Guilfoyle (2003) pointed out that use of power does not necessarily mean oppression or domination (p. 334). From a Foucauldian perspective, Roberts (2005) shared that, in mental health relationships,

> The client is invited to observe and monitor their own thoughts and feelings and, on the basis of the psychotherapist's theoretical framework, adjudicate for themselves which are to be understood as "normal" and "abnormal," and to regulate their thoughts, feelings and behaviour accordingly. (p. 37)

The point is that the practitioner is consciously ensuring the client does not become a static subject in the power relation. Roberts (2005) further shared, "Foucault's work can

help mental health professionals to become aware of the importance of understanding psychiatric discourses, categorizations and presuppositions as historically and politically constituted and therefore as subject to continual revision" (p. 40). This point is critical in relation to the research question as it highlights how the social identities that exist in the therapeutic space are wrapped in the container of this therapist–client power relation in a social, cultural, and historical context, and within this relation, the use of power can be used constructively.

**Multidimensionality and complexity of identity.** Within the dynamic and complex nature of power, the literature emphasized the dynamic and multidimensional nature of identity (Brown, 2012; Cheshire, 2013; Levine-Rasky, 2011; Talwar, 2010). Cheshire (2013) noted that a movement in the field of psychotherapy is presently occurring, which is gravitating to models that acknowledge the complexity of identity (p. 8). Cheshire's (2013) specific concern was in relation to lesbian, gay, and bisexual social identities, which traditionally have been taught in counselling through specialized courses or through a multiculturalism model (p. 4). The literature highlighted the negative impact of fixed identities and the dangers of simplistic understandings of multiculturalism, diversity, and cultural competency in therapy, which box in individuals and groups (Cheshire, 2013; Moodley, 2007). This literature will be reviewed later in this chapter.

There is a danger in fixing notions of social identity. Talwar (2010) noted identity can be understood both socially and psychologically, and because more attention has been paid to the latter in therapeutic circles, social identity needs to be better understood in order to acknowledge the socialization of power and privilege (p. 12). Scholars and

academics have warned about the essentializing and categorization of identity (Brown, 2012; Cheshire, 2013; Levine-Rasky, 2009; Moodley, 2007; Talwar, 2010). Interpretation of identity as unified may keep persons and groups in oppressed positions, as discussed by Cheshire (2013). Hodges (2011) explained how queer theory shines a light on "the identity categories we routinely use such as lesbian/gay or straight are social and cultural products which bear the traces of culture, power, politics and history *within* them" (p. 36). As well, a clear warning of the impact of essentializing social difference is stated by Brown (2012):

> Aside from the fractiousness, and immobilizing of possible social action, which others have identified as a limitation, the totalizing focus on difference is objectifying, and othering. People are positioned as insiders and outsiders, and those most marginalized are reified in these positions as others. To always be positioned outside the center is to stay at the margins. Rather than challenging the center, it freeze frames the preconstituted categories of the haves and the have nots as though it could never be any other way. (p. 47)

As noted in Chapter 2, this approach of compartmentalizing identities can be managerial in nature and can reduce individuals to static boxes versus dynamic, changing, and complex beings. Frozen social categories diminish the therapist's ability to see clients in their multiplicity. As a result, the therapist is called to complicate and challenge the boxes of social identity and their meeting spaces.

The understanding that social identities are multiple and complex can have disturbing implications for the therapist. Lumpkin (2006), an art therapist, shared her own experience of this type of group labelling and its potential to be problematic. In particular

she noted how her identity as an African American woman constantly puts her in the position of an ambassador: "As ambassador, it is often expected that I represent my entire race to dispel myths, identify cultural strengths, and explain customs to those of another culture" (Lumpkin, 2006, p. 34). This expectation of ambassadorship can have both affirmative and harmful implications. Although it can be a daunting expectation to be branded the expert, the constructive aspects of this position have offered opportunities to build understanding and address inequity (Lumpkin, 2006, p. 34). The example offered by Lumpkin, however, pointed to how putting the person in a place of ambassadorship, is essentially a form of stereotyping, which locks in notions of social identity and creates assumptions.

Moodley's (2007) thinking connects to Lumpkin's experience with bounded identity by further noting the disadvantage and displacement experienced by marginalized communities and the alienation that comes about by internalizing oppression based on social identities (p. 7). Identity shaped by external social constructions can have significant and scarring implications for those individuals and groups bound by static perceptions and definitions. An oversimplification of identity dismisses the fact that identity intersects with other multiple identities. Levine-Rasky (2011) wrote, "Who one 'is' is not static; it is wholly relational to others, to culture, and to organizations in which one moves" (p. 242). The experience of one person does not mirror another just because that person represents a particular social identity; as well, one intersects a multiplicity of identities.

In my experience working in the area of antiracism and hate crime with the Government of British Columbia, it was critical to hold the tension between recognizing

the oppression of groups based on social constructions and also recognizing individuals as complex and unbound by social identifiers. Brown (2012) stated, "While we do not need to abandon social categories, we do need to avoid simply re-inscribing and entrenching them" (p. 53). Avoidance of this reinscribing and entrenchment is crucial in the therapeutic context where individuals are often experiencing confusion and loss of a sense of identity. A more sophisticated lens of understanding the interplay between identities is required, which leads to the next section on the theory and practice of intersectionality and postmodern theory as it relates to addressing the multidimensionality of social identities in counselling.

**Intersectionality theory and postmodern theory.** Intersectionality theory and postmodern theory's understanding of identity also challenge static notions of social identity by moving "closer to the complexities of lived realities while providing space for struggle across difference" (Levine-Rasky, 2009, p. 243). Focusing on one sole dimension of an individual in therapy is simply inadequate. Intersectionality repels singular categorizations and moves the therapist "towards a more fruitful therapeutic and political practice" (Burman, 2004, p. 297). This theory acknowledges the dynamic interplay of multiple social identities and allows for analysis on multiple levels as opposed to focusing on one social identity. Levine-Rasky (2009) summed this up succinctly: "Identity is thus transformed from object to process" (p. 243). In this sense, identity becomes unbound by the static categories.

The application of intersectionality theory provides opportunities for expanding and redefining a client's story and sense of identity as the client is not limited by social constructs. My attention was captured by an online article by Sara Salem (2014). She

called for the Western, liberal privilege of intersectionality to be transformed, and she provided a helpful example of what intersectionality looks like in theoretical practice (Salem, 2014). While her example is not specific to the therapeutic context, it demonstrated the agitation of social identities required in a transnational feminist movement:

> Another way to employ an intersectional decolonial approach is by deeply interrogating the categories and notions of oppression we use. Rather than assume that we know *what* harms women, we should let the intersectional categories emerge from the cases and contexts themselves, bearing in mind global structures of inequality. To think of an obvious example, in the case of Arab women it is almost always assumed that "culture" (already a problematic homogenous designation) is somehow implicated in the oppression of women. Not only does this essentialize "culture," it also isolates it as something problematic that needs to be fixed. This ignores the possibility of Arab women using cultured notions as a means of fighting oppression. It also fixates on culture at the expense of other relations or structures such as class. Constructing "culture" as a barrier to women's personal freedom reveals a liberal conception of the human subject, where liberty—at a personal, individual level—is framed as especially important and as the direct result of the elimination of cultural practices, without taking into account the political, economic and social factors that are affected by both local and global factors. (Salem, 2014, para. 8)

This example provides a lens into the intricate layers inherent in notions of social identity and into the ways that bound categories, such as culture, prevent seeing the complexities.

From a therapeutic lens, one can see that unpacking these layers offers deeper understanding to presenting issues and possible insights into the change and healing process.

As well, postmodern theory calls for consideration of all criteria that society has used to justify oppression (Burt, 2012, p. 23). Focusing on one dimension of an individual in therapy is simply inadequate, although Burman (2004) noted that feminist critiques have succumbed to doing so. As I consider the potential of more conscious integration of intersectionality and postmodern theory in therapy, I see it opening a door to reducing "othering" of those who have been boxed in by oppressive social categorizations. It also opens a door to dismantling levels of fixed power by more consciously including white people who often remain outside of the discussion of social identity (Levine-Rasky, 2011; Moodley, 2007). Moodley (2007) contended that conceptualizing and including all intersections of identity are important, even though they are linked with oppression. For example, white identity needs to be broken open into its multiplicity of identities, rather than homogenized (Moodley, p. 4). In regards to white identity and middle-class identity, Levine-Rasky (2011) wrote,

> To date, intersectionality theory has focused on the structures of oppression and the experiences of oppressed groups . . . Rarely has intersectionality theory been coupled with whiteness and middle-classness. In doing so, the process may not only break down barriers between these efforts—in theory and in activism—but may also build up nuanced understandings of each as they exist in inextricable relation to each other. (p. 240)

Often privileged social categories remain in positions of power due to theory and practice, which continues to project fixed categories of "otherness" on people labelled with subjugated social identities.

I worked in the multiculturalism department with the province of British Columbia, and I recall a senior government official remarking upon our introduction that I did not look very "multicultural." In this person's view, only people who looked a certain way were multicultural; somehow, a person who was visibly white was outside of having an ethnic identity. Opening up theory and practice to consider the make-up of identities of all persons creates opportunities for healthier power dynamics (Chantler, 2005; Moodley, 2007). By acknowledging and engaging identities of privilege in the therapeutic context, rather than only being attentive to those identities of disadvantage,[3] understanding and experience of social identities may be agitated and deepened.

Patricia Hill Collins (2014), a professor of sociology and feminism, put forward key questions in a lecture about the practice of intersectionality: "Who is claiming intersectionality? Where is intersectional discourse emerging? Is intersectionality elastic enough to encompass competing agendas of neoliberalism and social justice?" These questions call for the usage of intersectionality itself to be reflexive and problematized in order to ensure that it is not simply replicating managerial methods for deconstructing oppression. Intersectionality offers a lens that complicates the dimensions of social

[3] Usage of "disadvantage" is intended to highlight that persons are disadvantaged because of social identities marginalized or objectified by domains of power and dominant social groupings. An anti-oppression practice seeks to address the inequity between sites of advantage and disadvantage. I do not want to suggest, however, that a person in a site of disadvantage does not have the capacity to have an experience of value or privilege. As well, given the complexity of experience, persons may simultaneously experience advantage and disadvantage in their social identities.

identity and enables therapists to see not only more of clients but also more of themselves.

**Danger of multiculturalism, diversity, and cultural competency models.** A common theme in the literature was the issues that have been created by a focus on simplistic understandings of social identity and power relations, which have spawned multiculturalism, cultural competency, and diversity models for addressing these issues in therapy. A focus on these concepts and models shies away from critical examination and ignores issues related to power and social identity (Moodley, 2007). Moodley (2007) pointed out that European multiculturalism, which ignores power relations, can further marginalize and alienate oppressed groups and have an impact on self-identity. Multiculturalism as a model has failed to critically examine inequity and has a capacity to "ignor[e] questions of power relations and human rights issues" (Moodley, 2007, p. 6). Thus, he called for a new critical multiculturalism that will more adequately inform therapeutic practice (Moodley, 2007). Similarly, Chantler (2005) noted that diluted understandings of diversity that focus on celebration have depoliticized inequality (p. 241). Calisch (2003) also supported this thinking: "Studying diversity is not simply a matter of learning about people's cultures, values and ways of being; it involves discovering how multiple factors underlie the fundamental axes of societies, institutional systems, social issues and the possibilities for social change" (p. 11). Counselling models that have relied on multiculturalism and cultural competency models have failed to see the dynamic nature of social identities. This has led to the development of "how to" models for working with people from specific cultural backgrounds, known as cross-cultural counselling.

Cross-cultural counselling models have tended to leave those with power and privilege on the outside of their specialized focus. Moodley (2007) identified three key changes required for counselling and psychotherapy:

> 1. first, it is critical to include white people as clients and not just as therapists and researchers;
> 2. second, it would need to incorporate the notion of socio-cultural diversity as a part of its discourse, i.e., to be inclusive of gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, age and relation; and to focus on their intersections and convergences in clinical practice;
> 3. third, it would need to integrate indigenous and traditional healing practices in appropriate and meaningful ways to meet clients' holistic health needs. (Moodley, 2007, p. 3)

These changes would support moving away from oversimplified models that deter the therapist from seeing the complexities. He supported the creation of a *third space*—"a space that includes, intersects and integrates the diversity of identities" (Moodley, 2007, p. 3). Therapists are called to create this space, where identities are problematized and power relations are addressed.

**Implications for creating a meeting space with other.** As I consider the threads in the literature about power and social identity, I see considerable implications for an ethical therapeutic practice. By acknowledging disparity and structural oppression, and by recognizing the complex intersection of identities in their practice, therapists are increasing their potential to respond more adequately to inequity and static stories that stagnate identity shaping. Talwar (2010) challenged the middle-class, white roots of her

art therapy profession and believed that acknowledging the privileged role of the therapist brings more authenticity to how others' stories are represented. If the therapist embraces a "third space" (Moodley, 2007, p. 3), which embraces the intersections, there is an opportunity to practice critical self-reflection and to challenge entrenched notions of identity.

Being conscious of power relations and the intersectionality of identity does not mean that inequalities and social identities are ranked based on levels of oppression. Rather, the web-like nature of intersectionality supports individuals in accessing their personal power and agency, reimagining their stories, and addressing injustice (Talwar, 2010, p. 13). This reimagining can happen through the challenging of dominant stories, which disallow subordinated stories to come forth (Burt, 2012, p. 25). Narrative therapeutic approaches have the potential to counter dominant stories and structural inequality and to instead bring stories forward based on strengths (Watts-Jones, 2010, p. 407). They have the potential to offer critique to the status quo and to challenge the socially accepted relations in society (Brown, 2012). Besley (2002) also advocated for the use of narrative therapy: "Some discourses are prescriptive and constitute dominant cultural stories, yet within these dominant narratives there are different subjective possibilities for constructing our own distinctive narratives of identity" (p. 139). The therapist attending to subjugated stories supports the emergence of new understandings of identity.

Brown (2012) further challenged social workers to think about the ways in which they continue to breathe life into oppressive stories. Psychotherapists also need to challenge the ways that they relate to these stories and create possibilities for a meeting

space with other. Attention given to the subjugated voice in clients' oppressive stories provides opportunities for a retelling of stories in a way that allows a reauthoring (Brown, 2012, p. 48). This approach blends well with both intersectionality and postmodern theory in that it recognizes the diverse nature of identity and the complexity of power relations.

Many therapists also advocate for the identification of one's social location in therapeutic practice as a way to address issues of power and foster identity formation (Talwar, 2010; Watts-Jones, 2010). Watts-Jones (2010) believed that a step towards therapeutic collaboration occurs when therapists acknowledge their privileged position and social locations. In Watts-Jones' (2010) words, "Making identities transparent is an invitation to clients to participate with the therapist in being mindful of how our mix of experiences may at times create tension, misunderstanding, or frustration or to talk about it" (p. 413). Naming and inviting social identities may create exploration for potential tensions and frustrations. Meeting space is created by inviting others to show up in a way that gives them power to self-identity and to define their story the way they choose. Catherine Moon (2002), an art therapist, noted the process of identity building and defining self is a political act: "The ultimate subversive activity occurs when the issues society seeks to deny are overturned, the invisible transformed into the visible" (p. 296). It is exciting to think about the possibilities therapy provides for dismantling oppressive stories and the rich exchange that can take place.

**Psychological Literature**

The goal of this research study was to uncover the experience of therapists living the tension within their own social identities and power relations and to explore ways in

which space may be created for meeting of the other. The above section explored literature related to the subject matter within the research question. However, no literature has yet directly touched on the psychological task or dilemma within this lived tension.

**Unpacking my psychological task.** The psychological task or dilemma is likely to differ for each therapist as one's experience of power and social identity is shaped by one's personal experience and worldview. I want to make transparent that the psychological literature I have chosen to share is based on my own experience with the research question under study, just as the theological reflection in Chapter 2 was also a way to bring forward how my worldview influences my experience of the tension. I have done this because I have included myself as a coparticipant in this study; as well, identifying my psychological task is a means to bringing forward my preunderstandings. I am in no way suggesting my experience is a universal phenomenon for all therapists.

As previously shared, my worldview is underpinned by a social justice philosophy. This social justice perspective shapes the way I see the world and also the way in which I view therapy. My personal theology is deeply influenced by my Mennonite, Anabaptist tradition and values. Like liberation theology, which sees God on the side of the oppressed, my Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition instilled in me the imperative of standing on the side of the oppressed. I recall my education at a Mennonite boarding school in Oregon and at a Mennonite university in Virginia, which provided opportunities to reflect on have–have-not oppression. For example, in one of my courses in university, we went to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Washington, DC, and met with staff at these institutions. After these visitations, the professors asked the students to collectively reflect upon the experience and our ethical

response. We read about liberation theologians in Central America and the ways in which our own Anabaptist tradition called us to stand against oppression (though, of course, with acknowledgement of the disparity in power and privilege between the contemporary manifestations of the Mennonite faith tradition and the oppression and violence being faced in these political contexts). Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994), the liberation psychologist, called Central American psychologists to consider their own social location. I resonate with his words:

> It is not probable, and perhaps not even possible, for us to achieve an adequate understanding of the most profound problems that burden the majority of the population today if we do not place ourselves, hermeneutically, at their historical lookout point. (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 46)

Not only is there a theological requirement but also a therapeutic and psychological requirement to enter into the experience and historical lookout of the other. In my own tradition, I resonate with Al Dueck's (2014) writing on his Mennonite and Anabaptist influence in his counselling practice: "This is not a psychology that begins with the power of the expert Western psychologist but rather with God's privileging of the poor" (p. 370). The belief that there is divine favour for those who are marginalized affects how I view both the external and the internal psychological factors at play.

As described in Chapter 2, my World Two lens sees the structured inequality and oppression threading through society. This leads to an inherent distrust in the systems and structures and can lead to hopelessness. Coupled with my belief in a universal law that stands on the side of the oppressed, this view creates an immense sense of responsibility in my encounters with others, and a plethora of other feelings. It is difficult for me to

name a direct psychological task or dilemma at hand given how my World Two orientation tends to structure psychological tasks in the external world; for example, the task would be the requirement to participate in dismantling systems and structures that continue to oppress those who are marginalized. That said, I also see how the inner experience—the shame, anxious responsibility, and sense of powerlessness—are called to shift from a paralytic, depressive state to a fluid, active state. At this time I believe my experience points to a lack of trust in not only the systems and structures or in the presence of a creative energy, as explained in my theological reflection, but also in a lack of trust in self. Gillian Proctor (2002) wrote about her experience, which connects to my own experience:

> I have struggled with my own dilemma of feeling powerless and believing that I have enough worth and responsibility to be powerful. I have tried to work out how to feel empowered without using power over others. I have struggled in relationships to create mutuality and space for all to have their own power and not encroach on each other's power. . . .The experience of anxiety can be understood as being a result of fear about uncertainty and a lack of control over one's environment, and so again is clearly related to a subjective feeling of powerlessness. (pp. 1–3)

Proctor (2002) named the experience of polarization that can emerge; there is a knowing of the power and privilege in the therapeutic space and yet a feeling of powerlessness that can rear its head. I share this somewhat reluctantly as I have always reiterated the space that people with advantaged social identities can take with their "white guilt," which further entrenches a position of power. George Yancy (2015) described the process of

suturing, which "functions as a site of *keeping pure*, preserving what is unsullied" (p. xv). And so, I hold this tension of naming these psychological tasks, which may enact a way of keeping pure and free from transgression. Rather than fall into suturing, my hope is to disrupt the taken-for-granted inner and outer processes and peel back the intrapsychic activity that could unconsciously play in the therapeutic space.

**Experience of shame.** The experience of lack of inner trust is entwined with an experience of shame. The feeling of shame is particularly stifling in the experience of my own social identities and power relations as I feel it take residence in my chest and move up my throat. It is a heavy ball of energy that lingers, not making many movements. Thompson (1996) saw shame as a resource to pastoral psychotherapists:

> Shame is an intrinsic aspect of the structure and process of therapy that is not always acknowledged, much less resolved. Ashamed of their shame, therapists and clients are prone to deny or at least to avoid confronting and exploring it. (p. 319)

Being ashamed of the experience of shame runs the risk of cloaking oppressor–oppressee positions. Heather Hackman (2013), in her writing on "Addressing Shame as White Racial Justice Advocates," captured the importance of bringing voice to this experience in her social justice trainings:

> But, when I have watched white people name the shame, open up on a deeper level, the talons of fear do not seem to grip them and they can stay present (at least somewhat, anyway) in the training and basically "hang in there" with their discomfort. What it tends to do for people of color in the room, when the naming is done honestly, is make the training feel a little more authentic as a process and

> therefore a little safer to stay in the conversation. Importantly, this process of speaking the shame is **not** about white people becoming the victim of racial oppression through testimonials of how hard it is to be white at the exclusion of the pain people of color feel. Instead, there is a bit of distance here, relief against the sky if you will, where white people can see the shame arise, know that it is an impediment, and share about it from a desire to address the impediment rather than feeding the notion of how hard it is to be white. It may seem like I am splitting hairs here, but the distinction matters because it shapes the contours of the conversation and determines the level of wisdom, compassion and authenticity being brought to the table. ("Speaking Shame [About Being White]," para. 1)

The grip of shame is loosened once it is named and acknowledged. Following Hackman's (2013) example, I am bringing forward my experience of the tension within my own social identities and power relations in the therapeutic space and I am naming the impediment that can prevent creating the space for a meeting with other.

In seeking to name this impediment and understand my psychological task at hand, I looked to literature on the experience of shame. Developmental psychology identifies the experience of shame being rooted early in the lifespan. Erik Erikson's (1965) developmental lifespan model, a perspective focused on the development of American identity, identified shame as a task in toddlerhood to be overcome in favour of developing a sense of autonomy. In describing this maturational phase, Erikson (1965) drew attention to how the child's environment "must protect him against meaningless and arbitrary experiences of shame and of early doubt" (p. 226). If this should not transpire, "the child will turn against himself all his urge to discriminate and manipulate" (Erikson,

1965, p. 226). The experience of shame in the tension with other in the therapeutic space may then also suggest an experience of doubting and trusting in one's ability and autonomy.

William K. Hahn (2001) highlighted how shame may be the inability of one's ideal self to align with one's actual self. He recognized the individualistic notion of an ideal self in isolation and noted that the role of shame may be a way to stay connected in relationship: "Even when experienced in isolation, shame is other oriented and plays a fundamental role in maintaining interpersonal bonds" (Hahn, 2001, p. 273). In this way, shame is an affect that emerges in relationship. To expand on his view, "The experience of shame in adulthood evolves from repeated emotional misconnections with primary caregivers. The term often used to describe this process is "affective misattunement" (Hahn, 2001, p. 273). He argued that, if affective misattunements adversely reoccur in childhood, "the resulting mental representations retain their early subjective qualities of self and other. The internal self-image is pervasively negative, while the perception of other is of condemnation" (Hahn, 2001, p. 274). This then has an impact on how the adult manages relationship in the future and on how one reacts to or masks shame (Hahn, 2001, pp. 274–275). In light of this, the therapist who experiences the other as a source of condemnation is perhaps called to reflect on what is informing this dynamic in the space.

This notion of the tension between the self and ideal self in regards to shame is expanded by Seidler (2007):

> In my view, the idea that shame manifests itself when the subject measures himself against a set of ideals and concludes that he cannot live up to them is not sufficiently process oriented. Judgmental self-relation is intimately bound with the

> initially external gaze of the other. The subject appropriates the gaze and uses it to look at himself. In principle, this is merely a critical gaze in the original sense of the Greek root KRINEIN—to divide; to differentiate; to judge. But because of its close relation to the pain caused by the division of self into subject and object, there is a tendency to feel this gaze is critical in the negative or fault-finding way. (p. 40)

This perspective integrates the relationship with the other in the space. Seidler (2007) referred to this dynamic as the "interface affect" (p. 38). His position does not look at the subject and object as separate entities, but "as a product of interaction between two participants" (Seidler, 2007, p. 37). In this sense, emotions like shame "can be understood as processes that are not located solely within the individual but are comparable to networks: their emergence, regulation and effects take place through reciprocal exchange processes among two or more persons" (Seidler, 2007, p. 38). The traditional object-relations theorists focus on the parties of subject and object, which Seidler would challenge. In his view, the self and other are not so easily divisible. What interested Seidler was the relational movement of affect in interaction.

A postmodern view on object-relations theory extends our understanding further. Corey (2013) stated,

> Object relations are interpersonal relationships as these are represented intrapsychically, and as they influence our interactions with the people around us . . . It is used interchangeably with the term *other* to refer to an important person to whom the child, and later the adult, becomes attached. (p. 86)

Building on this view, when encountering the other, the therapist is called to question how the other is living within the therapist intrapsychically and how past experience with power and other inform the present experience.

Psychologists Dueck and Goodman (2007) explained the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and his view of the experience of self and other coming into relationship:

> When the Other draws near, as in a neighbour, my position is one of vulnerability. Instead of actively thematizing, engaging the other, the self is absolutely passive. There is no resistance to the coming of the Other to me and in me. I am accused by the Other who meets me and enters. He persecutes me in that I no longer have a home, no foundation, no position from which to assert myself. I have no place to play my game, to make war. I am without resources with which to engage the other. Grammatically, I am the accusative where the Other is the subject . . . The presence of the Other does not enslave me but rather constitutes my freedom. (p. 608)

This description moves from the self being challenged by the ideal self, to being challenged—even intrapsychically entered—by the other. It captures the dynamic of self and other in relation, where the essence of the other is the means to the self finding freedom, but not without suffering. Dueck and Goodman (2007) identified the requirement of discomfort of the therapist who is oriented to Levinasian philosophy: "Being accused means the Self is not comfortable in its own skin. It is the Other, the client, who interrupts the comfortableness of self and reflection by entering my

consciousness" (p. 613). The experience of shame is linked to the experience of accusation and to the experience of facing the other in their otherness.

Shame is perhaps a call to vulnerability and responsibility to other. Levinas (1996) described shame in relation with the other as the following:

> [A] movement in a direction opposed to that of consciousness, which returns triumphantly to itself and rests upon itself. To feel shame is to expel oneself from this rest and not simply to be conscious of this already glorious exile. The just person who knows himself to be just is no longer just. The first condition of the first as of the last of the just is that their justice remains clandestine to them. (p. 17)

The place of exile is the site of injustice where the self rests and escapes responsibility. To further elaborate on Levinas's view, I looked to Guenther's (2011) description of Levinas's interpretation of shame: "It shows how the sad passion of shame may be transformed into responsibility rather than *ressentiment*, and into a source of solidarity rather than perpetual struggle for domination" (p. 7). Shame invites an other-relation instead of a self-relation. In the article by Alford (2000), he identified how both Levinas and the object-relations theorist Donald Winnicott share a common concern—"how to connect with another without imposing oneself on the other, without doing violence to the other's awesome otherness" (p. 236). The act of allowing other to enter within and to touch this space of holding, even take residence in the Levinasian sense, may be the aim of the psychological task.

This review of the literature on shame, in relation to my psychological task, invites a new way of experiencing. The heavy ball in my chest may be an invitation to

pay attention and halt the "movement in a direction opposed to consciousness" (Levinas, 1996, p. 17). As Guenther (2011) expressed,

> Shame can also pull me out of myself, disrupting the complacency and self-satisfaction of the same, orienting me in ethical and political solidarity with others, and opening a relation to the future beyond what I could have imagined or constructed as a solitary individual. (p. 3)

By allowing shame to enter me, I may more fully come into presence and solidarity with other.

From a social justice perspective, the experience of shame highlights complexities around power differentials. The experience of shame can be a way in which groups who are marginalized by their social identities are further oppressed (Leeming & Boyle, 2013, p. 141). Leeming and Boyle (2013) called for further research into the experience of shame as it relates to stigmatized identities (p. 155). In the case of the therapist, however, the experience of shame may not be entirely negative. Shame may be an invitation to reflect upon the historical and social factors that have created the conditions of oppression. In mainstream media, an article entitled "Why Guilt and Ethical Shopping Aren't Enough: We Need to Start Shaming" read as follows: "Shaming, unlike guilt, can be used to influence the way groups—even entire industries—behave. Shame can also be used by the weak against the strong" (Jacquet, 2015, para. 12). Similarly, Alexis Shotwell (2011) identified the virtues of shame:

> I hold out for the potential of affects like shame to get at and under conceptual frameworks and grids of intelligibility and to shift the terms on which life as usual proceeds. Always—and only when—situated alongside sharp, steady

> understanding of how multiple systems of oppression co-constitute subjectivities, appropriate negative affect can offer some leverage for reconstituting selves against the systems that constitute us. (p. 92)

In this way, she does not advocate slipping out of the experience of shame but allows it to fuel processes that transform the self. Shotwell (2011) connected to Hahn's (2001) view that shame may be the discrepancy felt between the real self and ideal self. She stated, "Shame can be thought of as a moment of contradiction in the multiple selves that we comprise, a confrontation between the self one has been and various selves one wants to have been" (Shotwell, 2011, pp. 94–95). Rather than seeking shelter from shame (Yancy, 2015, p. xiii), shame, in this sense, can be an invitation to new ways of being. Dueck and Goodman (2007) wrote about the pain experienced when the other enters the self; this is the space where one's sense of identity is fractured (p. 608). As well, the fracturing of the ego results in a "multiple self" (Dueck & Goodman, 2007, p. 608). This pulling apart of the ego, into the multiplicity of selves, offers an opportunity to acknowledge and come into relationship with the other's multiple selves.

Overall, the literature presented here on shame seems to point to its potentially useful role in allowing the self—or multiplicity of selves—to be challenged. By naming the experience of shame, its silenced power is uncovered, which opens up potential for self-transformation and social transformation.

**Capacity to believe.** I am drawn to Hamman's (2001) writing about the wounds, or developmental arrests, that psychotherapists seek to heal in themselves through their profession. Hamman alluded to these wounds as "developmental capacities" (p. 344). He wrote, "When these capacities are achieved, they provide an individual with a sense of

realness and wholeness" (Hamman, 2001, p. 344). The first developmental arrest laid out by Hamman is the "capacity to believe" (p. 344). Hamman stated, "The capacity to believe refers to the developmental ability to be confident with that area of experiencing that exists between pure subjectivity and pure objectivity. It suggests a certain emotional foundation that determines one's relationship to the object world" (p. 344). Building upon Winnicott, he suggested that "some individuals seem not to have it in them to believe" (Hamman, 2001, p. 344). This suggests that a movement toward growth involves cultivating an emotional foundation, which allows one to believe and trust in self. It also suggests, however, that that there is a capacity to discern that which is beyond one's sense of self-creation and self-control. The manner in which therapists then respond to this capacity to believe and ability to trust has profound implications—for the other and for how they show up with other.

Hopkins (2003) differentiated between the capacity to believe and "believing in" ("The Capacity to Believe," para. 13). The capacity to believe refers to an inner experience for which one has "belief in internal good objects" (Hopkins, 2003, "The Capacity to Believe," para. 4), which is required before there can be the experience of "believing in" (para. 13). Hopkins described the need for "an interior space to put beliefs" ("The Capacity to Believe," para. 13). He further stated, "That takes the attainment of a certain depth, depth enough to recognize that there are things worth believing in at all" (Hopkins, 2003, "The Capacity to Believe," para. 13). Hopkins dug into the etymological roots of the word *belief* and reacted to how the empiricist lens shifted belief into "a certain conviction of the truth or veracity of something that falls short of absolute proof" ("The Capacity to Believe," para. 19). He connected to the Old Teutonic roots of the

word *belief*, which means "'to hold dear' or 'to trust in'" ("The Capacity to Believe," para. 19). The inner experience of holding the tension of one's own social identities and power relations seems to link with this notion of belief, which involves both holding and trusting in, first, an internal good object. Hopkins suggested that the activity of trusting in or holding "implies the existence of a place from which that trust originates, an inside, a space where things can be held. But it also implies something upon which such trust may be bestowed, something to place such trust in" ("The Capacity to Believe," para. 20).

The tension may require that the therapist hold dear this inner space and trust that this space can act as a crucible when connecting with other. This inner space may also be the creative space where shame can be taken in and transformed, allowing a trust in self so that risk taking and relationships with the other and with the unknown are possible.

## Chapter Four: Methodology

There are multiple branches of phenomenological inquiry; I used the hermeneutic method for two reasons. First, I hoped to deepen understanding of how, in living the tension within social identities and power relations with the other, the essential meanings of these connections can be transformed. Second, I aimed to explore how such transformation and reinterpretation of social identities and power relations might influence therapeutic practice. Hermeneutic phenomenology offered a pathway to explore both the lived experience and what the lived experience might mean for meeting the other.

### Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology came onto the scene at the turn of the 20th century. Butler-Kisber (2010) identified two key contributors to phenomenology:

> It is predicated on the work of Edward Husserl (1970), a transcendental phenomenologist, who theorized about how knowledge comes into being, and Martin Buber (1958), an existentialist, who believed that people cannot understand others the way they understand objects, but rather, human understanding requires a relationship of openness, participation and empathy. (p. 50)

These thinkers, among others, challenged the prevailing, positivistic, and scientific approaches to research. In contrast to positivism, phenomenology has "an epistemological focus on experience or narrative" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4); hence, there is a focus on gathering first-person stories of experience with a recognition that

researchers account for their influence in the process (p. 4). As proposed by van Manen (1990), phenomenology is a human science, not a natural science.

This human science is concerned with the direct experience in the lifeworld of the human being. The lifeworld is "the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations" (van Manen, 1990, p. 101) and "is the natural attitude of everyday life which Husserl described as the original, pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude" (p. 7). Persons intersect and experience a multiplicity of various lifeworlds (van Manen, 1990, p. 101). Finlay (2012) described a phenomenologist as "one that examines taken-for-granted human situations as they are experienced in everyday life but which typically go unquestioned" (p. 173). Phenomenology seeks to describe beyond the generic and beyond what is already known; it "strive[s] for fresh, complex, rich description of phenomena as concretely lived" (Finlay, 2012, p. 173). Reflecting upon and making meaning of taken-for-granted lifeworlds offers a portal into unpacking terrain filled with assumptions and theoretical applications, which has implication for praxis.

Theory is important and supports the building upon knowledge. Yet I also see where clinging to theory can lean into a type of fundamentalism and thwart new meanings and interpretations. Van Manen (1990) made clear 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 at once a reflexive re-living and reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (p. 36). This aim calls for some wariness of theoretical approaches, which swiftly categorize and label experience. Van Manen (1990) stated, "I want to be suspicious of any theory, model, or system of action that only gives a generalized methodology, sets of techniques or rules-for-acting in predictable or

controllable circumstances" (p. 155). A nonscripted approach was advocated by Adams & van Manen (2009): "Phenomenological inquiries have become attractive because they offer an alternative to managerial, instrumental, and technological ways of understanding knowledge, and they lead to more ethically and experientially sensitive epistemologies and ontologies of practice" (p. 615). Max van Manen also highlighted,

> Phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. (p. 9)

It is a research methodology that increases the chances of unearthing deeper understandings while also providing insights for moving beyond what is simply described and what is presuggested through theoretical constructs.

This research method can lend easily to meandering and wandering from the phenomenon as there are no prescriptive and sure rules for undertaking the method. Nevertheless, van Manen (1990) offered a methodical structure: (a) turning to a phenomenon which interests the researcher, (b) investigating the lived experience, (c) reflection, (d) writing, (e) maintaining a strong orientation to the phenomenon, and (f) balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole (p. 30). The "strong and oriented relation" (van Manen, 1990, p. 33) to the phenomenon under study supports in guarding against "superficialities and falsities" (p. 33). It can be easy to lose sight of the phenomenon and be seduced by fixating on themes and using theoretical lingo. Finlay (2014) also stated clearly, "Remember it is about fidelity to the phenomenon" (p. 137).

In traditional phenomenological research, the focus is on the common threads among participants' experience of a phenomenon and their descriptions of the essence of

this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). There is an attention to process versus the end product. Martin Heidegger (as cited in Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2002), a student of Husserl and a founder of the hermeneutic arm of phenomenology, believed that Husserl's work still remained too entrenched in the scientific tradition (p. 114). Heidegger (as cited in Laverty, 2003) identified interpretation, versus description only, as critical to the process of knowing new meaning (p. 24). Heidegger (as cited in Fleming et al., 2002) was "interested in the possibilities of Being, in which existence knows itself only in relation with other and other objects" (p. 114). Hermeneutics has typically been a branch of study associated with the interpretation of religious texts. Applied to phenomenology, hermeneutics attends to the evolution of meanings that arise within any research process. The researcher is pulled into intentional wonderings around what the reflective descriptions could mean to an evolving practice. In van Manen's (1990) words, "Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life" (p. 4). Interpretation is not done in a vacuum but considers context. Because meaning is contextually and historically further revealed, hermeneutic phenomenology pays particular attention to contextual and historical influence. Laverty (2003) wrote, "In Heidegger's (1927/1962) opinion, all understanding is connected to a given set of fore-structures, including one's historicality, that cannot be eliminated. One therefore needs to become as aware as possible and account for these interpretive influences" (p. 24). In Heidegger's (as cited in Langdridge, 2007) view, there is no possibility of neutrally examining and identifying an experience without integrating where one inhabits (p. 27).

As noted, hermeneutic phenomenology aims to add interpretive dimension to the essence of a lived experience as we discover it in its multiplicity (van Manen, 1990, p. 18). Yet herein lies the paradox; in this method, the aim will forever be incomplete. Van Manen wrote,

> To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. The phenomenological reduction teaches us that complete reduction is impossible, that full or final descriptions are unattainable. But rather than therefore giving up on human science altogether, we need to pursue its project with extra vigour. (p. 18)

Human science research requires an ability to hold the ambiguity of the phenomenon under study. A hyper focus on a perfect end product is not congruent with phenomenology. Finlay (2014) encouraged being with the ambiguity and ambivalence and stated, "Remember that you are never going to get the analysis perfect or 'right'; you simply want to capture something meaningful that expresses, or points in the direction of, that particular lived experience" (p. 137). Keeping this reminder at the forefront in phenomenological study is critical so as not to fall into positivistic leanings, which are drawn to needing to know what is factual and what is "real."

**Prejudices and Preunderstandings**

In phenomenology, there is a practice known as *bracketing* where researchers suspend their preconceived assumptions and ideas. Finlay (2011) described bracketing in the research process and addressed how this practice is often misunderstood in practice:

> All too often the process of bracketing in phenomenology is wrongly understood to be an exercise in objectivity, one undertaken to minimize bias. In fact, rather than striving to be unbiased, distanced or detached, the researcher aims to be fully engaged, involved, interested in and open to what may appear . . . Rather than objectivity, the challenge here is to juggle the contradictory stances of being "scientifically removed from," "open to" and "aware of" while simultaneously interlacing with research participants in the midst of their own personal experiencing. (p. 23)

This description of bracketing broadened my understanding. I also found myself drawn to the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer's practice. He proposed that "it is not possible to lose one's preunderstandings as everyone always has a preunderstanding of the topic in question" (as cited in Fleming et al., 2002, p. 115) and that "it is only through one's preunderstandings that understanding is possible" (p. 115). Like Gadamer, other phenomenologists such as Fleming, Gaidys, and Robb (2003) and Conroy (2003) noted that prejudice in this sense is not a pejorative term. Rather, prejudice is synonymous with the word preunderstanding; preunderstanding is required to come to understanding (Fleming et al., 2003, p. 115). Fleming et al. stated, "If one does not recognize one's preunderstandings, there is a risk that one will fail to understand or will misjudge meaning" (p. 115). Shotwell (2011) clearly stated, "Putting prejudices at risk is an essential activity in the process of coming to understanding" (p. 17). Gadamer (2013) explained, "This kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices" (p. 282). Reinterpretation of experience through wisdom

gained from stating one's preunderstandings, through hearing the preunderstandings of others and then revisiting those preunderstandings in light of further lived experience, brings forward rich data. By making no claims to impartiality, the data can breathe more freely and without resistance, but of course requires constant scrutiny and questioning.

I sought to identify my preunderstandings with active intention. In my role as a coparticipant, I involved my own reflections and narrative in the weaving process through an active interpretive role. For example, threads of my theological worldview were brought forward at the outset of the research as a way to name and agitate my taken-for-granted experience and understanding of the lived tension. As well, my intrapsychic experience was shared around trust and shame. My theological worldview and intrapsychic understandings are the tools I have used to make sense of the experience of living the tension; however, they can treat the lived experience in a familiar and static way that establishes experience. Hence, the circle of inquiry is critical for circulating the dialogue and for gaining deeper awareness of preunderstandings, assumptions, and the meanings inherent in the data.

**Existentials, Lifeworld Fragments, and the Hermeneutic Circle**

As I applied the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to my research, I drew most largely from van Manen's work (1990, 1997). Van Manen (1990) identified existential categories, which provided a meaningful structure for the research study. These thematic categories are identified as "existentials" (van Manen, 1990, p. 101), or that which relates to the human condition. The four existentials are lived space, lived time, lived body, and lived human relation (van Manen, 1990, p. 101). I also looked to the work of the Peter Ashworth (2003) who practices a type of phenomenological

psychology that considers seven fragments of a lifeworld; they are selfhood, sociality, embodiment, temporality, spatiality, project, and discourse. Four of these fragments aligned with van Manen's existential categories. Ashworth (2003) made it clear that "these intertwined fragments are not regarded as anything like 'variables.' They are not distinct parameters of measurements or description . . . It is equally important that the researcher, setting out to investigate the world, does not use this set of fractions as a kind of 'checklist'" (p. 156). Taking Ashworth's caution, I found these fragments and existentials opened a door to investigating an experience that, from my own experience, gets caught in theoretical frameworks and binary thinking. I found these dimensions useful for breaking open my own prereflection and prejudgments. As stated, "[the existentials] are productive categories for the process of phenomenological question posing, reflecting and writing" (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). Finlay (2012) captured how the existentials or fragments are lived in the lifeworld:

> Lifeworld points to our embodied sense of self, which is always in relation to others given through shared language, discourse, culture, and history. We have a sense of time, living in an unfolding present with a determining past and yet-to-be determined future; we are thrown into spatial relationship in the world surrounded by things that have meaning while we engage activities that become our projects. We share lifeworlds with others while also having our own unique vantage point. (p. 180)

These categories, which dig into layers of the lifeworld, served as an overarching, reflective guide by providing a soft structure for the development of interview subquestions and for the synthesis of data. Peering into the lifeworld using these

existential lenses reminds the phenomenologist "that person and world are intentionally and intersubjectively intertwined" (Finlay, 2014, p. 130). Through their own existential inference, space is opened to reveal the layers of experience inherent in being human in a diverse, complex, and changing world.

A hermeneutic phenomenological study, carried out by Rich, Graham, Taket, and Shelley (2013), shed light on the value of utilizing the existentials for reflection. Some of the nuances involved in working with the relations between these groupings were highlighted when the authors noted, "Although each of the four lifeworld existentials offers different points of focus, they are not sharply separable; rather, they are interwoven and interact with one another in the exploration of the lifeworld" (Rich, Graham, Taket, & Shelley, 2013, p. 501). In the research that Rich et al. (2013) undertook, they noticed this lack of separation and minimized the perception of a hierarchy between the existentials by examining all transcripts using one existential category at a time. In their words, "This allowed all of the interviews and existentials to be approached on equal footing" (Rich et al., 2013, p. 503). I used this approach of giving equitable weight to each category in my reflection and analysis.

Conversation and dialogue are used to sustain the connection between the existential nuances through the hermeneutic circle of inquiry. Fleming et al. (2003) identified a 5-stage research process based on Gadamer's call for this dialogic exercise. The third and fourth stages call for dialogue with both participants and texts as a way to gain understanding, and explain how "understanding will appear through the fusion of the horizons of participant and researcher" (Fleming et al., 2003, p. 117–118). A horizon is likened to a field of vision, and a fusion of horizons involves a new, expanded field of

vision between researcher and participants (Fleming et al., 2003, p. 117). More specifically, Gadamer (2013) defined horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (p. 313). He further stated, "Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 315). Horizons move with dialogue and in relationship. Researchers bring their own horizon to the research, which shifts over time through the motion of conversation, dialogue, and engagement with the hermeneutic circle.

Under these existentials, and to engage the various experiences and layers informing my question, I applied the philosophical premise of the hermeneutic circle through dialogue with the various voices. The hermeneutic circle, or the hermeneutic spiral as Conroy (2003) preferred, is dynamic and layers upon other interpretations, which shift understanding over time (p. 43). Put another way by Finlay (2011), "This is the process of coming to understand the being of something (be it 'text' or the 'phenomenon' or 'participant' in the research context) through moving iteratively between the whole and the parts and back again to the whole" (p. 115). This study was a weaving process that moved, sifted, and revisited the data in all of their forms as a way to make connections. As well, it was a process of consensus building between the specific and universal within the texts. For example, I moved between the narratives of the coparticipants, academic literature, imagery, metaphor, and my own personal process notes and sketching. In between these movements, I sought to pay attention to what may be shared, hidden, brought forward, or pulled back (Conroy, 2003, p. 41). The

movements provided the backdrop to all research activity by allowing the texts to intersect and connect in a web of interactions.

## Method

The following sections outline my process for carrying out the research study. Although the sections are laid out in a linear way, there were cyclical movements between research activities.

**Recruitment.** Following approval from St. Stephen's College, I reached out to previous connections that I had made in my work and conducted my own online research to identify potential coparticipants. As well, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association—BC Chapter sent an invitation to members via email throughout the province on my behalf. This triggered a positive response. All interested participants first received an electronic letter of invitation (see Appendix A). I had conversations and correspondence with interested participants. After engaging in dialogue with interested participants, I invited three therapists to participate in the study. The therapists related to experiencing an inner tension within their social identities and power relations and were able to share about this experience in an in-depth way.

**Ongoing consent.** I had preliminary conversations via telephone and email with the coparticipants to ascertain mutual fit and to discuss the consent process. Upon discerning fit, I sent an email to each coparticipant with background information and with the coparticipant consent letter (see Appendix B). Attention was given to consent throughout the entire research process by inquiring about any concerns or questions as they participated in the study. As well, coparticipants were given the option to opt out at any time without consequence.

**Research conversations.** I created a visual with the interview questions and sent this to the coparticipants beforehand, along with a list of supporting questions as a way to invite movement into the reflective process (see Appendix C for Interview Questions Guide). The existential categories of body, time, space, and human relation/other were used as a reflective guide for shaping the questions.

One research conversation took place via Skype as the coparticipant was outside of Canada, and the other two conversations were in person. The approximately two-hour research conversations were semistructured lifeworld interviews in the spirit of Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) work and included questions that asked the coparticipants about their lifeworld as lived through body, time, space, and human relation. Kvale and Brinkmann described the approach to such an interview: "It comes close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it has a purpose and involves a specific approach and technique" (p. 27). I sought to maintain a conversational approach, and at the same time maintain an orientation to the lifeworld of the coparticipants as they encountered the phenomenon under study. My aim was to create enough structure to glean narrative experiences from the coparticipants and enough openness to follow unexpected trails of insights. In an effort to stay with the hermeneutic approach, I attempted to reflect with the coparticipants on their lived experience with the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, p. 63). Immediately after the conversations, I took time to reflect and journal on the experience. While journalling, I considered Conroy's (2003) article on interpretive phenomenology, which included a "Hermeneutic Development of Commentary," (pp. 50–51). In this commentary, she provided a series of self-reflective

questions to be asking oneself alongside the delivery of the interview. For example, some of her questions included the following:

- Is there an apparent mood to the interview exhibited by the participant?
- What is valued by the participant?
- What are her concerns/issues? What is her body language telling me?
- What themes are running through the conversation? (Conroy, 2003, p. 50)

Upon completing the interviews, I used these questions to support a search between the layers of information shared by the coparticipants. As well, I reflected on my own mood, values, and body language after the research conversation.

**Beginning the synthesis.** Interviews were transcribed by a professional service (see Appendix D for the Confidentiality Agreement). In the meantime, I listened to the interviews and engaged in the practice of visual mapping as a way to record what was shared. Visual mapping involves large pieces of paper on a wall. Words and images are then used to synthesize information that is being listened to. The practice of mapping the interviews was an effective way to immerse myself and energetically feel the coparticipant conversations kinesthetically. I found myself writing down phrases that were more animated or that drew me in by their wisdom and insight into the phenomenon under study. Visuals of these maps were sent to the coparticipants along with the transcripts for their reflection and feedback (see Appendix E for an example of visual map).

I relistened to the interviews and conducted a detailed reading of the transcripts several weeks later while taking in the visual maps to access a full sense of what each participant really said. Van Manen (1990) noted that finding the overarching meaning of

a text is "the wholistic or sententious approach" (p. 94). I did further journalling, sketching, and scribing to capture insights, expressions, and metaphors that reflected the meaning of the whole. For example, the metaphor of water emerged in the coparticipants' stories. In response to this metaphor, I sketched drawings for each coparticipant to visually capture their overarching way of being with the tension.

**Identifying meaning units.** Upon receipt of the coparticipants' feedback from their transcripts, I created an organizing device for synthesizing the data (Rich et al., 2013, p. 503). The format included three columns. The entire transcript was inserted into the first column, meaning units and interpretation were in the second column, and the third column was used to reflect on how the meaning units intersected with the existentials (van Manen, 1990) and lifeworld fragments (Ashworth, 2003). Before identifying shifts of meaning in the transcripts, I returned to the wall mappings and visuals to stay in touch with the wholistic meanings arising from the coparticipants' stories. I then returned to the transcripts and separated the data into sections according to shifts in meaning.

Transcripts of the coparticipants' interviews were searched to get in touch with the living content. Using the Gadamerian process laid out by Fleming et al. (2003), I searched "every single sentence or section" (p. 118) to unearth meaning. I listened for new meaning "being careful not to lose the link to the significant statements" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 53). I first synthesized the data by creating meaning units in the first-person voice, as practiced by the psychologist Greg Madison (as referenced in Miller, 2009), as a way to stay close to what was being said (p. 38). After the first-person meaning units were created, I further synthesized the meaning units to create a larger

field interpretation that connected to the phenomenon (see Appendix F for an example of template and data synthesis).

While reading the texts, I related the existentials identified by van Manen (1990) and the lifeworld fragments identified by Ashworth (2003) to the emergent themes from the data. Application of these existential categories seemed to capture both the tangible and the intangible aspects of lived experience and served as a reflective guide for synthesizing data. The existentials and lifeworld fragments offered a lens to gather insight about how the body, time, space, and human relations are experienced with the phenomenon under study.

**Continuing conversations.** The follow-up interviews were done via Skype for two coparticipants and by email for one coparticipant as I had moved to London, United Kingdom during the research study. Second interviews took place to receive feedback on the meaning units to ensure that they accurately reflected the experiences of the coparticipants and to explore additional questions. I also asked specific questions that aided in gaining clarification in certain passages. I transcribed these interviews and, based on feedback, made changes to existing meaning units and added new ones. Again, I sent the coparticipants visual notes of our conversations to reflect back what I had heard.

Throughout the research process, I also engaged in conversation with new literature sources, artworks, and metaphor. During the synthesis process, I had the opportunity to visit museums in London and engage with diverse artworks, which were sieved through the research question and through the stories I had heard from the coparticipants. I moved between the data sources to support dialogic conversation among the diverse voices in the process.

**Pre-clustering and pre-thematic descriptions.** Each coparticipant's meaning units, which were coded, were first clustered within their own data. I created pre-themes as a way to give form to the notions that arose through the initial synthesis. I followed van Manen's (1990) description of a theme; he identified a theme as "the means to get to a notion" (p. 88), and he added that it "gives shape to the shapeless (p. 88), it "describes the content of the notion" (p. 88) and it "is always a reduction of a notion" (p. 88). I created separate strips of paper of each meaning unit so that I could visually move them into different categories, and I created duplicate meaning units where they seemed to straddle different thematic categories (see Appendix G for a visual of this process). The meaning units and themes that arose from the data were referenced back and sieved through the existential categories.

**Relating and creating the themes.** After pre-themes were developed under each coparticipant, I introduced them to one another by bringing together all of the pre-themes. The pre-themes fell under the existential categories of time, body, space, and other, and the additional lifeworld fragment of selfhood. When identifying the themes that fell under these categories, I had difficulty seeing where specific pre-themes relating to power relations and social identity fit. In response to this conundrum, I moved into relistening to the conversations and rereading transcripts to get in touch with the initial sharings to ensure that I was maintaining an affinity to what was said and meant in the interviews. As a way to bring some life and embodiment back into the process, I looked to poetic inquiry as a way to capture the sensate. Butler-Kisber (2010) wrote, "Found poetry is the rearrangement of words, phrases and sometimes whole passages that are taken from other sources and reframed as poetry" (p. 84). I followed this method by extracting the energy

statements from the transcripts. I then created individual poems from the coparticipants (see Appendix H). I also created a personal poem from my own process notes and from journalling about my experience of the phenomenon. This process seemed to breathe new life into the synthesis process. After this activity, I created firm, but loose, final themes. Addition of the interpretive design elements—such as the visual mapping, sketching, and found poetry—supported the hermeneutic circle of inquiry.

**Writing.** Through the writing process, I sought to capture dimensions of the phenomenon through the existentials as shared by the coparticipants. At times it was elusive, as words did not seem to do justice to what was expressed. I resonated with van Manen's (2006) thoughts on writing:

> The problem of writing is that one must bring into presence this phenomenon that can be represented only in words—and yet escapes all representation. The writer who aims to bring the object of his or her gaze into presence is always involved in a tensional relation between presentation (immediate "seeing" and understanding) and representation (understanding mediated by words). (p. 718)

I experienced this tensional relation between seeing the coparticipants' unique experiences and the understanding of what their experiences then mean for the therapist. This navigation was the interpretive task; I sought to be accountable and bear witness to the offerings made by the coparticipants. I took my coparticipants' understandings to heart in terms of how they live with their own tension in the research question. While writing, I sought to move with and embrace the tension.

## Reflexivity and Validity

I wove my own experiential process throughout the research process as a way to stay aware of and to make transparent my preunderstandings. Finlay (2014) defined reflexivity as the following: "It is an active, critical evaluation of personal experience in order to understand something of the fusion of 'horizons,' to use Gadamer's term, between subject and object, researcher and participant" (pp. 130–131). Process notes and visual responses to the data supported self-evaluation and transparency. Constant engagement required taking a dual stance of coparticipant and being witness to myself as coparticipant. Awareness of movement between the two supported my being in this tensional space. Romanyshyn (2010) stated, "But to do research in this way, one has to be able to counteract the lethal forces of denial, which would make one unresponsive to one's own unconscious shadowy projections onto one's research" (p. 289). I sought to be aware of where my history and emotional climate played into the research process, and I brought forward unconscious material as much as possible.

By employing the hermeneutic circle, I sat with, moved with, and revisited the texts over time to ensure validity of findings. "Trustworthiness is enhanced when there is clear evidence that length of time has been spent in the field and there are multiple forms of field texts that can help to corroborate explanations" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 14). The multiple forms of field texts supported the corroboration process between all coparticipants and the data. As well, involvement of the coparticipants by sharing the transcripts and by seeking verification of meaning units and themes was a way by which I sought to represent their lived experiences as clearly as possible. I invited their feedback to explore accuracy and resonance with the data, and I paid attention to the consistency of

what the coparticipants said about particular aspects of the phenomena over time. The practice of "checking for consistency . . . over time" (Patton, 2002, p. 559) aligned with one of Patton's methods for triangulation of qualitative data sources. As a way to further provide rigour to the research, as per Conroy (2003), I also asked for feedback from coparticipants about their sense of the usefulness of the research to their therapeutic work.

Throughout the research, I sought to maintain an orientation to the phenomenon through visual reminders and conversations with my supervisor, as I felt the seduction of moving into emerging avenues for exploration. I also sought to use what I was learning from attention to my preunderstandings and theological leanings—documenting my personal experience, processing my dreams with imagery and concepts that seemed to reflect the inner workings of this exploratory process, and keeping process notes—to remain present to how shifts were happening in me. I also created visual mapping, imagery, and poetry as a way to deepen my relationship to the data.

**Ethics**

The research study did not begin until the Research Ethics Committee of St. Stephen's College provided approval. I followed St. Stephen's College's ethical guidelines when conducting my research study, and I ensured that I maintained support through supervision and peer colleagues to work through arising issues.

Coparticipants were fully informed of their rights and confidentiality. Both risks and benefits were clearly communicated in the consent form for coparticipants (see Appendix B). As well, they were provided with the option to withdraw from the study at

any time without consequence. I checked in with the coparticipants throughout the study to inquire about their continued interest.

I removed names and identifying information from transcript passages and research documents to protect coparticipant identity. Additionally, pseudonyms were used when data were transcribed and synthesized. I also avoided including data which coparticipants were not comfortable sharing. To further ensure confidentiality, I kept all notes, transcripts, and audio and video tapes in a secure location in my home. My personal process notes and any produced visual data were also stored safely in my home environment. I will destroy the data 3 years after the completion of my research.

Recognizing the "research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3), I was attentive to power relations with my coparticipants throughout the inquiry and sought to uphold St. Stephen's College's ethical principles which seek to protect the dignity and well-being of research participants. I was mindful of difference in social identities and power relations, especially given that the inquiry asked coparticipants to reveal their personal experience with these concepts.

I appreciated Yasmin Gunaratnam's (2003) words when it comes to sensitivities around collecting and analyzing data:

> Seeking to recognise how "race," ethnicity and other social differences are produced and have effects in qualitative interviews is undoubtedly difficult and messy work. Rather than trying to fix this mess with methodological strategies such as matching, or analyses that erase the complexities of difference and power relations in the interview, there is much to be achieved by distrusting any

> neatness, and actively searching out and valuing the complexity and richness that comes with the mess. (Chapter 4, "Conclusion," para. 4)

Indeed I experienced messiness as I worked with the data given the tension underlying this question and my theoretical and theological leanings. Because of this, I engaged in conversation with my supervisor and engaged the voices in the hermeneutic circle to support sifting through complexities. The hermeneutic circle challenged emerging themes by

1. continuous questioning,
2. frequently visiting the texts, and
3. relating back to the text as a whole as a way to expand my horizon of understanding.

As well, the hermeneutic circle shone a light on sensitive issues that arose in the circulation of data. For example, I engaged voices of philosophy around white self-criticality that pointed to ways in which the white person who examines topics, such as in my research study, can be trying to remain pure and without condemnation (Yancy, 2015, p. xv). This very notion helped me stay awake to this dynamic as I wove in my preunderstandings and reflections throughout the inquiry, though I recognized that while trying to remain awake I was journeying in messy terrain that required accountability and responsibility. My hope is that ideas in this thesis will continue to move and be challenged, and I am open to critical wisdom where I may have lost courage to face the responsibility of the tasks I undertook.

## Chapter Five: Revealing of the Experiences

Coparticipants were invited to reflect upon their experience of living the tension within their own social identities and power relations, as they make space for meeting of the other. The coparticipants each offered unique voices to the experience. At times their experiences wove together and at other times they parted ways—all enriching an understanding of the lifeworld. Although the data shared are sieved through my understandings and interpretations, I have chosen to reveal the coparticipants' experiences for this chapter only, as my experiences with the research question have been shared throughout this thesis.

The data were sieved through the categories of lived space, lived body, lived time, lived other, and lived selfhood. These categories—van Manen's (1990) existentials and Ashworth's (2003) lifeworld fragments—provided a structure for holding the themes that came forward.[4] As well, the existential categories were helpful dimensions for processing and pulling apart the taken-for-granted human experience within its multiplicity.

A tension in the writing process was the fluid nature of the categories of body, time, space, other, and selfhood. Experiences shared by the coparticipants often dipped into all themes at once. Rich et al. (2013) shared how these categories collapse into one another, in particular body, time, space, and other: "They are not sharply separable; rather, they are interwoven and interact with one another in the exploration of the lifeworld" (p. 12). The data demonstrated this movement and interaction between the

[4] Ashworth (2003) used seven fragments of a lifeworld; they are selfhood, sociality, embodiment, temporality, spatiality, project, and discourse. Four of these fragments align with van Manen's (1990) existential categories of body, time, space, and human relation/other. Going forward, I will be referring both to Ashworth and to van Manen's groupings as *existential themes*, which essentially embrace the diverse dimensions of the lifeworld. The use of one term, *existential themes*, is simply to reduce potential confusion around the separate terms fragments and existentials.

existential themes; however, the data also captured the uniqueness of the phenomenon in relation to each lived existential category.

As well, given the multidimensionality of social identity and power relations, the coparticipants at times shared more than one primary experience to reveal different dimensions of the phenomenon and the multidimensional nature of the lived experience. Often the coparticipants' sharing of stories moved between their experience in a situation to their active practice and values. Therefore, some phrases will refer to present practice, while other statements move from past to present with the sharing of their experiences.

**Lived Space**

Lived space is felt space (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). Therefore, lived space is not limited to measurable dimensional space but extends to how it feels and lives within and without. For example, space may appear abstract and unquantifiable such as when a large room feels small and claustrophobic. Van Manen (1990) drew attention to how space shifts with context: "There are cultural and social conventions associated with space that give the experience of space a certain qualitative dimension" (p. 103). As well, Ashworth (2003) posed a question in relation to the experience of lived space that connects to the inquiry of the coparticipants: "How is their picture of the geography of the places they need to go to and act within affected by the situation?" (p. 149). In this way, the experience of one's own social identities and the power relations at play in a space exude this qualitative dimension. The coparticipants reflected on dimensions of this lived space within the situation of meeting the other in their own social identities and power relations. Lived space came forward as an aspect in the experience of the therapists as it touched on the following subthemes:

- The therapist consciously enters and creates the space.
- Social identities and social context shift the experience of space.
- The therapist is taken to a space of tension and moves with the tension.

**The therapist consciously enters and creates the space.** A couple of words describe how the coparticipants entered and created space: gently and attentively. It was not an abandoned skipping into the space, but thoughtful movements with an awareness of the intensity of the experience as one navigated social identities and power relations. Claire exhibited a conscious stepping into the space when exploring her experience:

> I prefer space, but it's tight spaces that challenge me to learn how to be better with that, because there's times where we just have to be in tight spaces and I can go in it holding my breath or I can go in it going, "Okay, I'm in a tight space. What kind of air do I have?"

Claire was aware of how the "tight space" would challenge her. Yet she consciously chose to step into and enter the space of the tension. She was having an experience of boundaries being stretched, recognizing that she could step "into new expanded space or create contraction." In addition to choosing to step into the space, she also spoke about how she consciously chose to be with the tension by creating spaciousness within by opening the heart and mind. She opened herself to the experience and shared, "It's just sort of like, yes, let's do this! Let's enter this space together and travel. How wonderful to travel on the interior together." Claire shared how in her practice, she enters space in an interior and exterior way, and she travels these terrains with thoughtful excitement.

Like Claire, Elena entered the space with an allowance for the discomfort and embraced the tension as a way to create space for the other. She posed the question:

"Where's the room for the discomfort and the requirement for discomfort?" Making room for the discomfort supported her in entering the space with awareness and attentiveness to power. In addition to embracing the tension, she shared, "It's our job as the therapist to create an ethical container that has room for the other, and I believe . . . making room for the other is a sacred space, always across these domains of difference." The act of "making room" and the creation of sacred space may seem like abstract movements; however, it was through concrete acts that Elena worked to create space. For example, she actively invited these domains of difference into the space by sharing her own social locations. In her words, "You can't just expect them to show up and show you who they are." Elena was also attentive to the domain of the sacred and this aspect of social identity in the space. By "outing" her own social identities and discussing what that means in the space, she was actively creating a safe container for others to share and was making room for their social identities in the collective, contextual setting. However, she shared that therapists can create an excess of internal comfort by naming their privilege and then not doing anything to mitigate power relations. In her experience, embracing the discomfort is a way to hold both an ethical practice and a container for the other.

In a more concrete, spatial sense, Anna shared her awareness of how much physical space her body was taking and how much auditory space her voice was taking in the space. In addition to an awareness of how the body and language diminish or enhance space, Anna had a heightened awareness to the power differentials and tended to these dynamics by "really stepping back." She also shared how she was conscious of her voice and language and what she needed to do to address this: "I have a pretty strong and outgoing personality, and just maybe playing with that a little bit in terms of how I

speak." She sought to create space by being mindful of how she moved her body and voice in the space.

In terms of creating space for difference, Claire shared the importance of creating common ground with a common language. She described her experience with a client who held a particular faith tradition different from her own. She shared how "I knew I didn't fit into the 'it' that he was seeking." In response to this encounter, she sought to create space for him by connecting to his use of language. Claire referred to this man's spiritual identity as a "life buoy" and she shared how she needed to let him "know that it's okay to swim near me and that he won't get drowned, that I'll just be there floating beside him." This image revealed by Claire of the therapist floating alongside the other captured the manner and being of all coparticipants. There was the attentiveness required when floating in a large body of water, yet also a gentle floating as a way to make room for the other. Her experience demonstrated how the therapist ensures to embrace the other's social identities—or life buoys—to create a safe space.

**Social identities and social context shift the experience of space.** Both Claire and Anna specifically shared the experience of noticing how their own social identities shifted the experience of space. This is demonstrated in Anna's experience of feeling distance between her life experiences and the experiences of her clients based on social identities. Anna shared, "Because there's so much closeness in this group in terms of their shared identity . . . I felt just that space between our experiences." It was an experience of separation from other, and feelings arose in response to this distance. As well, Anna had the experience of proximal separation, as empty chairs were on each side of her at the beginning of the gathering. Not sharing the same physical closeness with

others in the space heightened her sense of feeling different within the group, though she acknowledged that her role as the therapist put her in this position and she actively sought ways to close the distance.

Claire's hearing impairment, an aspect of her social identity, shifted her experience of space. For Claire, the experience of being hearing impaired can diminish a sense of social context, which contributes to the tension. When in a particular social context where there is more than one pair of lips, she can have difficulty grasping the context. In these situations, she revealed that she can have the experience of "hitting the edge" of what she perceives her abilities to be. In the experience of "hitting the edge," there awaits the call "to grow up or into a bigger container of being." She further described her movement in this experience, "Surrendering to the reality gives me back to myself while I sort through or integrate and develop new boundaries and coping skills both unconscious and conscious for me." This experience highlighted how she is working with space within herself as well as in the social space. Claire reflected,

> It's something I live with. I've chosen to live with that creative tension as opposed to exiting out of let's say the hearing world and just . . . signing or hiding away or finding a job where I don't have to go out. I challenge that. I allow myself to be challenged with that in the world because I want to be engaged with both, but it's not comfortable. I've just learned how to dance with that creative energy, the tension.

This narrative signified how making a choice to live with the tension that arises in the experience of one's social identities and how allowing oneself to be challenged and

engaged, is uncomfortable; yet, one has an ability to learn to dance in the space with the tension.

**The therapist is taken to a space of tension and moves with the tension.** The coparticipants at times referred to the tension as a presence that entered the space within and without. Throughout the interviews, the therapist's relationship with the tension in the lived space emerged. For example, Claire described how the experience of the tension takes her out of her comfort zone. Her description implies movement from a zone of comfort to a zone of discomfort. In spite of being in the space of discomfort, she shared, "I do not need to struggle or escape but learn to breathe and be one with the experience." In Claire's experience, she chooses not to escape the space of discomfort but recognizes that tension ebbs and flows; the tension, dissonance, and balance are not permanent. The therapist does not seek balance or permanence to hold on to but learns to allow it, be with it, and dance with it. This dancing with tension conjures an image of movement within the space. She shared, "The tension is something that's a dance, and some days I dance it well and some days I don't." When not dancing the tension well, Claire pointed out that the therapist must make conscious efforts to shift and be the container of the space.

As noted in the first subtheme in the Lived Space section, Elena felt that the experience and space of discomfort was required. She expressed how the therapist must stay with it, embrace it, and even look for more of it. As well, she added, "It's really complicated and it's hard to embrace that tension, to have that be the territory and to not work to get your feet on solid ground but to just live with the tension." In spite of the difficulty, she embraced the complexity with intention so that oppression was not replicated with other. She perceived that to seek a place of comfort leads the therapist

into potentially ignoring the power relations and multiplicity of social identities in the space with other. Her narrative revealed that staying with the tension keeps the therapist alive and attentive.

**Lived Body**

Lived body highlights the fact that human beings encounter the world through the body (van Manen, 1990, p. 103). This category "refers to our physical body or bodily presence in our everyday lives, including all that we feel, reveal, conceal, and share through our lived body" (Rich et al., 2013, p. 501). The experience of lived body includes feelings, thoughts, and bodily reactions. Coparticipants described their bodily experience of meeting other in their social identities and power relations under the following subthemes:

- The tension of social identities and power relations is embodied and felt.
- Therapists make useful the embodied experience.
- Potential lies in the embodied experience of the tension.

**The tension of social identities and power relations is embodied and felt.** As the coparticipants described the experience of their bodies, I felt resonance in my own body. They described a range of felt thoughts and emotions that enter the body and that serve to connect or disconnect the therapist. Anna described the experience of being in a group, which increased feelings of difference from others. Upon entering the space, she felt tense and noticed her sweaty palms and feelings bubbling forth, but what Anna noticed most was her thoughts:

> Feelings of . . . oh maybe I don't fit in as much. Or being . . . not as relaxed. That is probably the thing I'm noticing most. And I'm noticing thoughts. How should I

present myself? Just being more aware of myself and less relaxed. Maybe more anxiety.

Anna was also open about the thoughts that emerged as she came into relation with other. She described herself as "analyzing within myself everything about my appearance." Additionally, she had a feeling of concern about the other's perception of her social identities associated with privilege. She described a tension between self-awareness of the different social identities between self and other and the desire to appear that there was no difference because she wanted to connect with other. When asking Anna about the experience of any inner disturbances when in this space, she shared about her judgments and perceptions around appearances that formed upon her first meeting. Her awareness of the stereotypes and judgments that form in those initial moments allows her to work with this inner disturbance and to challenge these thoughts and impressions. In her practice, she works to challenge these internally as well as openly in the space with others.

Intense feelings also arose for Elena. When meeting the other with social identities abused by power and oppression, she experienced the tension as palpable, and she felt dirty and culpable. Her client had experienced horrible injustices by Canadian systems, and Elena had the experience of feeling his suffering in relation to her own privilege as a Canadian-born therapist. In addition to the intensity of the feelings of culpability, Elena also described vulnerability, fear, anger, and shame. The shame was experienced as "hot" and "a crawling inside your skin feeling." Elena described the meeting with her client:

> I was on the outside of my own skin and he could tell . . . Like I felt vulnerable without containment for it, but I also felt like a very "just" anger. I was angry about what had happened to him and there was a tension between feeling that anger alongside feeling culpable and tied to what had oppressed him. And then I also felt fear.

The body's messages swept through her and were unable to be concealed. Yet the feelings were somewhat multiple, because in the midst of these feelings, she also felt safe for him. She described this sense of both feeling culpable and safe: "Like I felt like I was going to be safe for him. I remember thinking, how am I going to be safe for him? And I did even alongside [feeling culpable, etc.] because you have multiple experiences, right?" This comment by Elena captured the experience of the body—there are multiple experiences happening at once, and trying to name the experience as one thing does not do the description justice.

Claire's description also captured the multiplicity of experiences in the body. She described how in the initial phase with the other there might be doubt, fear, and some anxiety, yet also an experience of excitement. Claire shared how the initial experience of the tension was instinctual and animal—like a shockwave. It first entered the body and then affected cognition and behaviour and created a feeling of being unbalanced. She described this experience: "One of our senses goes, 'Alert, alert, alert.' And all of a sudden, the body . . . goes into whatever mode it does to survive, to work through, to be with that creative tension." She further described an experience of squeezing when there is resistance to this instinctual tension. The squeezing prevents flow, creativity, and freedom in the space with other. Claire found being closed or fearful, instead of open and

curious, interrupted the flow of connection. This revealed that if tension is not allowed to flow, its energy sits self-consciously in the body and mind.

In Claire's experience, different degrees of tension and reactions cause inner sufferings and shame and create a feeling of being emotionally full. She described how "simple daily interpretations [are] not a big deal for most people." From the lived experience of having a hearing impairment, however, she shared how these daily interpretations, when misunderstood, can hurt. This is where shame enters. Yet Claire described openness to being stretched and even hurting a little in this shame and tension. In her experience, negotiation of suffering and shame is required through a place of self-forgiveness and compassion. When being stretched, she seeks to maintain commitment to continue to dance with the tension, while ensuring no harm to other or self.

**Therapists make useful the embodied experience.** All of the coparticipants identified their experience of the body as a resource. Information was being gathered from the thoughts, feelings, and bodily reactions as they navigated their social identities and power relations. As mentioned above, Anna noticed the inner disturbance of the judgments and concern. Her recognition of these initial cognitive processes heightened her awareness:

> My awareness of that has helped me to . . . realize that whoever I work with that they automatically do that with me right away, and also to understand that they are doing that to one another. And just to acknowledge that and bring it up and name it.

This experience oriented her to the dynamic of how perceptions of other are also at play in the space. She gently named this human activity in the space, which supported understanding and connection.

For Elena, the tension is an embodied experience, which helps her pay attention. For example, the experience of shame was felt in her body, which ignited a sense of responsibility and awareness about the injustice her client had experienced. In response to the feeling of shame, she shared, "I want to run out of the room and I want to defend myself. You have to decline those things." Declining "those things" invites a responsibility. Shame can be transformed into responsiveness to the other. She shared how she works to shift the experience of shame: "[When experiencing shame] I have to think about it and discern that it's up to me to have the meaning of the shame be that it is an enabling shame, it's going to be a shame that's useful." Elena's description shows how her sense of collective accountability, rooted in her social justice values, supports her in transforming these tough feelings into something meaningful.

Claire also expressed how she utilizes her body by being present to the way that the tension is taking residence within. For Claire, the instinctual response in the body is a call within to experience the tension fully. The experience of embodiment offers her presence to a context, which can at times be challenging with her hearing impairment: "A lack of embodying the context of voices creates tensions of fear, uncertainty and leads to disconnecting." She expounded, "[But] the presence of context through experience of embodying offers a truth of life energy that is relational, and fluid." She has learned to work with this tension by stepping back and being present with her body and by allowing it to move into relationship with self and other. In the same way, she is present to her

experience of shame and suffering by looking for the learning and lessons in the feelings. Claire shared, "If I am intentionally both aware and respond to shame's lessons for me or it's guidance, then shame lives more comfortably within my energy system and I have deepened my relationship between inner and outer energy life systems." Negotiation of suffering and shame is required through a place of self-forgiveness and compassion. Creating a relationship with these feelings, rather than cutting them off from self, moves her into a full, bodily presence.

**Potential lies in the embodied experience of the tension.** Claire and Elena in particular drew attention to the potential that lies within the experience of the tension and discomfort. Claire shared how one can resist or acclimate to the tension. Acceptance of the tension created a flow, open space, and calm in her body. In her words,

> Tension happens as a natural creative act of living and being. We cannot escape it. I feel we are here to learn how to surrender to and embody its natural ways, so we are constantly growing, learning, changing along with life itself.

Repeated acceptance of the tension is required in order to allow its movements in the space with other and for its creativity to be revealed.

For Elena, smoothing over the discomfort and tension is an ethical issue. She provided the following example to describe this position:

> I think that a lot of what we do in the helping professions is to try and ground ourselves to the extent that we neutralize ourselves to those experiences and don't listen . . . Like these are risky, risky conversations. I don't want to ground myself out of them . . . It's not a theoretical thing. It's that it can lead you to think that you got it, and it's safe, and then you might stop paying attention and the next

> thing you do, you transgress it. It might have you exhaling and disappearing any discomfort or tension to the point where now you're not paying attention.

In this sense, allowing herself to really feel that discomfort informs her practice and keeps her attuned to the power dynamics. In fact, the absence of discomfort within the therapist, in both body and mind, may speak to potential abuse of power.

Elena used a helpful metaphor to demonstrate the importance of embracing the tension. Using the metaphor of water, she described how water could take someone by surprise if they are not vigilant. She expressed,

> Any calm, still piece of water can kill you. There is never that groundedness. You are never safe. That is not to say be terrified, it is to say . . . power is always at play, this can always be different. It's always possible for something to happen that is transgressive, right? And that is to be in the presence of water and have a real lived experience and respect for water.

This metaphor connects with Claire's metaphor of floating alongside the other in water. When combining the meanings of these metaphors and the coparticipants' ways of being, the therapist is both attuned to the unpredictability of water and to its gentle embrace. The therapist draws from the depths of water's resource.

**Lived Time**

Lived time captures the dimensions of past, present, and future within the experience with other and considers the subjective experience of time as well as the objective experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 104). For example, the duration of time may seem to go much more quickly in certain situations and may appear more rigid and slow

in others. Each coparticipant reflected on how she experienced time when meeting the other. The following subthemes emerged:

- Passing of chronological time shifts experience of knowing.
- Time is experienced as outside of chronological time.

**Passing of chronological time shifts experience of knowing.** The passing of objective time offers layers of experience within self and with other. Anna related that when first meeting clients with whom she was working, she encountered tension in her own inner thoughts and perceptions. There was heightened attention to difference, speculation of the perceptions of others and then measuring these perceptions against self. What she noticed was a loosening of these perceptions and feelings of difference as time passed. When asked about this experience, Anna revealed:

> In that initial time when you're really a lot more conscious of your own presence and how you're perceived, you're measuring it up against yourself. Everything you notice, you're kind of going, "How is that different for me?"; whereas in later sessions I'm a lot less conscious of my own presence in a way.

In her description, she shared that, after this initial encounter, she had turned toward the other and that which was being shared within the group. She experienced a movement from the inner experience to the outer experience as time passed. Anna also highlighted how repeated encounters over time increased connection. She shared, "Coming back into that space again together, time and again, connects you." In particular, she spoke to how vulnerability shared over time deconstructs ideas of social identity. Unexpected parts of the self and other were opened up, which challenged initial preconceived notions.

In another way, Elena highlighted how her competency has shifted over time in the way that she shows up with other. She expressed that in her earlier practice she had been concerned that her own social identities were potentially reinforcing different forms of oppression, and in response, she sought a training experience abroad to challenge what she had been taught as a therapist. In her experience, a commitment to gathering and building experiences over time supports the therapist's learning. Though, in regard to the tension, Elena noted how it is not an experience to move through over time. She shared, "I don't believe in developmental stages, so it's not like you're going to get through this." Developmentally moving through the tension in objective time is not sought; embracing the tension is required in every moment. The therapist may have the experience of "meeting the other"; however, this is not an end to the tension. Tension must be continually entered and actively lived within every moment.

Claire shared how reflection after the experience creates different ways of seeing. In the experience of the tension in the therapeutic space, Claire noted the discomfort experienced when being taken out of her comfort zone. She stated, "Being taken out of comfort zone is a blessing; however, this blessing is not felt in present, but upon reflecting back." This narrative described that with the passing of clock time, the therapist may be able to experience the tension as a blessing and something to welcome; incubation of time helps the therapist stay in, even seek to be with, the tension.

**Time is experienced as outside chronological time.** All of the coparticipants noticed the experience of time as subjective versus clock time within their experience with other. Claire uncovered her experience with time: "[The experience] is no-time. It is the experience of presence in-the-moment. No words, thoughts . . . an open, responsive,

authentic energy that flows with the Universal or One energy of life." The experience of no-time is infused with a sense of trust and safety. Claire further shared, "There's a really beautiful sense where I can just be with the person and the intuitive part knows that the timing is closing or that the subject is closing, and it's beautiful when the clock and that no-time come together." There is an experience of presence in the moment and to the movements of the process. She said, "It's not something I could figure out intellectually. It's only something that I can be with in the moment, following the process as it's unfolding." When this experience is occurring, tension ceases to exist in that moment when being present to the other's suffering; though she noted that being in the moment is also a "wordless process." Claire, however, also shared another dimension of her experience with time. When the tension is bound by self-consciousness, there is an experience of time becoming bound. Tension and time no longer flow.

Much like Claire, Elena described time as being experienced as fluid. In her experience, when the therapist is open to transformation and liberation with others, time can be experienced with flow. Her description exhibited how embracing fluidity supports the therapist in moving out of linear spaces, which supports the meeting of other and addresses power imbalances. Rigidity and staying in objective time may lead to a misuse of power.

Anna found that therapeutic practices such as the sharing of stories expanded a sense of time with other. She shared, "I felt that it was a longer time than the actual [time] . . . it was kind of this frozen moment, you know, with people and hearing their stories and then making a connection." She had an experience of time as outside chronological time, where time felt both present and expansive. Anna described how this experience of

time contributed to the creation of a powerful space. Although they had only been in the space two hours, she felt like time had stretched to create a greater sense of knowing the other.

**Lived Other**

Lived other is "the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space we share with them" (van Manen, 1990, p. 104). Within this theme, I have been inclusive of the spiritual other, such as lived relation with a holy other, spirit, or the infinite unknown. The coparticipants described and interpreted their experiences and interactions with clients. It was difficult at times, as with all of the existential themes, to work with lived other as a separate category as I found all of the coparticipants maintained a strong orientation to the other within reflections. Nevertheless, the following subthemes capture key ways in which the coparticipants particularly lived relationship with the other:

- The therapist experiences mutuality and togetherness.
- The therapist is present to other.
- Social identities and power relations meet, live, and move with other.
- The therapist is in relationship with supportive other.

**The therapist experiences mutuality and togetherness.** The coparticipants shared how they experienced mutuality and a sense of togetherness in the experience with other. The relational nature of the therapeutic work and the togetherness in the struggle were recognized by Elena. In her work she seeks to dignify, respect, and humanize the other in relationship. She stated, "Once you're in a real authentic relationship, now you're

both open to being something other than what you were." The therapist and other are in relationship and both are changed.

Anna also expressed this sense of sharing and mutuality with other. She practices vulnerability with her clients. Her own personal story of pain and suffering in her life helped her "connect with these amazing people." By sharing her own story, she gained a feeling of acceptance and belonging within the group and experienced a sense of togetherness. She said, "That was like the best thing that I could share, is actually just share my own story and not try to be anyone different." She finds the practice of vulnerability serves to connect and to decrease the felt distance she described in regards to the felt space. Though, in her experience, vulnerability can serve both to open up and to shut down connection, and therefore, it is practiced with awareness and attentiveness to other. She said, "I've been in situations where I've been with a facilitator or a therapist leading a session who's too open about their own fears and vulnerability, and no one feels safe to be in the space because they don't feel like anyone's guiding it, or it's too open." An expression of too much vulnerability on the part of the therapist can move into unethical terrain; vulnerability must attend to power dynamics.

Claire shared how both the therapist and the other are in a dance. Tension lives in other as it lives in the therapist. In her exploration of her inner experience, she was attuned to how the other was also relating and being with the tension in the shared space. In response to the mutual dance, she created an inner, open channel, which contains the therapeutic encounter's changes of rhythm and allows the human exchange to connect and flow, thereby cultivating a readiness to receive whatever comes her way. She described her experience with a client as such: "In a really fundamental way, we're just

two humans that have been scared in life like we all are, and we're just coming together to try to connect. I think it's all about connection." In addition to recognizing the mutual dance, she brought forward the role of risk taking. She sought to embrace risk taking with the other to avoid re-entering and doing the familiar. This required that she allow herself to be tested by the other. Her narrative revealed that this testing of the therapist by the other creates the conditions for a sense of safety with the therapist. In her words, "We're here because we both want to do something together. We want to share something together and you're testing out whether I'm the right person for you to do that with or not, or it might be one time, but it's an invitation." This testing demonstrates the mutual exchange that occurs in the space. It is not a one-way flow of the therapist acting on other, but cyclical movements of interactions.

**The therapist is present to other.** Elena and Claire touched on different ways in which they centred and created presence with other. Elena demonstrated her attention to power relations and her own social identities of privilege by focusing on the other's suffering in the therapeutic space. To demonstrate how she relates to the suffering other, Elena shared an experience with a client who was targeting her social identities. She found that by accessing compassion and focusing on the suffering, she was able to move into a presence with the client. She shared,

> [I was] seeing him as a suffering other, not seeing him as a man who was oppressing me . . . I could have easily left the room righteously and people would have backed me up. I'm not telling people that they should be accommodating to any oppression, [and] we should suck all that stuff up. I didn't suck it all up, but I was able to put it to the side.

She found that getting herself out of the way and focusing on the other moved her into a space of presence and compassion. Her story captured how this is the responsibility of the therapist.

Claire found that by offering safety of presence to the other, the other is allowed to risk. Presence and authenticity are also a responsibility of the therapist. She described that by offering this to her clients, she in turn encourages this expression of authenticity, presence, and risk taking in other. Though Claire noted that there should not be an expectation that the client mirror back what is offered: "If somebody doesn't want to, believe me, there's nothing you can do about it. You can only be authentic and make an offering." This sharing of her experience conjures up the image that she shared of the gentle floating alongside the other; the therapist offers presence and support but does not push them to dive deeper than they wish.

**Social identities and power relations meet, live, and move with other.** Social identities and power relations rub up against one another in the movements with other. The coparticipants recognized the complexity of how social identities and power relations are revealed in space and how they connect, relate, and interact. They demonstrated how power relations and social identities are not one-dimensional entities to be dealt with, but rather multidimensional and dynamic. This subtheme speaks to how the coparticipants encountered these complex and multidimensional movements.

A shared experience amongst the coparticipants was the view that power is always present and at play. Claire's definition of power was as follows: "[Power is] part of all things, and it takes numerous forms. But because it's an energy that's living and breathing like life itself, it has to be dealt with." The living and breathing nature of power

circulates in the space with other. In Anna's experience, when working with a group of clients, it was important to be aware of this presence of power and its imbalances—and to have strategies for circulating power. As a creative therapist, she uses music to shift power dynamics and to cocreate with her clients. She shared about her particular experience in a group: "I was . . . trying to use creative strategies to shift the power imbalances, especially in terms of who could speak and who could share, and trying to make it so that people who were less powerful, in a way, would be equally sharing." As well, Anna finds the practice of vulnerability has the ability to circulate and shift power in the therapeutic encounter. Sharing parts of herself and cocreating beauty contributed to movement of power.

Anna also reflected upon her social identities associated with power and privilege in relation to the other. She noticed how when she was interfacing a homogenous group with social identities different from her own, she experienced increased anxiety and awareness. This experience heightened her awareness of power dynamics. Related to this experience, Claire shared that having a different social identity than others in a group context can cause a swinging between inner suffering (self-consciousness) and a concern for other (other-consciousness). If she is in this movement with other, she holds "a commitment to trust, to the natural life dances in the variety and pendulum between the known and unknown, tension and safety, knowledge and direct experience." Claire's experience demonstrated that trust in self and trust in the unknown creates an active relation with other.

Elena highlighted the power relationship between the therapist and client: "As the therapist, there's always the power relationship, the therapist and the client. You are there

because you're competent at what you do and the other person is there because there's suffering in their life." In this sense, the therapist is required not to locate themselves in their social identities that are deemed more marginalized in relation to the client. She said, "You don't get to be the oppressed when you're the therapist." As well, in relation to her client, she expressed, "I wanted him to be the person holding what power he could in this interaction." Her story contributed to the understanding that the privileged position of the therapist is to be tended to and addressed constantly.

As a way to see between the spaces of social identities, power relations, and the complexities inherent in each, Elena connected to an intersectionality approach, which recognizes the multidimensionality of social identities and oppressions. She shared, "We're never just beings . . . We know that in terms of intersectionality we're always indivisible from the multiplicity." Relating to social identities as fixed rather than porous prevents seeing the other. Claire also shared this view of social identities. She feels that social identities can be both harmful and helpful. She expressed that if we do not see social identities, we can harm others; if all we see are social identities, we can diminish a sense of belonging.

Elena further drew attention to how a rigid use of categories of social identity can prohibit movement of social identities in the space. There is a need for fluidity and an ability to look in between categories; however, the therapist's use of categories of social identity can also support in dismantling oppression. By acting as though the categories do not exist, the therapist's privileged sites of oppression are served. Elena shared the tension of utilizing these social categories:

> We're going to use these categories but it's not because we believe in them and it's not because we think that they're irrefutable. It's useful but flawed. It's what we've got right now and we're using it to dismantle itself. But until we have a just society we need these categories and some more than others.

With this shared insight, she shone a light on how it is useful for the therapist to be holding the tension of both the usefulness and the flawed nature of the categories in the therapeutic space. Categories can lead to commodification, but they can also support the therapist in seeing between the categories to create space for others. Such space mediates what has been given and what is; there is room to breathe with the other.

The coparticipants' experiences of their social identities in relationship to the other highlighted the role and responsibility of the therapist in the meeting of other. Elena shared that, when the other's social identities of privilege rub up against her social identities of disadvantage, she accesses compassion. As well, as noted in her anecdote above about a client who was prodding her social identities of disadvantage, she experienced a presence to the other's suffering and a movement with the power relations at play. Her anecdote demonstrated that, although the therapist–client power relation exists, a complexity to the way power is acted upon also exists. In light of this, both Anna and Elena connected to the tension of the therapist not being able to have socially just relationships in the therapeutic practice, yet shared how they sought to mitigate power imbalances in their social context. They were always aware of power's circulation in the interaction and the requirement to work for a socially just world.

**The therapist is in relationship with supportive other.** The coparticipants all shared about the role of spirituality as a way to support them with living the tension.

More specifically, spirituality included colleagues, friends, family, community, and nature and also included holy other: Holy Spirit, the infinite unknown, or values.

Anna spoke about her intentionality of creating community for herself and of maintaining a spiritual practice to support her. In her experience, a spirituality that embraces all of the person, including the broken parts, creates vulnerability and connection with others. She shared,

> I see now my Christian faith is much more in those vulnerable or broken or dark parts of my story . . . and I guess that is what I see as the redemptive story of the Christian tradition that I think is very valuable. Those are the spaces to really share and where you make those connections with people and where beautiful things grow.

Anna further shared a spiritual value that influences her practice, which is "to be hospitable and to be welcoming of the stranger." She described this value as being at the core of her work. Although this spiritual value is a catalyst and supports Anna in her work, she also noted how it enhanced her experience of living the tension. For example, she shared the experience of not having the structures of her religion fully acknowledge or address long-standing power imbalances. She expressed, "I feel like I'm fighting them rather than being supported by them." Anna shared how this experience creates an inner disturbance within her work, which increases her attentiveness to power relations and dynamics with other.

Claire also shared about the strength she found in others. Claire has a belief in trusting the infinite unknown and being willing to take risks. There is a spiritual knowing in the power of the human spirit, which drives the desire to connect with other. An

immense power beyond language and cognitive functioning exists that the therapist trusts, practices, and is open to. Claire shared that in her practice she surrenders to the unknown, with trust being the outcome of the surrender. Tension is released back into the infinite ocean of life.

Elena described her spiritual connection and solidarity through others' love and commitment to social justice. Accountability to others is required—a collective embracing of the messiness of the tension in community. She described the support she receives and this requirement for community:

> We can be in this ethical mess with each other and embrace this discomfort together and create accountability with each other where we don't prioritize harmonious relationships with each other, but we actually get in the mess with each other and call each other to account.

In addition to this community, she evokes others' spirited presence into the space. This is inclusive of people, Holy Ghost, nature, and solidarity itself. Her spirituality inspires responsibility and accountability to the whole of community.

**Lived Selfhood**

Lived selfhood considers the aspects of the self that connect to one's own sense of identity and power. Ashworth (2003) included the category of selfhood as one of his seven fragments of the lifeworld. In relation to the self, he asked, "What does the situation mean for social identity; the person's sense of agency, and their feeling of their own presence and voice in the situation?" (p. 148). This question connects to how the self lives a sense of power and voice within a social relationship. Bufton (2003) undertook a

phenomenological study around university students and social class using the lifeworld fragments. In regard to selfhood, she wrote,

> Our sense of who we are—our selfhood—is forged in the crucible of social relationships through which we recognise our similarity to (and difference from) others in the social world . . . This is not to deny the individuality of selfhood and identity but to recognise that these can never be separated from the social influences which help to form and sustain them. (p. 210)

Lived selfhood is a useful category for capturing the interplay of the inner and outer experience with one's sense of identity and personal power in a relational space. The interviews with coparticipants did not specifically inquire about this aspect of their experience as did the other existential categories; however, this experience emerged through the data synthesis. The experience of lived selfhood shed light on the following subthemes:

- The therapist interacts with their own social identities and power relations.
- The therapist's sense of personal power.

**The therapist interacts with their own social identities and power relations.** The coparticipants related to their own social identities and power relations with consciousness and movement. Claire shared about her experience as a hearing impaired person and owned her social identities in the sense that she cannot simply separate herself from them. She reflected on how she has interacted with these domains of identity in relation to her sense of self:

> The real question for me was, "Who am I now?", "Who am I in relation to language, social identities and power?" The more I ask myself, the intention

> becomes [an] embodied prayer and leads the way to synchronize life experience to learn about these words, issues or experiences.

In the past, Claire had a focus "on learning from other," which moved to a focus on how she was being, which then shifted focus to "the energies of us together and our dance." While in the dance, she described how her own social identities live in the space and open up her experience to self and other. For Claire, the therapeutic space is a meeting place for parts of her social selves to be touched and revealed with other.

Anna shared that she reveals and pulls back parts of her social identity as a way to connect with other. This navigation may be done quickly when in the therapeutic space as a way to assess how she can be most supportive to other. This consciousness informs how she moves with her social identities in the space. For example, she shared how she might hold a part of her social identity in the following way:

> For example, I don't often say to people, "I'm a Christian" just in an introduction or something because I feel that what it means to me, and the heart of what I see that to mean, isn't really what's perceived by a lot of the larger community because of those structures that exist, and that's really difficult. And that's interesting because that's a big part of the identity thing in when I choose to share parts about my spiritual beliefs or when I don't, with communities that I feel have been really oppressed or marginalized by the larger Christian structure.

Anna is mindful of how particular social identities may open or shut connection, and she brings forward or pulls back identities as a way to mitigate this. Navigation of social identities is required to make room for other.

Like Anna, Elena negotiates what parts of her social identity will show up as a way to be accountable and useful to the other. Yet she clarified that this does not require severing parts of herself in the therapeutic encounter:

> I think all of me needs to be present. So the parts of me that aren't useful to show up to him are really important for me to maintain my useful discomfort, to stand up in my privilege, and that can allow me to show up for him in the most useful way.

She seeks to locate in her sites of privilege as opposed to sites of oppression so that power relations are not obscured or violated with clients who are there because of their suffering. She noted that there are

> invitations continually for us to locate in various domains of our identity in different sites, and I think what I try to hold onto with an ethic of justice-doing is to identify in my locations of power and privilege when I'm a therapist and not locate so much in my sites of oppression because it doesn't serve justice.

As Elena expressed, this is why maintaining an active relationship with the tension is required; the therapist stays in the tension as a way to negotiate which social identities are important to locate in the moment. When bringing up parts of her social identity with other, she problematizes them as a way to invite domains of difference into the space.

The following word comes to mind when capturing the coparticipants' experience with social identities: movement. There are movements between owning, locating, negotiating, and problematizing their social identities as a way to be in tune with the inner experience, as well as to be accountable to the outer experience. Social selves are in a dance, being tapped on the shoulder, and invited to come forward or step back. The

coparticipants move with the rhythm of the questions of social identity through time and with other, all the while continuing to learn about themselves.

**The therapist's sense of personal power.** This subtheme connects to how the coparticipants experienced their personal power and agency or their capacity to act in the relational space. In one example, Anna described how the structures where she worked hindered her from stepping into her personal power. She felt that these structures did not fully embrace the work she was seeking to carry out. Anna shared, "I often battle with that within myself as far as stepping in somewhere with confidence." As well, she noted how historical–social context, personality, educational experiences, and her family of origin all impact her ability to live in the tension. For example, as the peacemaker in the family, she learned to relate to tension and difference in a particular way, and this connects to how she relates to others in her work. Claire also described her experience with the tension in the historical, family context. In this way, one's personal and past experience with power informs how they relate to power within self and with other.

When noticing the social identities of other, Anna also spoke to the experience of feeling less power in the space, in a way that surpassed acknowledgement of her therapeutic position and role. In Anna's experience, having less power in a space than those you are working with can raise feelings of fear and self-doubt:

> When you are working with people who are more powerful than you in that space . . . Just as a therapist I felt a little bit fearful. Should I go ahead with this? Is it ok? Should I take this role and try this?

As described under the section of Lived Body, Anna used these feelings and thoughts as a therapeutic tool. She transformed the feelings of powerlessness to responsiveness to power dynamics in the space.

Another dimension Anna shed light on was her experience and concern with legitimacy. She described her initial experience with her counselling group: "It's like an interview in some way or passing this test as far as: okay, are you legitimate? Can we accept what you have to share?" Although this experience has emerged in her work with clients, much of the concern about legitimacy has come from noticing others measuring the meaningfulness of her work based on the client group's social identities. For example, she has had the experience where working with marginalized clients can feel more legitimate and spiritually significant than working with groups who are less marginalized. This tension resonates within her, and she challenges herself to move out of a space that deems certain work more worthy. At times this creates a fear that she is not accomplishing enough in her work and contributes to her experience of the tension and personal power.

Elena also shared how her sense of competency can be challenged. When first meeting her client and in the midst of the tension, she described her experience, "I couldn't remember that I was a person that was useful to people. It shook my experience of my own competency." She had an experience of feeling vulnerable without containment, a feeling of being outside self in the relational space. Yet she also shared that she is aware of how to use her power in these spaces. Recognizing that power is not owned and cannot be commodified, she shared that she has a relationship with power and uses her voice and power to work towards a socially just future. This sense of voice can

shift depending on the space she is in. In some spaces, she has had the experience of her voice being silenced.

Claire exercises choice, which generates a personal sense of power. For Claire, if not exercising choice and consciousness, the therapist can be reactionary rather than responsive. She expressed,

> Choice is power. It only comes with conscious awareness of both the infinite and finite self (or silent and spoken self). The therapist has a responsibility to be as authentic (present moment awareness-being), ethical, and mindful as humanly possible in her work with self and others.

Making a choice to be with the tension and allowing oneself to be challenged and engaged is uncomfortable, but Claire has learned to dance with the tension. She shared how she takes responsibility for the presence of the tension, chooses to be with it, and trusts in her inner resources and the infinite unknown and universal, thus generating a personal sense of power.

**Coparticipants' Voices through Image and Poetry**

Throughout the research study, I kept process notes and engaged in sketching. After spending time synthesizing the data, I sketched images that sought to capture kernels of the coparticipants' ways of being with the phenomenon. Near the end of the data synthesis, I also shaped poems from the transcripts as a way to re-engage with their original voices. Here I share some sketches, along with excerpts from the poems, as a way to further orient the reader to the coparticipants' voices and offerings. I have included imagery and poetry relating to my own experience here as well; my personal experience with the coparticipants' narratives and insights is specifically contained in

Chapters 6 and 7. Sharing these creative responses as a closing to this chapter may support the reader in more fully coming to understand the inter-weaving voices in the themes above (see Appendix H for entire poems).

**Anna.**

My journey
connects more to
the broken parts of my story
It is these parts
where you make connection
where beautiful things grow
Vulnerability can open up
or shut down connection
It is a tension
I navigate
the best way
to connect to their pain
shift the power, shift my body, shift my voice
step back
structure is required for safety
I listen
open to surprise
And then
surprise at their own stories
Participating in beauty
together
this moves power
I had to be vulnerable to be allowed in
it is all about connection
Coming into that space
again and again
connects you
frozen and stretched moments

*Figure 4.* Sketch in response to Anna's experience

**Claire.**

How I respond or react, this is
what interests me
Choice is power
take responsibility for its presence
and be with it
creating internal spaciousness
riding out its movements within
body, mind
Repeated acceptance, curiosity, and
attention
Dissonance, balance
they are not permanent
neither is the tension
dance with it
Being tension, being human
we cannot exist without meeting up
with these movements
it is what life asks of us
It's about how we honour the dance
between us
while we get stretched, snap back, and
dance on each other's toes
Can we keep dancing?
To bust through the comfort zone
I don't mind it stretching and hurting a
little
it's not comfortable, but I've learned how
to dance
even dancing in stillness

*Figure 5*. Sketch in response to Claire's experience.

**Elena.**

Tension is a textured word
I want it there
to sit in it
It is not ethical to be comfortable
in these spaces
power is always at play and going on here
It's not like you are going to
get through this
you are jumping
into a question you can't answer
Embrace it, not resolve it
Stay complicated
stay with the tension
look for more of it
It is not to be avoided
We have to work to change the social
context of human suffering,
not just find ways to navigate the
complexity
create accountability with each other
And this:
I am inspired and hopeful
And I am good with this intentional and
complicated stuff
These are things I tear apart and
it's lovely

*Figure 6.* Sketch in response to Elena's experience.

**Tracy.**

I want to know the meaning
of this tension
for my way of being
suspicious of theories
that map it out
a response to a drive for authenticity
but what is “real” and “good”?
this sure thing I crave
the thread of monotheistic indoctrination,
individualism
that runs through me
Meaning is multiple, disputable
hard to trust
I see you, Tension
I was trying to civilize you
civilize = to create straight lines
line drawing becomes waves of texture
no plain, perfect abiding
it’s messy, unsure
shame, curiosity, fear
allow the movements
To take this tension in and out
is a requirement
see what happens in
the vulnerable space

*Figure 7*. Sketch in response to Tracy's experience

## Chapter Six: Sifting Through the Experiences

This study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the therapist's experience of living the tension within their own social identities and power relations, so that space is created for meeting of the other. The coparticipants revealed that they had experienced multiple dimensions of this lifeworld. They had both common and unique experiences in the ways they lived space, lived body, lived time, lived other, and lived selfhood. This discussion chapter begins with a composite summary of this lifeworld as sieved through the existential and lifeworld fragments and then moves to interaction with themes that emerged through the data.

### Summary of the Lifeworld

The coparticipants' descriptions and interpretations have been interwoven into the composite summary below as a way to invite the reader to travel into the combined experiences. The summary, as with the data, maintains the themes of lived body, lived time, lived space, lived other, and lived selfhood. I have used the pronoun "she" in the following summation as this fits with the self-identified gender of the coparticipants.

**Lived body.** Instinctual and animal like, the tension takes residence in the body. The body is tense, sweats, and crawls. The tension triggers thoughts and feelings that can feel too full. Thoughts swirl around. She wonders what the other is thinking about her, while in turn, her own prejudgments begin to form. Misunderstandings may arise. Shame enters. A feeling of dirtiness seeps in as she feels her privileged social identities in relation to the other. The tension can feel like a squeezing of body and mind, contracting inwards rather than flowing out. And then anger for the indescribable injustice! Everything is being stretched and it hurts. Yet there is also a feeling of safety within and

for other. An ability to be with and attend to the bodily messages alerting the therapist to be compassionate within and without. She is present to the body's movements and steps into vulnerability and openness. She uses the body as a way to stay informed and present to the tension, and she relates to the difficult feelings and thoughts as a way to connect. She could escape it, but she chooses to stay with it—even plunges into its depths—and sees its use and potential.

**Lived time.** The passing of time loosens perceptions and knowledge. Perceptions of social identity are pulled apart as clock time travels. Knowledge gained around notions of social identity and power relations from the past are challenged and shaped into new understandings and ways of being and seeing. Standing in a different space in time allows her to see the experience through a different lens. Now she has an ability to view the discomfort as a blessing. Time passing enriches and serves the meeting of the other, though she is not seduced into thinking the discomfort and tension disappear into a placid lake. Unseen and powerful undercurrents are always present. As social identities and power relations are active and moving, she must always be attuned to how an experience of living the tension can catapult her into an act of injustice.

Clock time can turn into subjective time. Once measurable minutes are now expanded or frozen moments. The very notion of time disappears into the energetic flow, and she finds herself in a timeless sense of rhythm with other. The body and thoughts can also halt time. When self-consciousness takes residence within, she has a sense of feeling in a stuck moment. Time is bound and glued to cement. She seeks to move out of linear spaces of time and to embrace fluidity. Working towards transformation and liberation challenges the experience of clock time; time now flows and moves.

**Lived space.** An interior and an exterior space are entered with the self and with the other. Space can be entered with excitement and embrace and, at other times, slowly and carefully. She may have perceptions of closeness or distance to the other's social identities, and these perceptions contribute to how the space feels. Proximity interpreted as more distant in relation to others in the room enhances discomfort and a feeling of difference. She addresses this by extending self through vulnerability, thus opening the space to new ideas of self and other. Shared pain and shared stories create shared space.

The discomfort zone is the space of inner suffering triggered by the perceived gap and the other's suffering. She can exercise choice around how to show up in such a social context and how to interact with these feelings of difference. It's not an easy space to be in. Room needs to be made for the other and for the multiplicity of social selves. She responds as a way to breathe in new life into what might feel like stale air. She does this by inviting difference into the space, welcoming difference, and unpacking the meaning of difference in terms of relations with power. Stepping into these moving spaces, she awakes to where the space opens, closes, and separates; she is an active participant in shifting space. Addressing power and allowing the circulation of power and notions of social identity are a way to create a container of safety, but not a container so airtight that the movements become static and wilt. As space expands or contracts, there is aliveness to the lived tension.

**Lived other.** She recognizes that the tension lives in other, just as in self. A kind of social tensional relation emerges from the felt difference, and then the dance begins. She seeks to move with other and creates an open channel to contain the dance. She is floating alongside the other, rather than seeking solid ground, and she is present and

attuned to the movements of water. She seeks to mirror authenticity and safety but has no expectations to have it mirrored back. Moving with the other's suffering, she keeps the other centred in the social context. They are why she is there. Hers is a privileged position; she works with her own "stuff" so that it does not get in the way. She is aware of where her own social identities serve or diminish the encounter with other and of how difference triggers feelings, thoughts, and relations. She is attentive to power playing in the space and seeks to create ways for others to hold and access their own power.

She embraces the other's social selves and commits to honour all of the parts, even those that are not apparent or understood. She does not assume that because one part is seen, another is not present and asking to come forward—or perhaps waiting to emerge. Nor does she cling to the socially constructed categories but uses them as a way to address power. She respects the other's way of being and seeks to create connection and hope while accessing her own compassion. An energy lies behind the notion of social identity that helps her see more than what appears.

Her community and spirituality are a support while navigating this terrain. Strength in others' presence, love, and commitment fuel her. They support her in her work and create a space to allow her to self-empty when feeling too full. The spiritual realm is accessed, whether that is Holy Spirit, Holy Other, spiritual values, or the infinite Mystery. Values of solidarity, collaboration, human connection, hospitality, and welcoming the stranger drive the therapist to live in the space. Deep, experiential, energetic knowing moves her into a state of "being-ness" with other, with tension, with self. She commits to trusting the unknown and direct experience; this is sacred space. At times, these values can contribute to the tension as they ask the therapist to enter the dark

places and feel the discomfort and the pain of our socially unjust world and relationships. Yet, these values guide her as she seeks to make room for and to centre the other in the therapeutic space.

**Lived selfhood.** She seeks and asks questions to self and to her power. She notices how the meeting with other opens a door to a meeting with self. Her social identities are a part of who she is; she owns these parts of self. And she navigates social identities, particularly those associated with privilege, so that she can be of most use to other. If a self-consciousness takes over and she contracts into self, connection is lost; however, if an expansiveness is embraced, she is able to allow the different parts of self to be touched. In this expansiveness and in service to other, she may pull forward or push back different identities. She is concerned about how to do this when her parts of self, associated with privilege, are revealed. Social selves seek to dance in rhythm to what is needed for the other. She unpacks the possible meaning that particular parts of her identity might hold, tends to power relations, and creates a space of safety for other.

Although she is in a position of privilege as the therapist, her own sense of power and competency may be challenged. Her history, family of origin, or social context may contribute to this sense of power and inform how she shows up in the therapeutic space. Differences in social identities trigger feelings of fear, self-doubt, and concerns about being seen as legitimate. She may feel as though she has to pass a test while the other is measuring her up. She may also have an experience of others judging the value of her work based on her client's social marginalization. This challenges her to continually reflect on her intentions and choices about where and how she practices and where she is placing value. She knows that measuring the other's marginalization against others

discounts their real suffering. Exercising choice, she moves herself into a space of freedom, a turning outwards rather than inwards. She takes risks, trusts in the pendulum of experience, and trusts herself to be more.

## Connecting Voices: Intersecting with the Literature and My Experience with the Research Question

As I stayed present to nuances of these personal experiences and sifted through the layers for meaning, I noticed something distinct becoming embodied and moving within me. In keeping with being a coparticipant, I fold back my own experiences in here and place them under themes that capture the insights that stayed with me. Because the stories from the data also piqued curiosity about what additional literature might shed light on the insights that had been revealed, I wove new findings into the themes that I personally identified. Several themes from the previously shared literature will also be reviewed in light of the findings.

**The dynamic presence of power.** Power moves. It circulates in the space and in between social identities. The literature identified the relational nature of power, and the coparticipants shared this understanding of power in the therapeutic space. Sparks (2014) referred to this as "a relational transaction" and noted, "Power is not a monolithic entity" (p. 18). As Claire shared, "[Power is] an energy that's living and breathing like life itself." I found that the coparticipants were aware of the multidimensionality and the, at times, subtle nature of power and were always seeking to address it in its many forms. Guilfoyle (2003) explained that the absence of overt domination or resistance does not mean power is not at play. This connects to Besley's (2002) call for therapists to "always assume that they are participating in domains of power and knowledge" (p. 134). It is not

easy to see power in its many forms and operations, but the coparticipants situated themselves in a knowing that power was alive in the space and acknowledged that its lived presence can be both life enhancing and life diminishing.

My sense from the coparticipants' stories was that this did not mean power always "felt" like it was relational and moving. Although power is seen as relational and dynamic, perhaps the relation between the client and therapist is also an area where power feels more uniform and where astute attention is needed to navigate this relation. At times the relational transaction of power felt static and stuck. For example, the feelings of powerlessness that Anna faced with the systems of her work environment. Or when Claire shared how an experience of self-consciousness within her own social identities can bind body and time. Or when Elena described the experience in her body that absorbed her client's injustice against her own privilege. In these descriptions, I would venture to say power felt monolithic—overbearing, unmovable, and stuck in the moment.

Experiencing one's own social identities in relation to the other can create fixed feelings of anger, doubt, self-consciousness, and shame, which take residence in the body, time, space, and self and with other. I resonated with these experiences. As described in my theological reflections, I am often left with static, hopeless feelings of shame and anxious responsibility when meeting the other—in particular when I feel my privileged social identities. Therefore, although this theoretical understanding of power is upheld, it may not be felt in the direct experience. However, the coparticipants revealed that this experience of power is unhinged and moves into an experience of relational power.

The coparticipants' experiences included diverse movements: connecting with the other's suffering, integrating expressive activities to circulate power, noting inner thoughts and feelings, accessing compassion, sharing stories, mirroring, floating, and "presence-ing." All interventions were a turning towards the other, a gentle peeling back of power within and without. The task of the therapist is unmasking how power is embedded in therapeutic practice and how it plays in the space (Besley, 2002, p. 134). The coparticipants did not unmask the presence of power in a managerial way, nor was unmasking of power done in a way to create an equal relationship between themselves and the other. Guilfoyle (2003) asked that therapists consider their position as inheritors of power in the therapeutic relationship and this "enduring power relation" (pp. 340–341). For Guilfoyle, this did not mean that the client is under the subjugation of the therapist, but certain practices can be engaged to work within this power relation. I heard each coparticipant share how they noticed the power relation and tended to it while being mindful of the social context, which resonated with the literature's call for the therapist to be attentive to how power lives in the social and cultural context (Guilfoyle, 2003, p. 340; Watts-Jones, 2010, p. 411). As Martín-Baró (1994) highlighted, therapists can not enter into a place of understanding if they do not place themselves in the clients "historical lookout point" (p. 46). The therapist relates to and moves within the social context.

The social, contextual, and institutional factors create the conditions for this power relation. As Elena highlighted, this power relation is always at play, and therapists are never in a position where they are oppressed in this power relation. This also connects to the literature's theme of how power may be concealed by the therapist's attempts to equalize the therapeutic relationship. Seeking neutrality entrenches the status quo

(Chantler, 2005, p. 254). This does not mean that the therapist might not feel oppressed or, in fact, have the experience of the client targeting their social identities. Elena shared the experience where a client was targeting her social identities with an onslaught of offensive remarks and assumptions. She felt righteousness and anger begin to emerge, but she noticed the inner process distancing her from the other. In response, she accessed her compassion, and she related to her client with full presence. This movement shifted everything. Elena expressed that the reason the therapist is there is because of the therapist's competency, and the client is there because of the client's suffering. The tables are never turned; this is the nature of therapeutic work. But this does not mean that the therapist does not struggle with tension and discomfort. Instead, she allows the discomfort to move and breathe and is not seduced into the reactive states. This connects with Claire's description of how "reactive coping strategies" can get in the way. Claire also accesses compassion; however, she shared how she offers this compassion to self as a way to move through and acclimate to the felt tension. This supports her in holding the container for the therapeutic power relation.

**Flow with the complexities.** The following word comes forward when I consider the kinesthetic feel of how the coparticipants moved in the space: flow. Anna shared how she moved with the changing aspects of her experience while being attentive to where the space was opening and closing with other; Claire shared how she worked to be with the reactive states by allowing the tension to flow and by enacting openness and curiosity; and Elena shared how fluidity, as a principle of queer theory, supported her in getting out of linear spaces. Allowing this flow makes it more possible for therapists to stay with the tension.

As I travelled with the coparticipants and synthesized the data, I looked into how queer theory allows for space and a kind of movement around and in between what seemed to be fixed notions of identity or theoretical practice. In an excerpt from Jagose's (1996) book *Queer Theory*, she stated, "Queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming" (para. 13). Queer theory embraces the movement and does not cling to a state of being. Reynolds (2010), an activist-informed therapist, wrote about insights that queer theory offers: "Queer theory frees us from taking on being an ally as a static identity, which could require being perfect and always getting it right. Queer theory invites fluidity, movement from the fixed and certain to the confused and unstable" (p. 13). This offering links to Holland and Henriot's (1980) radical approach to change (p. 32). It asks that we get out of traditional and liberal modes of being, which manage the seeming structural parts like building blocks. Fluidity offers the ability to take risks, to get it wrong, and to imperfectly venture again and again into embracing the tension.

The coparticipants also highlighted the fluidity and complexity of social identities. Social identities carry both the shadow and the light. The coparticipants demonstrated ways in which they related to these helpful and harmful dimensions. Claire expressed that we can diminish another's sense of belonging in the world if all we see is that person boxed in social identities; yet if we do not see social identities, we can also harm others in our rejection of core aspects of their lived identity. Anna accessed notions of social identity to assess power in the space and used these notions as a way to connect with other and unearth complexities by the sharing of stories. Stereotypes were washed away as connection was made and time was spent with the other. Elena spoke to the double-edged sword of the usage of social identities: "We're going to use these

categories but it's not because we believe in them and it's not because we think that they're irrefutable." These notions of social identity are what we have at this time to dismantle injustice, yet there is recognition that a fixed usage creates an inability to see the fullness of the other. The reviewed literature also drew attention to the negative impact of fixed notions of identity (Brown, 2012; Cheshire, 2013; Talwar, 2010, p. 12), as well as to ways to challenge fixed notions of social identity in the therapeutic context (Brown, 2012; Cheshire, 2013; Moodley, 2007).

The theory and praxis of intersectionality were noted in the reviewed literature and by Elena as a way to embrace the complexities. Intersectionality can support therapists in moving "closer to the complexities of lived realities while providing space for struggle across difference" (Levine-Rasky, 2009, p. 243). Intersectionality provides an ability to see the self and the other as beings in the process of becoming versus as fixed objects. Cheshire (2013) urged for intersectionality theory to be integrated and taught in all counselling programs as it supports self-analysis and creates open dialogue about power and privilege (pp. 10–11). I agree with Cheshire (2013). Integration of this theoretical understanding into counselling programs would be incredibly beneficial, but with the caveat that if it becomes a static model that gives the student a sense of having acquired a permanent roadmap, it disconnects from its intent.

Intersectionality and the interrogating of categories can keep the tension agile and the therapist attentive to moving with the complexities. In regards to an intersectional approach, Moodley (2007) stated, "Performing therapy in this way would also mean that the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the construction of multiple identities are not interpreted as the 'psychological problem', but are seen as a resilient part of the self"

(p. 14). The beauty of this approach is that it calls for critical self-reflection, which holds a fluid stance and embraces the discomfort of the paradoxes and contradictions where socially constructed categories are not taken for granted. This approach asks the therapist to peer at these seeming incongruities within as well as without. The coparticipants touched on these contradictions and paradoxes within their sharing of experiences: for example, the simultaneous experience of bodily reactivity within their own social identities in relation to the other and yet also a feeling of being present and mirroring safety to the other. They had multiple, contradictory experiences wrapped in a specific moment.

The questions posed by Patricia Hill Collins (2014) are relevant in the context of therapeutic practice. As noted in Chapter 3, she asked, "Is intersectionality elastic enough to encompass competing agendas of neoliberalism and social justice?" (Collins, 2014). Intersectionality must be elastic enough to hold the multiplicity of moving experiences. Operationalizing intersectionality in therapeutic practice requires a multidimensional, multiexperienced, multidirectional flow of internal and external movements and ways of seeing the other and self. I am not suggesting this as a magic bullet or one-stop-shop approach for therapists, but upon absorbing the various voices from the coparticipants and literature, I believe it is a useful resource for shaping a fluid and ethical practice.

**Movements of social identities.** The notions of flow and elasticity resonated with the way the coparticipants moved with their social identities. They allowed for the expansions and contractions internally and externally, by bringing forward or pulling back parts of their social selves—though they noted this was not always a comfortable process. The literature shared how many therapists invite the pulling forward, or the

identification, of social identities in therapeutic practice as a way to operationalize addressing power relations and to create meeting space with the other (Reynolds, 2014; Talwar, 2010; Watts-Jones, 2010). Watts-Jones (2010) shared that this not only identifies the power relation between therapist and client, but it invites collaboration. In Watts-Jones' (2010) words, "Making identities transparent is an invitation to clients to participate with the therapist in being mindful of how our mix of experiences may at times create tension, misunderstanding, or frustration or to talk about it" (p. 413). As well, it may be a way to uncover the silent operations of power.

That said, Elena shared her concern about the therapist with privileged social identities creating comfort by engaging in this practice. She pointed to the work of Barbara Heron, a professor of social work. Heron (2005) called for practitioners to reflect on their practice of locating their power and privilege. She wrote,

> I would propose that admitting one's privilege does not necessarily unsettle its operation. For this is a concept that has the potential to leave those who name it in a place of double comfort: the comfort of demonstrating that one is critically aware, and the comfort of not needing to act to undo privilege. For individuals on the other side of the privilege coin, the citing of privilege by those in dominance amounts, however inadvertently, to a reinscription of marginalization. Similarly, although social location is intended to acknowledge something more complex than the have/have-not dualism of privilege, it too becomes a kind of shorthand that reduces fluid and complex positionings into a fixed position that can be named. (Heron, 2005, p. 344)

Therapists naming their power, privilege, and social locations may create a removal from other by alleviating a sense of responsibility. Again, one meets the double-edged sword of a practice intended to attend to power relations. This practice may simply entrench oppressed positions. The invitation for clients to self-identify their social identities, however, can empower clients (Reynolds, 2014, p. 6). Reynolds (2014) wrote about the importance of dignifying relationships:

> As a practice of resisting replicating oppression in many forms, such as colonization, I ask people to self-identify how they wish to be located culturally. I ask everyone, including workers I might read as from the dominant culture/white culture, what culture they belong to as a universal practice to resist the racism inherent in only asking non-white people about culture. (p. 6)

Reynolds (2014) offered a practical example of a way to avoid the creation of comfort and potential harm. She extended the invitation of self-identification to all in the room, thus creating space for the interaction of identities as told through the voice of the other (Reynolds, 2014).

This practice connects to the literature which shines a light on how white people can remain outside of the application of intersectionality and multiculturalism models of counselling (Levine-Rasky, 2011; Moodley, 2007). There are obviously critical reasons for keeping attuned to how white presence and voice get amplified in mainstream contexts given the history of white oppression and continued manifestations of privilege. However, the invitation for everyone to reflect on their ethnic or racial heritage and share in the practice of culturally locating themselves, as Reynolds shared, is an example of a practice that challenges reified positions of power. Watt-Jones (2010) summed up that

"location of self is a tool in progress" (p. 418); it is a practice that requires training and also time. As well, she identified that "therapists with covert subjugated identities need to be in charge of whether to name or forego naming these identities in their location of self" (Watt-Jones, 2010, p. 415). She specifically referenced lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender therapists and therapists with marginalized spiritual traditions; however, her view is that therapists need to "consider what would need to be different for them to feel ready to take such a leap" (Watt-Jones, 2010, p. 415). In light of her reflections, I recognize that different contexts will shape the therapist's movements. This is when personal power—choice and agency—must be respected. I also recognize that therapists with identifiable social identities are often in a position without a choice about how to reveal their social selves as prejudgments and preunderstandings can be unsoundly placed upon them. Watts-Jones (2010), an African American therapist, provided an example of the way in which she engages in location of self by sharing how she would invite this practice into the space with the client:

> Before going forward with therapy, I also like to share a bit about myself. I do this because I believe that my training is only one of the lenses that helps me to understand and work with problems and families. My personal experiences also inform my vision, what I see and don't see. And so I like to think about how my personal identities might be helpful or a limitation in our work together, and get your thoughts about this. I think it's important to be able to talk about this now and throughout therapy if either of us thinks we may have hit a roadblock or pothole related to this. (p. 412)

I find this offering by Watts-Jones very useful; it is transparent and also in service to the process and the relationship with the other. It also has the potential to unmask covert understandings of the self and other. This is a practice which requires active attention to power relations and the complexities that arise in the intersections of difference.

On the other hand, holding back parts of one's social identity may be what is required in a moment with other to hold the container of safety and to create a sense of belonging. Claire's experience demonstrated a situation in which divulging her spiritual identity would have not served the therapeutic relationship. She shared an experience in which her client, who identified as Christian, was seeking to understand her own spiritual identity. She explained, "I knew what he was asking and I knew I didn't fit into the 'it' that he was seeking . . . in that moment, when I could feel the laser saying, 'Are you the same type of Christian? What do you believe in?'" In response, she shared how she went into an "openhearted space of open compassion" and sought to understand the language that he connected to. She reflected,

> The identity is tied to their history, their emotional make-up, their ways of coping. It's a complex picture. So I'm going instinctually and following my intuition . . . I'm picking up this man is frightened, and I've picked up already that he uses the language of spirituality, his Christian spirituality, as a life buoy. And therefore, he needs to know that it's okay to swim near me and that he won't get drowned, that I'll just be there floating beside him.

This is an example in which Claire sensed that sharing her social identity at this moment in time would potentially distance the other. In response, she actively sought to

understand the language required to create a safe space for dialogue. Claire highlighted the importance of finding this common language:

> If I use the language that you can't connect to, we're not going to connect no matter what, even if I say it with an open heart . . . There's a sense of timing around there too, because if you get too direct or go in too deeply, too fast, it's too threatening. So it's really about a dance of safety and connectedness that allows us to do the internal life together.

In this way, the therapist considers how social identities, or those that are not identifiable to the other, are mediated and revealed through time. As Claire sensed, an upfront identification of her spiritual social identity may have disrupted the relational space. There is a movement around, in between, and through notions of social identity, with attention to timing. As Heron (2005) noted, "Mentioning social location does not necessarily lead to an interrogation of power relations" (p. 343) and can "reify that which it seeks to identity" (p. 343). Simply naming or identifying social locations can in fact be a dangerous practice if the power relation is not further examined and understood in terms of its operation.

Anna reflected on when she brought forward or pulled back different parts of herself in the therapeutic space. She shared her recognition of needing to maintain the professional boundaries, but she also knew that she needed to find an entry into the space with other. She shared that, when in the group, she thought, "I have to share something to be able to be allowed in this space." And so she revealed a painful part of her story and life experience to connect with the social identities of the other. She further shared, "I'm not part of the therapy group, but also I felt like I needed to be a little bit vulnerable and

have something shared. I just knew it intuitively that that was really important." She gave attention to the way that sharing her own experience and her story could be a bridge to connection.

I witnessed the inner negotiation of the coparticipants' social selves through their sharing of stories. Mariana Ortega (2008) highlighted the complexity in this negotiation:

> We are multiple, both belonging to herd and not belonging to it; we are the product of history and circumstances but also of our own making, not in the sense of a fully autonomous subject but of a multiplicitous self who is constantly and critically negotiating our given and chosen identities. (p. 78)

Although her comment is in regard to the negotiation of the self with identities that connect to diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, her words captured the contradiction and complexity inherent in the negotiation process. I noticed that the coparticipants' movements were always a turn towards the other. The choices made were sieved through their experience of their bodies, time, space, experience of other, and experience of self, and shone a light on the need for attention to these movements. Claire's statement sums it up: "Being human, we cannot exist without meeting up with these movements because it is what life asks of us."

**Getting it wrong, risk taking, and vulnerability.** Embracing flow and complexity also requires an openness to challenge notions of self. Heron (2005) poignantly asked what it means for the social worker to be in this "structured position of power over other people" (p. 348) and how this agitates the sense of self. In light of this, Heron asked how this sense of self may contribute to blind spots (p. 348). As she stated, "The moral imperative to 'get it right' is also very powerful for self-regulating subjects,

and may make it difficult for a social worker to acknowledge having gotten it 'wrong' unless it is pointed out" (Heron, 2005, p. 349). Fear of wrongdoing can lead to self-consciousness. The therapist can turn inward and feel the fullness of emotions which bind the flow of experience. Heron (2005) offered some helpful questions for the practitioner to consider. The questions focus specifically on racial social identity but can be expanded to all intersections of social identity:

- What self-image do I have as a result of my good intentions towards racially othered clients?
- What will happen to my self-image if I see myself as having failed in respect to my good intentions?
- Have I failed—have I, in fact, been racist in my work with these clients? (Heron, 2005, p. 349).

These useful questions ask the practitioner who is engaged in critical self-reflection to be willing to risk vulnerability and challenge images of self. Perhaps the questioning needs to challenge the image of the ideal self more specifically. Hahn (2001) highlighted that shame may be the inability of one's ideal self not aligning with one's actual self. Being able to allow the egoic self to face the critical reflection and tough questions increases the chances of something different emerging.

Therapists are also required to reflect on notions of being "good" in relation to this experience in their social identities and power relations. Kumashiro (2009), a professor of education in the United States, discussed the role of discomfort in anti-oppression teaching:

> Common definitions of "good" teaching often leave little, if any, room for the moments in education when confronting one's own resistances to disruptive knowledge can be traumatic. In fact, "good" teaching often means that crisis is averted, that lessons are doable and comfortable, that problems are solved, that learning results in feeling better, that knowledge is a good thing. (p. 47)

Kumashiro's (2009) description of "good teaching" (p. 47) resonates with my own experience laid out at the outset of my research. At the outset of this research, I see where I was seeking to alleviate the discomfort of shame, feelings of powerlessness, and anxious responsibility. I was perhaps trying to civilize or colonize the discomfort and pain by seeking a linear path or a full and finished knowing of how to do it right. And perhaps I was disappointed in feeling as though I wasn't meeting my ideal image of a good anti-oppressive practitioner.

From personal experience, I find it difficult when I seem to try so hard and hold so tight to particular values and theological views, only to get it wrong. But the reality is that these values and views of self are not without clumsy attempts and potential harm to the other. If I am to embrace the stance of fluidity with openness to the contradictions, paradoxes, and becoming, then I must face the fact that I may get it wrong. Better this than to fall into polite accommodation and paternalism. I am struck by the words of Yancy (2012), who discussed the limits of self-knowledge and asked that white people come to terms with "I don't know myself as I thought I had" (p. 170) or "I am other to myself despite my assumptions to the contrary" (p. 170). This is what it means to live in the discomfort: to allow these questions to be penetrated, particularly in sites of privilege, and to allow the contradictions and multiplicity of experience while living the tension.

Acts of risk taking and vulnerability venture into the possibility of getting it wrong. Claire shared the importance of taking risks and added, "It's so easy to do what's familiar." Anna spoke to the power of vulnerability moving her into relation with the other by breaking down stereotypes and creating connection. Risk taking and vulnerability ask the therapist to move into the zone of discomfort. Sölle (1990) and Lederach (2005) also spoke to risk taking and vulnerability. More specifically, Lederach's invitation to risk taking connects to this practice of fluidity:

> Sitting in the messy ambiguity of complexity while refusing to frame it in dualistic terms requires risk . . . By definition, risk accepts vulnerability and lets go of the need to a priori control the process or the outcome of human affairs. (p. 163)

Dualistic or managerial notions of social identities or power relations contribute to lack of creativity and pat answers. There are no sure answers when sitting in the "messy ambiguity" of the relational tension. This lifeworld asks the therapist to be open to the unknown. Elena stated, "I think the point is not to have an answer to anything but to help people embrace this question more, to embrace this tension and not necessarily to find a way to resolve it in any way." As well, Anna shared the importance of being open to surprise, which requires embracing the unknown:

> It's not like something that is a one-time lesson but a reminder of being called to really, as much as humanly possible, to suspend judgment and to really be open to, "Okay, I initially am thinking this about this person, but I want to really see who they really are." And to be open to being totally surprised by people and giving them that chance to be completely different than you expect them to be.

Risk taking and openness to the unknown mean that sticky situations can happen when we get it wrong. When the movements with self and other are not done well, the therapist can offer the self-compassion and self-forgiveness, as expressed by Claire. Claire recounted an experience when a misunderstanding occurred with the other, which triggered shame. In response to the inner suffering she experienced, she shared, "The place of self-forgiveness and compassion for myself is what allows me to move beyond that for that moment." There are different layers of the tension, which can cause inner suffering and shame. Negotiation of suffering and shame is required through a place of self-forgiveness and compassion as one navigates the terrain.

**Body is a resource.** I could delve into ways all of the existential themes contributed to deepening an understanding of the lived experience; however, I found the accounts of the experience of the body particularly illuminating. Various thoughts and body and feeling states were triggered as the coparticipants entered the tension of meeting the other. As discussed above, they moved with these bodily experiences and created an opening within and with the other. The body provided clues as to how they were absorbing the experience and what was required of them. A variety of thoughts and feelings came forward from all of the coparticipants. Elena shared the example of an experience with a client whose social identities of privilege were rubbing up against her social identities of disadvantage. She was feeling offended by the client targeting these social identities of disadvantage, and then she was able to halt the offended feelings. Once she took note of the experience in her body by addressing herself—"Stop. Exhale. Get in your body again. What is going on?"—she was able to notice what was circulating within so that she could access compassion and reach out to him. All of the coparticipants

demonstrated that they moved into meaning-making or came into relationship with what was happening in the body. These actions were a way of recognizing and giving expression to feelings that are often deemed not useful.

In the psychological literature in Chapter 3, I described my own experience of the feeling of shame in particular. In regard to the feeling of shame, Shotwell (2011) stated,

> Shame can provide a gap in practice; it can stop the conceptual habits we comfortably use to navigate the world. It has a disruptive function. I see some use, then, in shame's potential capacity to hold open, to not freeze, affective space. (p. 90)

Shotwell's (2011) description threads into the experience of the coparticipants, where shame (and other unpleasant feelings or thoughts) were held open so as not to numb themselves from the experience. Bailey (2015) questioned, "What if we made a sincere effort to engage our fluttering?" (p. 48) and then asked that the difficult feelings be engaged: "Treat anger, fear, and anxiety as natural reactions to moving closer to knowledge. Crafting a discourse of vulnerability requires settling into our discomfort rather than continuing to flutter" (p. 52). I am drawn to her call to move into these spaces and to find the gold within the experience.

An activated feeling state may be shaped differently depending on whether it is resurrected from a site of advantage or disadvantage in one's social identities. From what I heard Elena share, the therapist is first called to tend to the therapist–client power relation. Coming into relationship with shame may be unavoidable whether identities or privilege or subjugation are agitated within self and other. Watts-Jones (2010) identified a challenge around this, which is to engage in acts of transparency and vulnerability

around social identities, whether privileged or subjugated, "in a way that does not shame either the therapist or the client" (p. 415). The emergence of shame, however, may be signalling the very need for something to shift and change (Shotwell, 2011, p. 91). Yet Shannon Sullivan (2014) questioned the effectiveness of shame as she sees it as a motivator of harm. In her view,

> Encouraging white people to feel ashamed of their whiteness as a response to racial injustice implicitly caters to the hegemonic and narcissistic interests of middle-class white people. It encourages middle-class white people to experience a raced emotion that buttresses their class/race supremacy, and it keeps lower-class white people "in their place" by promoting an emotion that is unavailable to them. (Sullivan, 2014, p. 138)

Sullivan (2014) raised a critical point that indulging particular feelings may in fact be a perpetuation of hidden and abusive power relations. In this sense, the therapist would need to be mindful of how they worked with their feelings in the space. As Elena said in response to feelings of shame, guilt, and righteousness, "All of them are real, but that's my work to do." She situated the experience of these feelings as her responsibility and not the others in the space. To add further to Sullivan's (2014) response around what to do with shame that arises, she suggested "a spiritually healthy self-love would enable a self-relation" (p. 145). This is not a self-love that it about feeling better but recognizing that affect is intertwined with other: "It is a call for them [white, middle-class] to nourish their positive affects with regard to whiteness so that a different kind of political and interpersonal action on their part will be possible" (Sullivan, 2014, p. 148). This call

makes sense, but I do believe that it may be difficult to manage the feeling of shame. There is potential for this to diminish shame's voice and presence.

I recognize that the triggers for shame were different between Claire and Elena. Claire shared in one experience that her shame was triggered from the social identity of a hearing impairment, whereas Elena's shame was triggered from the social identity of a Canadian-born person, along with other sites of advantage. A more in-depth study of these nuances would be required to fully understand the nature of this shame, its links to social context and history, and the way it shows up with other and moves within the body. However, from considering the data in this study and the themes that emerged, the coparticipants shared that when the charged affect enters the body, they allowed themselves to feel it and move with it to create an open channel with both the self and the other. Claire's description of how she makes space for shame can serve therapists:

> It seems to me if shame is an authentic human experience to grow from, and [is] thus universal, it will always be there in the general life energy but its effects will depend upon my own relationship with it within my own energy system and continued life experiences.

These tough feelings are a part of the process of becoming and moving towards more socially just relationships. As Claire had shared, suffering and shame is required through a place of self-forgiveness and compassion. By creating a relationship with these feelings, rather than cutting them off from self, the therapist is moved into a full, bodily presence. The body points toward a transformational justice. Shame—or any affect that arises with the tension—is the therapist's responsibility in the therapist–client relation.

**Living the tension.** The etymology of tension is "a stretching," "a nervous strain" (Tension, n.d.). In these phrases, I sense both potential and harm in the stretching and straining. The coparticipants shared their presence to the potential and also held a knowing that their efforts can turn inward and disconnect from other. They entered into a relationship with the tension with attentiveness and intentionality and navigated the tough spaces, their social identities, their power relations—the intrapsychic relations and external relations with other—and found ways to turn towards and meet the other. As they mediated their experience through body, time, space, other, and self, a relationship with the tension was not lost. Its presence lived as the therapists moved into the multiplicity of experiences when with the other and with the self.

I am drawn to what propels the coparticipants through these movements. I am led to consider the reflections around my theological task, which challenged me to consider the presence of a creative, spiritual presence in relationship with the other. The coparticipants shared that they sought support in this cocreative space with supportive others—whether it be an internal experience of the infinite, spiritual values, a community, or spirited others. The shared stories spoke to a powerful presence that gave strength to their work, choices, and ways of being. I am also struck by how the presence to something both inside and outside of themselves supported them in their movements. Nakashima Brock (1998) referred to relational energy as erotic power; erotic, in this sense, means the creative life force (p. 40). Inspired by the writer and feminist Audre Lorde, she wrote,

> [The erotic] can only be felt through our own unique presence and the presence of others in us . . . The erotic compels us to be hungry for justice at our very depths

> because we are response-able . . . Acts against oppression become essential to ourselves, empowered from our energized centers. Through the erotic as power we become less willing to accept powerlessness, despair, depression and self-denial. The erotic is what binds and gives life and hope. It is the energy of all relationship and it connects us to our embodied selves. (Nakashima Brock, 1998, pp. 40–41)

Nakashima Brock's (1998) description of erotic power inspires an ability in my body to move with the tension. The stretching and straining in the embodied self is connected to this relational energy. In this space, a sense of trust begins to emerge, and I am offered a better glimpse into the experience of Claire. She described that when she is "feeling lost and thus discombobulated [and] isolated," there is a surrendering that allows her to "[trust] that no matter what those next moments bring, I will be okay ultimately." Her movement towards surrender and trust demonstrate the fluidity also needed to support the intrapsychic sense of self in the experience with the tension.

I realized that at the outset of my research, I was searching for a way to find some balance, inner peace, and gracefulness as I sought to understand the uncomfortable terrain of the tension. Reynolds (2014) wrote about the requirement of "an honest reckoning with privilege" (p. 10) rather than engaging with "the politics of politeness" (p. 10), which takes "ourselves and others out of our discomfort" (p. 10). Her call to "resist smoothing over tensions and discomforts" (p. 9) speaks to the question of how therapists live the tension within their own social identities and power relations. There is a requirement to live the tension so as to remain vigilant to the therapist's position, power,

and privilege. Yancy (2015) wrote about the commitment that is required, specifically in regards to white social identity:

> White self-interrogation, however, is a form of *striving*, etymologically, "to quarrel [*streiten*]" which means that one is committed to a life of danger and contestation, one which refused to make peace with taken for granted "legitimating" white norms and practices that actually perpetuate racial injustice. (p. xii)

Quite honestly, the idea of committing "to a life of danger and contestation" (Yancy, 2015, p. xii) triggers the anxiety and fluttering, but rather than avoid or squash those feelings, I see where I am invited into a relationship. I can better draw near to that which feels threatened and avoid fixating on finding a way to "do it right." Applebaum (2015) made the point that, again in the case of white people, there is a plethora of

> discursive mechanisms to avoid considering their complicity, to remain in the space of comfort, and these mechanisms are socially sanctioned. They have the privilege to avoid, evade, and ignore . . . When we want to escape too quickly, we many forfeit the opportunity to hear anything at all. (p. 10)

Elena described this feeling of wanting to escape and "run out of the room," and Claire described the feeling of "resistance to flow," and Anna described the "battle . . . within myself." Having them name these experiences and inclinations captures what seems a very human desire to find some permanence in the pendulum of experience. Yet all the coparticipants demonstrated a turning to their inner and outer supports and a turning towards the other as a way to stay with the tension. Their honest accounts capture the

possibility of showing up with the tension with all of these uncomfortable human experiences.

My attention was captured by an article in *The Guardian* by Giles Fraser (2015) who spoke about his favour of hypocrisy over cynicism. When one has "a moral vision to redesign the world" (Fraser, 2015, para. 4), this "opens the possibility of professing a position that one fails fully to live up to—i.e. hypocrisy" (para. 4). Giles further stated, "My intention here is not to over-praise hypocrisy. . . but rather to condemn contemporary cynicism, a diminutive philosophy that espouses maximum protection from being wrong or being disappointed" (para. 5). By sharing his thoughts, I am not seeking to favour a practice of hypocrisy, but a therapeutic practice that is fluid enough to allow for the riskiness of these spaces to be entered with a critical lens as opposed to cynicism. So although it may be a "life of danger and contestation" (Yancy, 2015), it is also a life in which deep healing and transformation are possible, a critical lens is favoured over stagnating cynicism, and social identities and power relations are engaged. In a way, the task required is a bit like becoming comfortable with the tension. Watts-Jones (2010) expressed that leaving the comfort zone is required, but leaving this zone also requires developing a comfort with moving into this space:

> It is not easy to figure out how to foray into these issues at the level of depth that they often operate and maintain the possibility of a therapeutic relationship. It is no wonder that both therapists and clients alike will often cooperate in keeping this exploration a skimming operation. But I have found that the more the therapist can be comfortable with and clear about the importance of such a

> discussion, the more likely the client will feel at ease giving it consideration and participating in a meaningful dialogue. (p. 409)

The coparticipants have shared with me their willingness to stay with the difficulty and to even invite relationship with the tension. The coparticipants never shared that they had it figured out or that they did not expect to continue experiencing the difficult feelings. Anna shared, "It's not a one-time lesson." Claire expressed, "The conscious awareness of tension is an invitation to dance with the ebb and flow of life waves." Elena said, "Stay complicated, to stay with the tension, to embrace this, to look for more of it, to not avoid it." Its presence lives in the lifeworld. Emmy van Deurzen (2009), an existential therapist, wrote,

> When we discover that the tension we feel in our lives is no more than the energy that drives us forward and that it is the electric current between positive and negative poles that produces power, then perhaps we will stop trying to smooth everything out. We need this dynamic differential, for it is what life is made of. (p. 237)

Essentially the tension is a state of living and being. Claire shared that to be cocreatively present with the tension is like "being-tension." By trying to smooth it out, we run the risk of cutting the electric current that keeps us alive both to healing and to injustice.

The composite description of the coparticipants' experiences indicates that the therapist is "attuned to the movements of water." Claire and Elena connected to the use of water as a metaphor. While living with the data and playing with the metaphor of water, I came upon the work of Maggi Hambling at the National Gallery in London. The exhibit,

entitled *Maggi Hambling: Walls of Water*, ran between November 26, 2014 and February 15, 2015 (see Figure 8).

*Figure 8*. Maggi Hambling's painting incited the feeling of palpable tension.

*Note*. Wall of Water V (2011). *Copyright by Maggi Hambling* [Oil painting]. Received March 17, 2015, from Douglas Atfield, photographer. Reprinted with permission from Hugh Monk, manager.

When I first encountered the images of water, I left the exhibit room feeling almost too full. Her paintings captured the embodied experience. The waves of water incited the feeling of discomfort and aliveness so similar to the feeling of living the tension. Shaun McNiff (1992), an expressive therapist, asked that when coming into relationship with imagery that the viewer take the role of a listener (p. 106). As I listen to the imagery and sit with the interpretations that have emerged from the data, I sense a shift taking place. There is a turning towards the tension with deeper listening and a

desire for relationship. The discomfort has not been subdued, but rather than seek to soften the tension and create a calm, abiding body of water, I see where I can allow the movements of the question to live.

# Chapter Seven: Shifting and Committing to Practice

## Areas of Potential Application

This research study offered many ways to shift practice and commit to living the discomfort of the tension; however, here I offer two key possibilities for application to therapeutic practice:

- sieving experience through existential categories; and
- attending to movements.

**Sieving experience through existential categories.** Asking the coparticipants to share their experience through the lens of the existentials themes provided an opportunity to notice different dimensions and layers of the experience. For example, the way the coparticipants experienced and used their bodies as a resource to turn toward the other provided information about how they were living the tension. Lederach (2005) wrote, "Think, feel, and follow relationships" (p. 86), and I witnessed the coparticipants following the other with attention to their bodies. The meaning was not revealed through a linear process, but in the movements, the back and forth and sometimes even a floating in stillness, as Claire shared. Natasha Synesiou (2012) stated,

> [S]ince everything that is revealed in our encounters issues forth from our embodied presence—gesture, language, silence, gaze, inscription; and it is with this full corporeal presence that we are called to respond . . . So I in-corporate, I embody, I extend my corporeal boundaries, which embrace my historic, cultural, aesthetic and emotional hypostasis; I live the experience of the scorching the other suffers. (p. 330)

Our bodies shape space and offer ways of knowing. The experience of living the tension is alive in the body and may be a way therapists can draw information from their movements with the self and other.

Experiences of time also gave shape to the coparticipants' stories. My own experience resonated with the way in which the coparticipants lived time. When in the tension, the therapist may encounter a stuck feeling, like things have come to a halt, as shared by Claire. The therapist can also have a time travel experience as shared by Elena as she witnessed her client moving back into his experience. And I could relate to Anna's experience of time feeling stretched, as though a knowing of and movement with the other occurs beyond the clock time. Time intersects with the experience of tension, and therapists' consideration of this intersection may support them in allowing time's movements both to complicate and to uncomplicate social identities and power relations. In reading Tripathi's (2001) insights around interfaith dialogue, I am drawn to this alternate interpretation of time. A spiralling view of time, similar to that of a conch, suggested that there is a moving back and forth that in time rises higher and higher (Tripathi, 2001). Conch-time presents opportunities for creating space across difference. The past, present, and future intertwine with interpretation, which gives a sense of fluidity to the lived experience (Conroy, 2003, p. 37). Perceptions of temporal time are experienced diversely. Yet, the allowance of time matters as space exists for deeper layers of knowing to emerge, both within the therapist and within the client. A more meaningful coming together can occur around what has presented for transformation.

The stories of the coparticipants demonstrated how they moved within space to create space. The experience of space was both an inner and an outer experience. Space is

made up of relations—whether that be the relations of power, social identity, intrapsychic relations, or relations between self and other—that inhabit them. The words of Ortega (2004) connected to this experience of space: "Existential space is lived space, space permeated by our raced, gendered selves. It is representative of our very existence" (p. 25). In this sense, our lived social identities and power relations shape space. As well, Lederach (2005) drew attention to how "relationships require that we understand how and where things connect and how this web of connections occupies the social space where processes of change are birthed and hope to live" (p. 86). Additionally, he drew attention to how proxemics of space can support a change process: "One way to understand how change is viewed is to study the space that people feel is necessary to perceive and experience a change process is genuine" (Lederach, 2005, p. 56). The consideration of physical distance in a change process is one worth noting. Perhaps even proxemics can be applied to the intrapsychic relations at play. For example, am I bound to this experience of the tension, selfhood, of time, and of body? Where is distance or closeness needed? These questions may support the therapist in shaping the interior and exterior space with other.

The experience with lived other and lived selfhood also shone a light on what it means to live the tension in relationship. There are intrapsychic and intrarelational dynamics at play, which weave into and have influence on any one encounter. In the coparticipants' experiences, there was a move toward the other. This seems similar to be what Levinas (1996) called for in relationship. There is no resistance to the other, and our responsibility is to the other (Dueck & Goodman, 2007, p. 608; Guenther, 2011, p. 7; Levinas, 1996; van Manen, 1998, p. 14). Van Manen (1998) described this responsibility

as "'being there' for the other" (p. 14). Yet responsibility requires active response. In Karen Teel's (2015) experience, "Focusing on my own anxieties has kept me at the center of my analysis and actions in situations that cry out for antiracist intervention" (p. 33). Creating the meeting space means responding to that lived tension, the anxiety, the shame, and the anger. When noticing how these movements between the self and other intertwine, the therapist may then be supported in noticing what opened, what closed, what was life-giving, and what was not—all in an effort to create the meeting space. As Finlay (2011) explained in relation to the I-Thou of Martin Buber, there is both comfort and threat when coming into presence with the other (p. 58); it seems that this comfort and threat is also felt when coming into presence with the self where notions of our ideal self must be challenged. The therapist is called to consider how this comfort and threat is lived in the therapeutic space.

Therapists' mediation of the experience through these existential categories offers insight into ways of being, moving, and responding. They do not offer a prescriptive method for self-criticality; however, they unearth insight into being more and showing up in a way that is alive to the tension.

**Attending to movements.** I was particularly captured by the coparticipants' transformative movements as they came to understand and make room for meaningful experiences of social identity and power relations. At first they had the experience of noticing the embodiment of the perceived difference—an "analyzing within myself" as described by Anna, "a shockwave" as described by Claire, and a "a crawling inside your skin feeling" as described by Elena. There was a navigation of thoughts and bodily reactions as they mediated their experiences through the diverse facets of the lifeworld.

Moving through these initial awarenesses of their own social identities in relation to the other, the coparticipants became increasingly attuned to different movements with their social identities. Combining the coparticipants' shared experiences, I would propose there was a movement with social identities that involved the following:

- owning of social selves, or parts of self;
- practicing choice around how to show up with other and the tension;
- potentially identifying social selves to other, whether through self-disclosure, sharing of stories or expressions of vulnerability;
- potentially holding back social selves as a way to hold the therapeutic container, and finding common language to connect in the midst of perceived differences in social identity;
- if sharing social selves, unpacking what these identities might mean in the space and then inviting the other to share their social selves;
- presence-ing to the other in a way that allows them to hold their social selves; and
- maintaining an active relationship with the tension and staying in the tension as a way to negotiate which social identities are important to locate in the moment.

The coparticipants' identification of these movements around social identities is an area of potential application for practitioners. No formula exists for these movements. This is where the practices of fluidity and intersectionality support the complexities and pay attention to unique social contexts when with the other. The tension, the discomfort, and the multiplicity of experiences and feelings live in the midst of these movements. No

one situation is the same and the dance is shaped as result of the movements. Nevertheless, what remains constant is the power relation between therapist and client. The therapist is required to be mindful of how they locate themselves in the intersections of their social identities. The coparticipants have offered me a new way of being and seeing in the therapeutic relationship—one that embraces this flow and movement and makes room for the other through the navigation of my own social identities.

**Limitations to the Study and Further Topics of Inquiry**

This study had several limitations. One limitation, which I continued to process during the research, was the sampling of coparticipants. Given the very topic of the study, I wanted to invite coparticipants with various representations of the seven stigmatized social identities that this study sought to explore. This proved to be challenging given I was seeking only three coparticipants. I did not want to fall into tokenizing persons, nor did I want to completely ignore diverse representation in the sampling. My foremost concern was including participants who had an ability and willingness to speak to the depth of the question. As a result, the coparticipants varied in some areas. All identified as female, were visibly white, and all practiced in North America. Claire also offered unique narrative as a person with a hearing impairment.

Expanding the study to include a more diverse and increased number of participants would shine a light on further paradoxes and contradictions in revealing the intersectional nature of the experience under study. A way to address the issue of the diversity of voices would be to include a focus group of practitioners and academics to review the data and meaning units. Sieving the data through a focus group of broader representation would add value to the data synthesis. As well, “conversation with peers

about analysis and writing" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 124) would add another layer of depth. Additional voices through dialogue would support "a constantly questioning attitude" (Conroy, 2003, p. 40). Further, a longitudinal study may also add value so as to capture the movements of one's experience of social identities and power relations over time. The lived experience of time captured the dimensions of shifts as clock time passed, and it would be interesting to gain insight into shifts in understanding and practice.

An additional limitation was perhaps the very nature of the research question, which focused on stigmatized social identities. This was recognized at the outset of the study; however, I noticed where other areas of identity were contributing to the tension or where a complexity existed in the coparticipants' descriptions that went beyond these categories. For example, Anna shared that her identity as a creative therapist contributed to her experience of the tension when interfacing self, her clients, and the work structures. She experienced her professional identity as not being taken seriously in some environments. Her experience highlights how each social context bears a new and complex meeting of identities. As Salem (2014) stated, "We should let the intersectional categories emerge from the cases and contexts themselves" (para. 8). Intersections are multiple and spawn new complexities. A future study could perhaps further complicate reified notions of identity and move into the spaces in between notions of identity.

That said, additional research may wish to peer into one specific social identity, such as white identity or physical ability, and to follow its interface in the experience of living the tension. Or alternatively, focusing on a particular affect, such as shame, in the experience of one's social identities and power relations may also offer insight. Focusing on one dimension may highlight the movements identified by the coparticipants with

further depth and understanding. I see the value, however, in having allowed the categories and complexities to emerge as the coparticipants shared their stories. Focusing on sole dimensions would perhaps give the illusion of a more rigid and controllable frame.

Additionally, although the existential themes provided a rich lens through which to sieve the coparticipants' experiences, I found that at times I had difficulty describing the experience through these categories given the interconnected nature of the experiences that slipped through all of the existentials simultaneously. This very limitation and tension, in fact, relates to the tension of choosing specific categories of social identity for the study. The lesson in this is that anything named or categorized is required to live in the contradictions and paradoxes as experience challenges its very existence.

Finally, the integration of visual mapping into the data synthesis process was a helpful tool for working with the data. This tool unexpectedly supported my inquiry in immense ways. The kinesthetic experience of listening to the interviews and moving with my body in response to the recordings offered me information. As well, sharing the visuals with the coparticipants and having them voluntarily interact with the visuals offered further depth to the analysis. Benefits and risks exist with any practice and further applied research is required around the process of integrating visual mapping into a data collection or synthesis process. Much like the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology, the meanings and interpretations of visual images continue to move and shift and, therefore, attention is required to these movements. Nevertheless, I sense that conscious integration of this tool into research processes may offer enhanced support to researchers.

**Personal Statement**

By allowing myself to come into relationship with the tension, I shift my way of living in my social identities and power relations. I am seeking to allow an unknowing with the complexity of experience. Tara Brach (2015), psychologist and Buddhist meditation teacher, spoke about this movement of coming into relationship with these states of unrest:

> It seems that there's a trajectory, this hopeful trajectory, whereby we are moving from what's called fight, flight, freeze, where that's in action a lot of the time, we are in a kind of reactivity of grasping and pushing away and trying to control our world. Where that is being more and more replaced by a capacity of consciousness for attending and befriending. For being able to witness what is going on, but not in a distant way, witness in a very engaged way so there is presence, but we are not hooked. (3:20)

By moving into a role of engaged witness, I am supported in moving out of the continual state of analysis that sleuths out the domination and subordination. An engaged witness creates an attentive holding of the categories of social identities, and at the same time, allows for the meeting spaces to emerge and to relate. In terms of social identity, I resonate with Claire's view, which acknowledges that they are simply who we are, but if all we see are social identities, it can squeeze out life and diminish belonging. Dawn Schooler (personal communication, February 24, 2014), my internship supervisor at Jericho Counselling, once said to me in regards to social identities and, in particular, sexual orientation: "It's the most important, unimportant thing." I hold this statement with me now as it captures that contradiction with social identities. I can move more

gently rather than bump into what can seem like monolithic social categories, which freeze power relations and strip an experience of its humanity.

**Gnawing of self.** Near the end of my research I read, "The therapist is one who 'gnaws' at himself or herself to create space for the other" (Dueck & Goodman, 2007, p. 615). I had read this prior to commencing the data collection; however, this phrase jumped off the page in a different way as the project was closing. The statement captures the requirement of living the tension. Entering this space of tension requires gnawing—it is uncomfortable—but perhaps gently tearing away at the self is a way to open wide the space for other—and for relationship.

In this gnawing, my theological and psychological tasks have been pared back further. For example, my World Two orientation and Anabaptist belief in God standing on the side of the oppressed is a theological tenet that does not seem embedded in a fluid, intersectional approach that peers into the complexities. In fact, this belief, if unchallenged, can centre my own privileged positions while keeping other positions subjugated. It can also lead to bounded, dualistic notions and mark things as good and evil, which stagnates movement. That said, for me social justice is a value, which remains essential and an ethical requirement. But what has been revealed to me is that movement, vulnerability, and human error create a liberational space where addressing the status quo can be life-giving as opposed to deadening. When categories or values begin to freeze and become fixed, they can lead to harmful objectification.

The study has also made me consider the role of the supportive other in this endeavour—both inside and outside of therapeutic practice. My longing, as captured by World One, may be a desire for reunion with community or the "supportive other"; as

well as a desire for reunion with self through living the tension. Les Todres (2004) wrote about how we live the "wound of longing" (p. 2) and "find it as a gate and passage to some of our deepest existential possibilities" (p. 2). In his view, narcissism is "a flight from vulnerability in order to attain a kind of 'freedom *from* wound'" (Todres, 2004, p. 2). He invited reflection on the gift of the wound as "soulful space" (Todres, 2004, p. 1) as this is what allows humans to connect with others. Todres also drew attention to the shame and self-loathing that can be triggered when one is in a state of longing or experiencing vulnerability:

> Before one defends strongly against vulnerability and longing, one may simply hate these feelings or the self that has them and experience great shame . . . there is a shock of painful consciousness in which one looks at oneself as a problem to be solved, an object to be changed. (p. 5)

In his exploration, pursuits for a fixed ideal self can lead one to take flight from otherness where one seeks a sense of completeness in isolation from the other (Todres, 2004). This is where "soulful space" (Todres, 2004, p. 1) embraces a "kind of freedom that embodies a willingness to 'wear' and 'move' within vulnerabilities of this human realm" (p. 9). This is a wound that can allow us to be in real relationship with the other. His writing has triggered for me where the self may not only objectify the other, but may also objectify its own self through the lens of fixed social identities. It is perhaps this harmful self-objectification that leads to a static shame rather than a transformative shame.

I was struck by the connection between Todres's (2004) writing on the wound of longing and between Yancy's (2015) writing on the white self. Yancy (2015) wrote,

> [T]here is a continuous process of encrustation, a scabbing over, as it were, of the white self that strives to remain un-sutured vis-à-vis the reality of white racism. This "scabbing over" can be theorized as the various ploys that whites use consciously or unconsciously to cover over the profound pain and distress caused from being palpably exposed. Being un-sutured, however, is not just to remain open to be wounded, but it is also to cultivate the practice of remaining with the opened wound itself, of tarrying with the pain of the opening itself, the incision, as it were. (p. xvii)

Allowing the wound to live openly, to not escape the pain of it, is the task. This connects to World One's task, which is to exit the stance of an anxious, static observer, and to rather fully participate in life in spite of the pain of feeling homeless and in-between. To gnaw at myself is required as both a therapist and a human being in the world. This is what makes room for the other. The gnawing prevents the scabbing over of the wound that numbs the pain and seeks to invisibilize privilege.

The feelings of shame and distrust in self are my work to do and my responsibility to self and other. I see where my relationship with the feeling of shame was one of resistance rather than flow. And I see where my trust in self was diminished by feelings of "not knowing." However, now that I have been more firmly ushered into an intentional space of not knowing, which befriends the discomfort, I feel an opening within. Hamman (2001) identified how the capacity to believe is linked with the ability to "live with uncertainty and paradox" (p. 345). My capacity to believe continues to be challenged, but I see where surrendering and moving into vulnerability and risk taking support living this belief. Vulnerability and risk taking require mutuality. This relational practice of not

knowing is described by Harlene Anderson (2005) as a "philosophical stance" (p. 503) in which the self and other "may have myriad identities, repertoires, and ways of being" (p. 501). I seek to trust in the other in this soulful space and to hold back temptations to control my world through paternalistic thinking and behaviour, which only leads to a disempowering empowerment. This may also open space for the other to put trust in me.

In this research study, I have also considered the intrapsychic power relations at play within. This ideal self, one that wants to do no wrong and be the "right" anti-oppression practitioner has been practicing dominant behaviour in my ways of relating. I have wondered how this character in myself has been influenced by Westernized, Eurocentric, privileged ideals. She is a construction of a social and cultural context. Her desire to do right may be deceptive. It is further my task to come into relationship with this part of self and allow all the voices—the multiplicity of characters and feelings—to join the hermeneutic circle of inquiry and engage in mutual meaning making and justice doing.

In the Summary of the Lifeworld in Chapter 6, was the phrase, "She takes risks, trusts in the pendulum of experience and trusts herself to be more." I hold these actions around trust in self and other before me as I continue to navigate my way. My deepest gratitude to the coparticipants for their vulnerability and risk taking in sharing their stories and experiences. They demonstrated the ongoing voyage in its cyclical movements. I have come to see the image of the phoenix shared in Chapter 2 with a fresh interpretation. Underneath this creature are golden eggs. Living the tension in this experience means living in the discomfort, but herein lies the gold.

**Water as metaphor.** I related to the metaphor of water as I sifted through and interpreted the data and as I sought to bring forward the voices of the coparticipants. Water captures the experience of movement that threaded through the shared experiences. Water is spaciousness. It can take up incredible amounts of space and yet be distilled into nothing but a trickle. Water is like time. It can encircle with fluidity or it can freeze into fixed states. Water is both gentle and dangerous. Its currents can cause immense suffering and damage, as can the unredeemed workings of social identity and power. The body can float, dive in, or drown in water.

Water has been pooling in our backyard, which has created a mucky mess. My partner has been seeking to resolve the issue for some time. At one time, he said with some exasperation, "The thing about water is that it always finds a way to get around things." His comment captured a personal insight about this research question. Whether it is the movements of the tension, power, or social identities, water moves and finds a way into lived experience. It will always find its way back in because it lives here.

After one of my interviews, I looked up on my desk and noticed a postcard given to me by a friend in Vancouver, Canada. The painting is entitled "Maggie and the Octopus," by Kris G. Brownlee, a Vancouver artist (see Figure 9).

*Figure 9*. Kris G. Brownlee's painting supported reflection on my relationship with tension.

*Note*. Maggie and the Octopus (2014). *Copyright by Kris G. Brownlee* [Print of oil original]. Reprinted with permission from the creator.

I related to the figure in the boat as I travelled with the coparticipants. Although Anna did not explicitly use the metaphor of water in her interviews, I noticed how her flow and elasticity with the tension connected to the movements of water. One of the ways in which Claire specifically shared about water was in the release of the tension into the infinite ocean of life. Elena also connected to this metaphor and shared that there is never groundedness with water. I held that paradox. Water has the ability to hold both healing and danger. It is agile and has an ability to come unstuck and flow. For me, it

captures the experience of living in my own social identities and power relations: there is always a requirement to be attentive to my movements and to the soulful space in which I seek to live.

This is an uncomfortable voyage, but the journey's movements move me into a space of becoming with self, other, and a socially just world. I am brought back to the words of John O'Donohue (1999): "The slow and difficult work of living out your vulnerability holds you in the flow of life" (p. 154). A commitment to living the tension and living the open wound holds us in flow. I will close with an excerpt from O'Donohue's (2008) poem *In Praise of Water*:

> Let us bless the humility of water,
>
> Always willing to take the shape
>
> Of whatever otherness holds it . . .
>
> Water: vehicle and idiom
>
> Of all the inner voyaging
>
> That keeps us alive. (p. 77)

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## Appendix A

## Letter of Invitation

Date:

Dear:

I would like to invite you to consider participating in a research study through inperson or online interviews. The research being carried out will support my Masters of Psychotherapy and Spirituality Program thesis requirement at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, Alberta. Please note that while the college is in Edmonton, AB, I reside in Vancouver, BC.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the inner experience of the therapist as they deepen their understanding of their own social identities in relationship to the other's social identities, and navigate the power relations therein. More specifically, my primary research question is as follows: What is the therapists' experience of living the tension within their own social identities and power relations so that space is created for meeting of the other? Through dialogue and conversation with you, I hope to explore the many layers of this question and what it means to you.

A brief overview of definitions within the research question is as follows:

**Social identities.** I am curious about those social identities that are highly stigmatized, such as; race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and age—those identified aspects of self that have been attributed with certain inferior or superior aspects by society, both historically and contextually.

**Power relations.** The use of power relations in my research question recognizes power as being both relational and contextual; the nature of power is ever-present, dynamic and complex. Since I am interested in the interior experience of the therapist, I am curious about the intrapsychic and interrelational nature of power that is experienced.

**Other.** In choosing the term other, it is not my intention to create a separation or to engage in an act of "othering" or objectification. I use other to define the person(s) in the social context I meet them in.

My hope is to come into dialogue with persons who have reflected on these concepts within their therapeutic work (sometimes called, Life Work), and with individuals who are interested in reflecting on their interior experience. As well, I am seeking to connect with therapists who may be involved in non-traditional forms of work or who define their work in a broader sense. If this speaks to your interests, I would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to set up a time for a preliminary, exploratory conversation to confirm mutual interest and fit. This conversation can take place by phone or via Skype.

Upon mutual confirmation of fit and interest, I will provide you a consent letter with more information about your involvement and rights as a coparticipant in the research.

Following this, an interview will be set up in June/July 2014 for up to 2 hours. A second interview will take place in September/October for up to one hour, which will allow you to provide feedback on the interview transcript and emerging themes within the data.

I look forward to hearing from you and your potential interest in this research study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to be in touch with me by phone [telephone number] or email at [email address]

Sincerely,

Tracy Wideman

## Appendix B

## Coparticipant Consent Letter

This research study is being completed for the purpose of a thesis requirement for the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality Program at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, Alberta. The primary research question of this qualitative study is: *What is the therapist's experience of* living *the tension within their own social identities and power relations so that space is created for meeting of the other?* It is my hope we will have the opportunity to enter into fulsome conversation and dialogue about what this research question means to you.

Key information on your rights and the research process are below:

- Two interviews will be carried out. The first interview will take place in July or early August 2014 for up to 2 hours; the second interview will take place in October/November 2014 for up to 1 hour.
- In the first interview, I will ask you questions about your experience around the research question above and invite reflection. In the second interview, I will invite feedback on the transcripts, share data and invite further reflections.
- Interviews will be digitally recorded.
- Your confidentiality will be ensured and protected by removing your name and any identifying information from the transcripts and data analysis. If required, composite stories will be created within the data to protect your privacy and confidentiality.
- Transcripts, notes and all data will be kept in a locked location in my home.
- You have the option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Even after the interview is completed, you have the right to withdraw. Interview data will be destroyed immediately if you choose to withdraw during the study. If you wish to withdraw, it is requested that you provide notification within two weeks of the completion of the interview; however, if this timeframe is not met, opportunity to withdraw from the study remains an option.
- After interviews are completed, a professional who also has a responsibility to uphold confidentiality will transcribe digital recordings.
- I may be creating visual data in the form of mapping or painting to support with the synthesis of data, which may be shared with you for feedback.
- Transcripts will be returned to you in October/November for your review; however, your review is not required if you do not wish.
- If you are interested, a final copy of the report will be provided to you.
- Three years after the completion of the research, I will destroy all data.
- Please note that in addition to this research supporting the completion of the thesis requirement for my Master's degree, data may be published or presented for other research or educational purposes. For example, there may be potential for this study to be published in the form of a journal article or presented at an educational workshop. If this secondary use of data should arise, the data will be handled with the same sensitivity to ethical principles. I will also contact you if data is published or shared in an educational setting.

- As well, please note I will be processing data with my Thesis Supervisor; she will also be required to keep confidentiality.

Potential benefits of participating in this research are:

- An opportunity to reflect on your therapeutic work and access new insights into your inner experience of your own social identities and power relations in relationship to the other.
- A potential increase in understanding of your experience in relation to the research question.
- Potential shifts in how therapeutic practice is experienced and lived.

Potential risks of participating in this research are:

- You may experience some concern or discomfort after sharing particular information in the interviews. (Please note there is an opportunity to provide clarification to information provided through the review of transcripts and the second interview. As well, you can be in touch with me at anytime to present concerns. As noted above, you are free to withdraw from the study without consequence).
- Participation may increase consciousness around issues related to social identities and power relations, which are sensitive and potentially painful. If these circumstances should arise, I will ensure to provide you with any resources and supports I am aware of and linked to.

You can contact me (Tracy Wideman, the primary researcher/coparticipant) at any time throughout the study if there are questions or concerns at [telephone number] or [email address]. Additionally, you can contact my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Colleen MacDougall at _____or the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality Program Chair, Ara Parker at [email address], if you have any concerns about the research process.

I, _____, understand that I have the above rights as a coparticipant. The study has been explained to me and I agree to participate.

Coparticipant Name (printed) _____

Coparticipant Signature _____

Date _____

Primary Researcher/Coparticipant Name (printed) ____Tracy Wideman_____

Primary Researcher/Coparticipant Signature _____

Date _____

## Appendix C

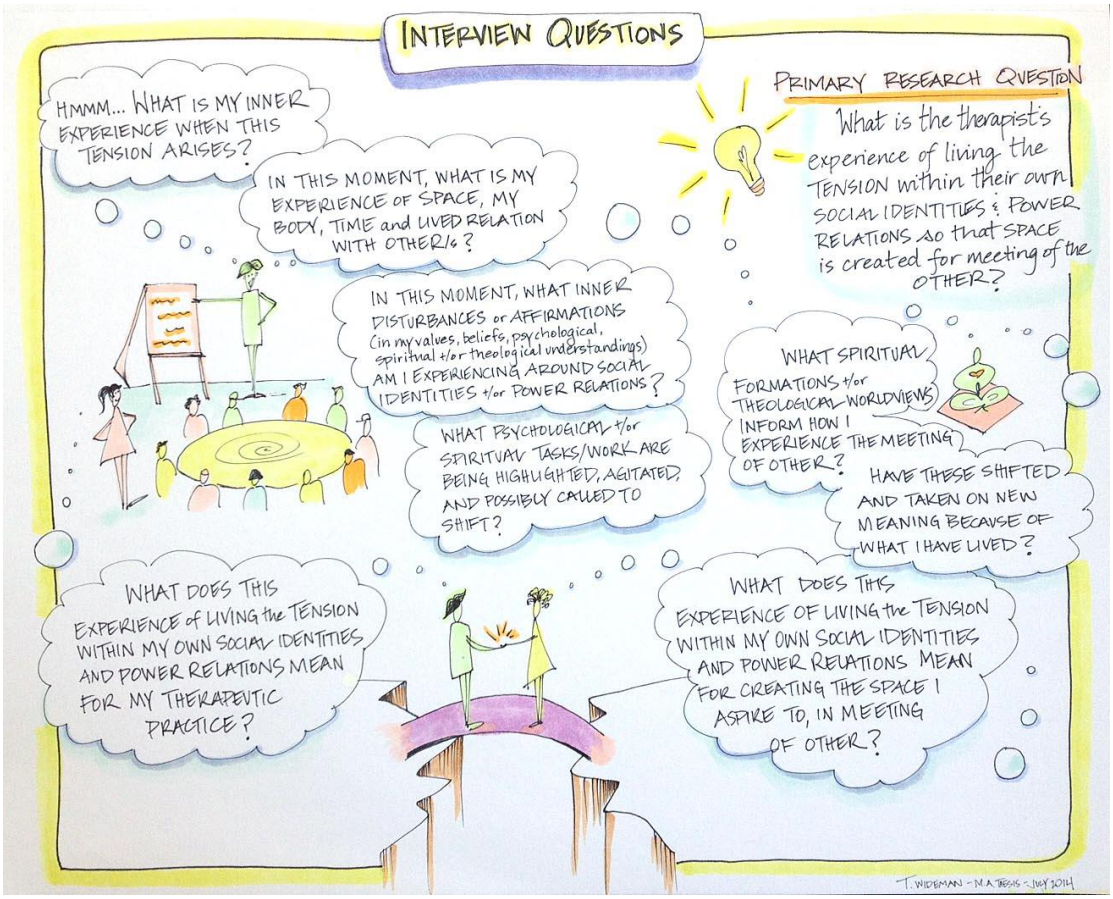
## Interview Questions Guide

Research Question: What is the therapist's experience of living the tension within their own social identities and power relations so that space is created for meeting of the other?

1. How has/is your understanding of social identities (been) shaped?
    a. Does this term resonate with you?
    b. What other terms/concepts relate for you?
2. How has/is your understanding of power relations (been) shaped?
    a. Does this term resonate with you?
    b. What other terms/concepts relate for you?
3. **In a general sense**, can you reflect on your inner experience when this tension around social identities and power relations arises, as you meet other? How does this tension show up?
4. Think about a **particular** time when you experienced such an inner tension and describe that moment in as much detail as possible. ("Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time" (van Manen, 1990, p. 65)
5. In that moment, what was your experience of **space**? (Space can be emotional, physical, a context, location, divisions, etc.)
6. In that moment, what was your experience of your **body**? ("Describe the experience from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings, the mood, the emotions, etc"; "Attend to how the body feels, how things smell/ed, how they sound, etc" (van Manen, 1990, p. 64-65)
7. In that moment, describe your experience of **lived relation** with other.
8. In that moment, describe your experience of **time** (e.g.: subjective time as opposed to clock time; e.g.: living in past, present or future?).
9. In that moment, what inner disturbances or affirmations (in your values, beliefs, psychological, spiritual and theological understandings) were you experiencing around social identities and/or power relations?

10. In these times of disturbance or affirmation, can you name what psychological and/or spiritual tasks/work are being highlighted, agitated, and possibly called to shift?
11. Can you say more about what spiritual formations and/or theological worldviews inform how you experience the meeting of other? Do you sense these formations and/or worldviews have shifted and taken on new meaning because of what you have lived?
12. What does this experience of living the tension within your own social identities and power relations mean for your therapeutic practice?
13. What does this experience of living the tension within your own social identities and power relations mean for creating the space you aspire to, in meeting of other?
14. Is there anything else that comes to mind as you reflect on this experience?

Please note the image below was also provided to the coparticipants as a way to make the questioning process feel less linear.



## Appendix D

## Points West Transcription Services

### Confidentiality Agreement & Security Precautions

I hereby agree that I and all of my staff will maintain strict confidentiality with respect to all information and all matters pertaining to any transcription we do for you.

All of our staff are familiar with and have signed an agreement with us that they will honour the relevant provisions of the ***Personal Information Protection Act*** and will hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual revealed during the transcription of digitally recorded interviews or in any associated documents.

None of our staff ever make copies of any of the digital audio files or transcripts of the interviews. Once a project is completed and you have verified that you've received all of our transcripts, staff delete all digital audio files, transcripts and any other documents related to the project from their computer's hard drive and any backup devices and shred any paper documents related to transcribing the project.

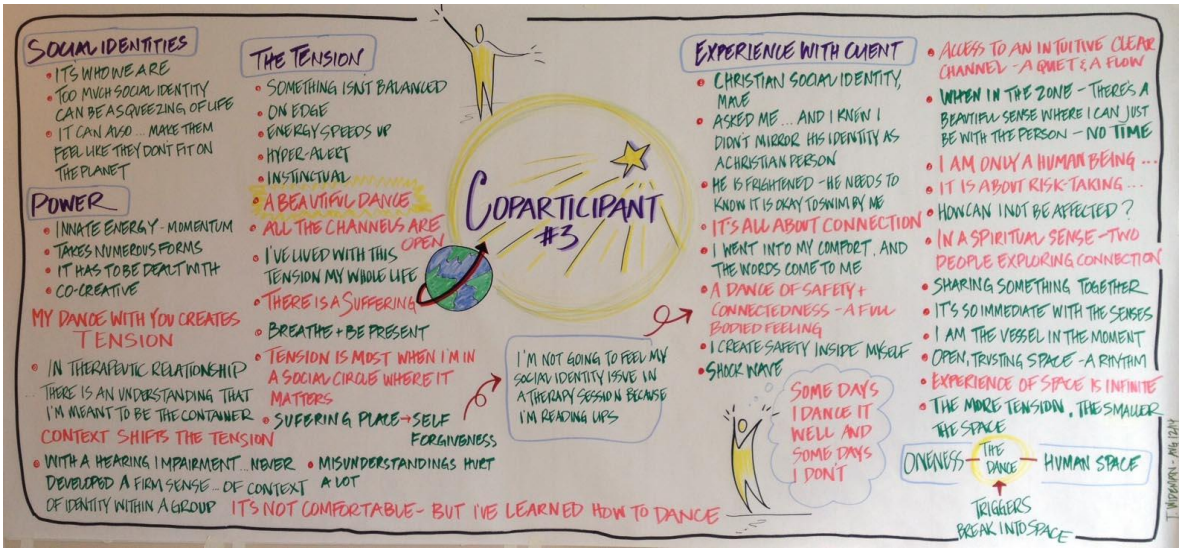
All staff have firewalls, their computers are password protected, they are the primary user of their computers and their computers are in a secure location.

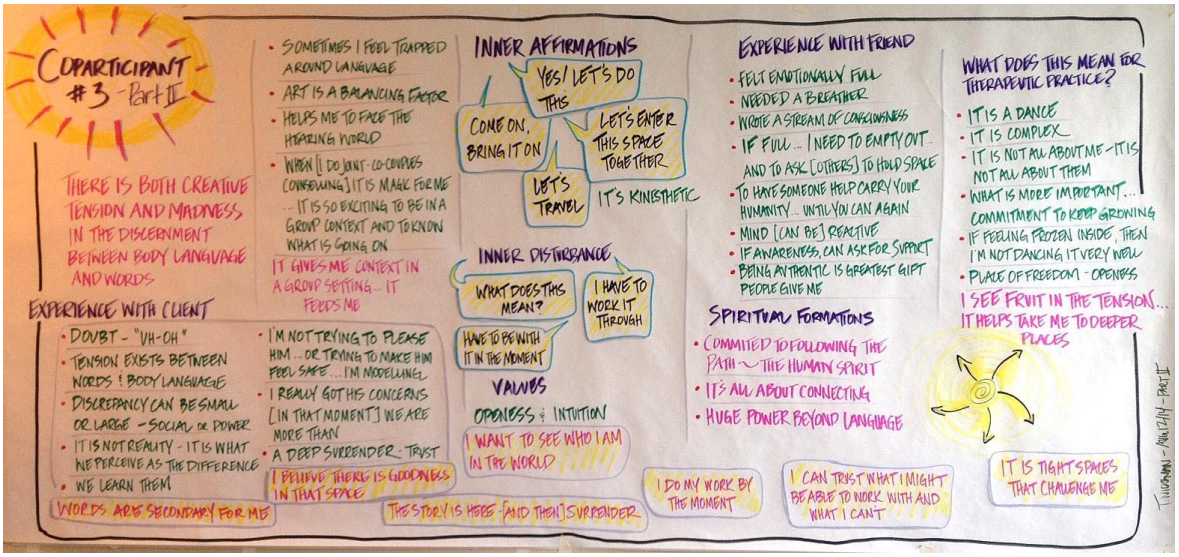
## Appendix E

## Example of Visual Mapping Process

(8 feet x 4 feet wall paper)

The visual maps below were created alongside the first listening to a coparticipant's recorded interview. The coparticipant provided feedback on the visuals and clarified words and images that did not fully capture her experience. The feedback exchange enhanced understanding of the coparticipant's experience of the phenomenon.



## Appendix F

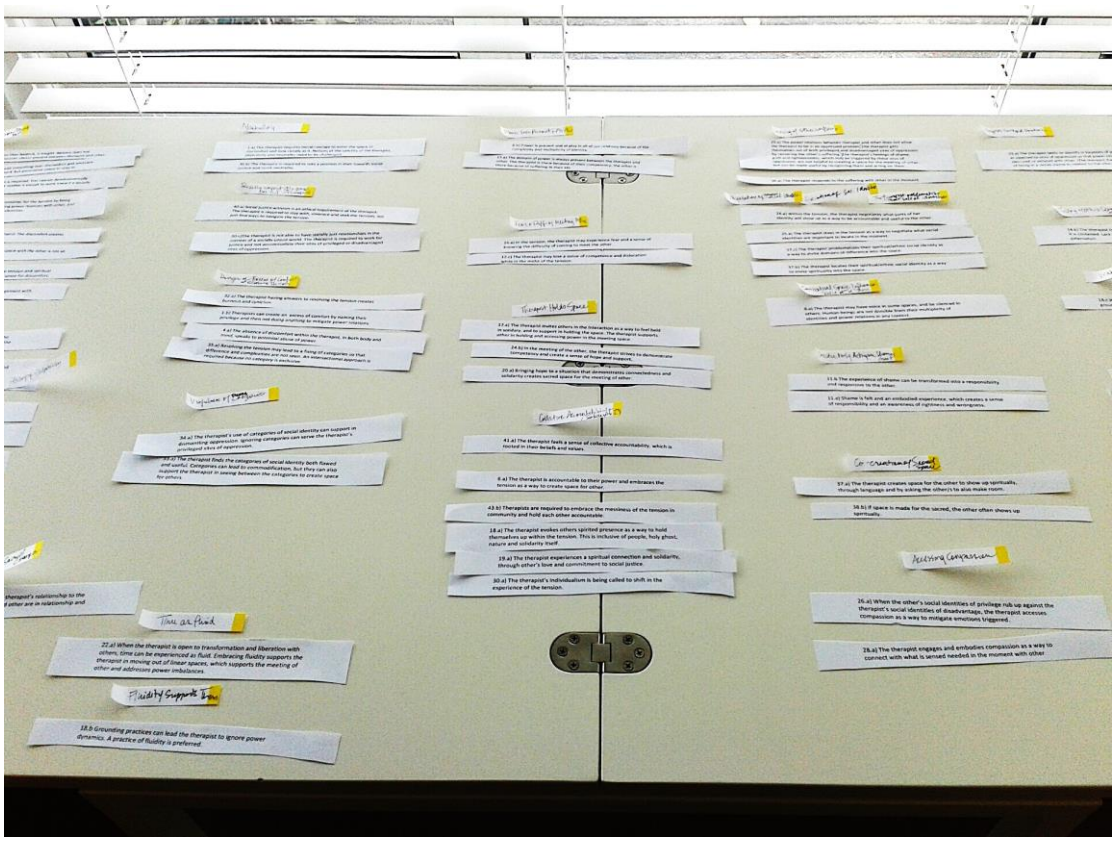
### Example of Template and Data Synthesis

| Transcript | Interpretation | Existential Categories |
|---|---|---|
| **2) p. 4 (Lines 10-22)**<br>**Re: Social identities**<br>So when I hear "social identity," and you listed the words like race and creed, religion… of course it made sense to me. What really comes forward is all the experiences I've had, not just as being disabled in my particular way – or different I should say, because it's really how I see it – but all my travel experiences, moving from paths, from childhood to adulthood. Like it's very, very, very broad. We can't live without that sense of something called social identity because it's who we are. I think when people don't see a sense of social identity, that lostness is what creates a sense of what I consider insanity, a place where we feel so discombobulated, we don't have a container to fit in, that it can be really harmful. Just like too much social identity can be squeezing of life, too broad of a one can make people feel like they're a star. They don't really fit on the planet. They don't belong on the planet. | **First Person Meaning Unit:**<br>*We can't live without that sense of something called social identity because it's who we are. When we don't see social identities, we can enter a space that feels discombobulated which can be harmful. But if all we see is social identities, it can squeeze out life and make people feel like they don't belong.*<br><br>**Broader interpretation:**<br>*2. a)* How we see social identities can be both harmful and helpful. Not seeing social identities can harm others; if all that is seen are social identities, a sense of belonging can be diminished. | **Body** (squeezing of life, discombobulated)<br><br>**Other/Human Relations** (how we see other; sense of belonging)<br><br>**Space** (entering a space) |

## Appendix G

### Image of Data Synthesis Process

This image provides a visual of my process working with the meaning units on strips of paper. The use of cut strips of paper supported the expansion and distillation of meaning. As well, it supported the movement of meaning units between the thematic categories.



## Appendix H

## Poems

### "The Broken Parts"
### Anna

My past, my history
influences
I am the peacemaker
I learned to relate
It is interesting
what parts of my identity I highlight
or don't
Stories constructed and shared
from the past
may be easier
than what I feel vulnerable about in the moment

I sense my social identities coming up more
in different groups
Maybe I don't fit in
as much
Others may perceive me as thinking I know
too much
I try to be cool
act like I don't feel there is a difference, but
I know there is

Aware of my presence
analyzing within
my speech
my appearance
what I am wearing
nervous, not as relaxed
tight, tense
thoughts, anxiety
separated from them
Everyone looking at me
aware of every way
I felt different
I felt space between
us
space between our experiences
not wanting to take too much
too much space, too much time

But taking
in everything
about them
how am I perceived?
Measuring their perceptions against me
disturbed by the perceptions, the judgments,
where I put value
Is this more legitimate, the work of God?
embarrassed
I sense myself
reluctant to fully step into
what would be best
the structures and the battle within
hinder me from stepping into this power
Am I the right person to work here?
Am I trying to prove something?
Questions, for me, my practice

My journey
connects more to
the broken parts of my story
It is these parts
where you make connection
where beautiful things grow
I value 'welcoming of the stranger'
it pushes me
out of my comfort zone

But sometimes
this makes me judge myself
How far can this really go?
there are limitations
I question
The structures of my religion
I'm fighting them
not being supported by them
Concerned and cautious to
reveal my religious identity

Yet affirmed in my belief
in the practice of vulnerability
the best thing I can do is be
my own self
share my own story
My pain helps me
Connect with other

Others want their story
heard
to be seen for who they really are
This moves me past
judgments

Vulnerability can open up
or shut down connection
It is a tension
I navigate
the best way
to connect to their pain
shift the power, shift my body, shift my voice
step back
structure is required for safety
I listen
open to surprise
And then
surprise at their own stories
Participating in beauty
together
this moves power
I had to be vulnerable to be allowed
in
it is all about connection
Coming into that space
again and again
connects you
frozen and stretched moments

**"Dance the Tensions"**
**Claire**

How I respond or react, this is
what interests me
Choice is power
take responsibility for its presence
and be with it
creating internal spaciousness
riding out its movements within
body, mind
Repeated acceptance, curiosity, and attention
Dissonance, balance
they are not permanent
neither is the tension

dance with it
Being tension, being human
we cannot exist without meeting up
with these movements
it is what life asks of us

An instinctual animal
at first
A shockwave
carrying some momentary doubt
My identity questioned
I react to
what is perceived
as the difference
Something is not balanced
it can swing
self-centred to
other-centred
no longer relaxed in my body
energy speeds up
hyper-alert visually
thinking and reaction
Stretching boundaries
contractions
or
new, expanded space
I can fight or acclimate
I dance both movements
until I discover
another presence to it

He is holding onto his spirituality like a life buoy
He needs to know that he can swim near me
without drowning
I will be just there
floating beside him
ready to receive
whatever comes towards me
He gives me his language
He gives me permission
to go deeper within his spirit to search
modelling safety, creating safety inside
I'm not trying to please
If you don't have safety, nothing can happen
Why would anyone want to risk swimming in deep waters?
It feeds me when two

decide to swim in deep waters together
A quiet and a flow
With language, timing, movements
clock and no-time come together
The tension does not exist when being
present to the other's suffering

A deep surrender of trust
that what is going on between
self and other
is enough
and there is goodness in that space
You can only be authentic
make an offering
My work is cut out for me
when I am unable to enter that space
when my own issues get in the way
Challenging to accept fear, shame
I can react
or I can respond to shame's lessons
I negotiate it
I deepen my relationship with it
In a place of self-forgiveness and compassion

Some days I dance it well, and some days I don't
We are always in the dance
A spiral, continual movement
a pendulum
transforming
in and out
Sometimes you are on the same wavelength
and sometimes not
Sometimes you go places you do not want to go
It's about being aware that
it's not all about me
it's not all about them
that we are each doing a dance.
What's important?
the intention, my commitment

There is both a creative tension and madness
in the discernment of body language and words
my hearing impairment
trapped by language and a social stigma
I needed all these lessons, passages, experiences
I needed to learn the words of 'power' and 'social identity' and 'language' by

direct life experience and education
and now by
forgetting the knowledge
as an authentic response to the inner embracement
of it all
It reminds me why I am here, why I breathe, who I am
it's about connecting, it's all about connecting
A huge power there
beyond language
normal interactions, were extraordinary interactions
I started listening more, opening up more, trusting it more and practicing it more until it became a life of its own

It's about how we honour the dance between us
while we get stretched, snap back, and dance on each other's toes
Can we keep dancing?
To bust through the comfort zone
I don't mind it stretching and hurting a little
it's not comfortable, but I've learned how to dance
even dancing in stillness

Tight spaces challenge me to learn how to be better
I have a choice to hold my breath
or to go in and ask
what kind of air I have

**"Look for more of it"**
**Elena**

Tension is a textured word
I want it there
to sit in it
It is not ethical to be comfortable
in these spaces
power is always at play and going on here

I felt dirty, culpable
his suffering, my privilege
I felt responsible
outside of my own skin
so tied to his oppression
'just' anger
I couldn't remember
my usefulness, my competency
in that moment

Time gets very fluid
it's not a
linear
thing
I felt implicated, yet
also well informed
addressing power constantly
There is a complexity

I don't want to enact being patriarchal
I need to trust people with their lives, their experiences
I want that discomforted tension because
at any moment
I could transgress
As the therapist, we don't get to be oppressed
We are never not in that position
Yet taking a position is required
I wanted him to be the one holding what power he could
in that space
It is my job to bring hope, not Pollyanna

Making room for other is sacred space
I felt held up in solidarity
while I did this tough thing
Held up and buoyed
I believe in evoking the spirit
of people
The Holy Ghost is alive
I have a reaction to grounding
because you might stop paying attention
I don't want to be anchored
I respect water

I negotiate with the tension
There are parts of me that aren't useful to show up
I need to ask what parts of me are important
I out my identities, and problematize them
And manage the feelings
shame
guilt
righteousness
These are real feelings, but they are my work to do
Centre the other's suffering
and get out of the way
We have got to respond to the suffering we are in right now
Everybody's suffering is real

It’s not like you are going to
get through this
you are jumping
into a question you can’t answer
careful not to get slick
if you are certain about how to be
with the other
you have commodified them
We use the categories because it is what we have got right now
we need the categories
to dismantle oppression
Work for justice and let’s not accommodate ourselves

Embrace it, not resolve it
Stay complicated
stay with the tension
look for more of it
It is not to be avoided
We have to work to change the social context of human suffering,
not just find ways to navigate the complexity
create accountability with each other

And this:
I am inspired and hopeful
And I am good with this intentional and complicated stuff
These are things I tear apart and
it’s lovely

**“I See You”**
**Tracy**

I want to know the meaning
of this tension
for my way of being
suspicious of theories
that map it out
a response to a drive for authenticity
but what is ‘real’ and ‘good’?
this sure thing I crave
the thread of monotheistic indoctrination, individualism
that runs through me
meaning is multiple, disputable
hard to trust

don’t wear lipstick
pre-preparation, anticipation
thinking through, planning through
my dialogue, watching my language
noticing, wondering
mind scanning, sifting, sorting
body tight, chest tight, mouth tight, time tight
self-conscious
an imposture?

do they feel comfortable?
am I being too careful?
trying too hard?
I wonder
ask for feedback
feel I need to justify, be accepted
trying to find favour, trying to get legitimate
fear of these feelings taking space
heaping privilege upon privilege
power upon powerlessness upon power
am I hearing you?

reflecting, labelling, analyzing, categorizing, conceptualizing
sharpening and entrenching
I try to go lightly, softly, see you tenderly
But tip-toeing too lightly now
tend to the paradoxes
fixed
porous
there are no easy answers

I’m not looking to be rewarded for
good, white behaviour
I want ability to
take a position, no neutrality
a justice where you feel met, seen
not having to face
self-aggrandizement

how can I ask an other to reveal?
I want to push away, feeling saturated
It is uncomfortable
how to be compassionate to the parts of me
while also so complicit
guilt and shame
anxious responsibility

a desire to feel worthy enough
I am not doing enough, nor
do I feel hopeful
But, I can't leave this

Over-caution to risk-taking
elasticity
trust in other, trust in self, trust in something bigger
than what is going on here
there is not one thing to trust
sit on status quo or dismantle
locate and pull apart
I don't stand alone in this
it is a full table waiting to be trusted

I see you, Tension
it makes it feel more possible
if I recognize you, name you
I'll feel nervous
bringing you in
I'll set the table for all of us
to sit at the table, clang the silverware and eat the food
listen to your movements
wide eyed and awake
making space
I was trying to civilize you
civilize = to create straight lines
line drawing become waves of texture
no plain, perfect abiding
it's messy, unsure
shame, curiosity, fear
allow the movements
to take this tension in and out
is a requirement
see what happens in the vulnerable space

Meanings aren't the forerunner
They don't clear the path and make the way
But the image, the Tension, is a companion
I can trust
Who am I with Other now?
Who am I with Tension now?
New relations, new discomfort, new possibilities