ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

CATCHING TOXIC TEARS: HOW IS THE SACRED FEMININE AFFECTED IN THERAPISTS COUNSELLING SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS?

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Audrey Hall Isberg, the embodiment of the feminine values I honor and whose presence, pride and encouragement I have felt throughout this journey. I am grateful to you and Dad for raising me to be a strong woman with a voice.

To my children, Ryan, Lisa and Carter, my precious grandchildren Kallen, Kamryn, Colt, Oliver, Leif and those grandchildren yet to be born. It is for you that I work for and pray for a better world.

ABSTRACT

A long-term interest in the subject led me to question the effects that dealing daily with the deep wounds of sexual abuse have on the Sacred Feminine and its inner repository, or "feminine soul" in a female therapist. My life journey led me to work with survivors of sexual abuse and assault, and the wounded voices of my clients led to my research question. Their stories made me feel anger towards the men who devalued them to the point that they could sexually abuse them.

There is substantial literature highlighting the physical and emotional effect of empathetic caring upon therapists. I questioned how this work imprinted my soul, touching that part of me that connects me to the Divine. I had to be mindful daily of my self-care, knowing that in order to be of help to my clients, my own soul had to be nurtured.

My research question, which arises from my own reactions to my clinical work, is as follows: How is the Sacred Feminine affected in therapists who counsel sexual abuse survivors? Organic inquiry and art-based research methodologies guide this research. My personal story will be an integral part of the paper, along with my art. The intention of this study is to gain an understanding of how sexual abuse therapy affects the least acknowledged aspect of female personhood—the Sacred Feminine. Through this study I seek to give meaning and voice to the experience of the stressful and sometimes distressing work of trauma therapy, as well as create the opportunity for the reader to envision more holistic ways of thinking about the Goddess, the Earth, and our place in it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The pages that follow are the result of a personal journey of research, writing and discovery. Although for the most part it was a solitary journey, there were people who encouraged me, supported me and cheered me on. To them I am grateful.

Firstly, I wish to thank Dr. Jane Simington for introducing me to art therapy and encouraging me to pursue a career as an art psychotherapist. The impact my connection with you has had on my life is immeasurable.

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Blessings to each of you.

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INTRODUCTION

I found God in myself

and I loved her…..

I loved her fiercely.

Ntozake Shange (Christ, 1978)

There is much that intrigues me about this research topic of how the Sacred Feminine is affected by counseling sexual abuse survivors. Coming from a long line of feminists, I have lived in a landscape of feminine consciousness and have long been aware of the disparity between the sexes. My great-grandmother was a self-proclaimed feminist, and a feminist philosophy has been passed down through each generation.

I remember questioning Christianity and Christian society for its implicit masculine preferences through my adolescence and continue to do so. My mother introduced my sisters and me to feminist activist Gloria Steinem at an age when we were beginning to define our place in the world. Steinem led a social revolution against sexual and racial barriers for over two decades. This impacted me to the degree that now, at age 60, feminism is a primary theme in this thesis project.

My life journey led me to a master's degree and a practicum at an agency where I counseled women and children, using spiritually-informed psychotherapy and art therapy to help clients heal the deep wounds of sexual abuse. I began to recognize I was being affected by the daily stories of women and children who painfully shared their experiences of victimization and how it feels to live in a body that has been traumatized. These feelings were not unique to me, and have led to research into the

complexities and nuances of this work. The feelings of anger and a stirring deep inside could not be ignored, and led to a desire to explore these feelings. My thesis topic is a result of those emotions.

I propose to explore the Sacred Feminine, also referred to as the Divine Feminine and Goddess, through Goddess mythology, sharing the evolution of consciousness resulting from humanity's changing attitudes toward female deities. I will explore how patriarchal-focused spirituality contributes to the devaluation of women and how the traits of the feminine: compassionate, nurturing, and instinctual, are devalued, while the traits of the masculine: authoritative, competitive and logical, are revered (Shlain, 2003). I will examine my desire to identify what is truly God(dess)'s word rather than deeply-held assumptions of our culture made as a result of patriarchy putting man at the center. An attempt will be made to affirm the message that all humans possess a full and equivalent human nature as personhood, as *male* and *female.*

The study focuses on honoring the Sacred Feminine. Issues of patriarchy are addressed and critically analyzed from a feminist perspective. This perspective investigates how the feminine half of the human spirit has been dishonored by masculine-dominated societies that carefully protect the cherished and holy concept of male supremacy. This concept is described by Monk Kidd (1996) as a "God-ordained image of female as under male, incapable, disobedient, unworthy - all of which added up to inferior" (p. 27). This dishonoring leads to an imbalance of the masculine and feminine principles, which has fundamental implications for how we create and live in our world.

Research Question

How is the Sacred Feminine affected in therapists counseling sexual abuse survivors?

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to inform readers of the state of existing research and expand and deepen that knowledge through my research. The literature that is relevant to this study spans a range of disciplines and is pertinent to the focus of my thesis question. The concepts of patriarchy, feminism, sexual abuse and Goddess/Sacred or Divine Feminine are examined and discussed at length. (The terms Goddess and Sacred or Divine Feminine are used interchangeably throughout.) I also examine the arts theory that justifies art as a way to access the unconscious, and question the impact of vicarious trauma upon the therapist.

Definition of Key Terms

Patriarchy:

1. a form of social organization in which the father or the eldest male is recognized as the head of the family or tribe, descent and kinship being traced through the male line
2. government, rule, or domination by men (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1970, p. 1042).

Feminism:

1. a) the principle that women should have political, economic and social rights equal to those of men; b) the movement to win such rights for women.

2. [Rare] feminine qualities (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1970, p. 514).

Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse in all forms is considered traumatic. This term includes all uninvited sexual behavior including assault, rape, incest, genital mutilation and exploitation—all resulting in feelings of denial, secrecy, shame, fear, helplessness, loss of control and threat of annihilation (Herman, 1992, pp. 28-33).

Goddess/Sacred or Divine Feminine:

Goddess, also known as Sacred Feminine and Divine Feminine (which I use interchangeably) defies unambiguous definition. Each adherent describes Her differently. Starhawk (1979) describes Her as indeterminable, a "That-Which-Cannot-Be-Told", stating She is "the world: moon, sun, earth, star, stone, seed, flowing river, wind, wave, leaf and branch, bud and blossom, fang and claw, woman and man" (p. 22). Christ states Goddess is "the love and understanding immanent in the joy and suffering of all individuals in the world, calling them to love and understand more deeply and more fully" (as cited in Plaskow & Christ, 2014, p. 29).

> We find in the Goddess a compelling image of female power, a vision of the deep connection of all beings in the web of life, and a call to create peace on earth. (Christ, 1997, p. xii)

Art Therapy:

Art therapy offers a theoretical framework from which to select appropriate materials and media to promote deeper self-understanding. The process of art therapy is based on the belief that an individual's most essential thoughts and feelings are derived from the unconscious, and releasing repressed material has a restorative power, impacting

the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual totality of a human being (Allen, 1995; Hinz, 2009). Common to art therapy in general is the welcoming of mystery and a high tolerance of chaos, for both destructive and constructive aspects of the creative act (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001, p.24).

Vicarious Trauma:

The term vicarious trauma (VT) as relating to therapists, was coined by McCann and Pearlman (1990) to describe how psycho-therapeutic work with trauma victims can cause distress to therapists. Hearing traumatic material while in a caring role can have consequences for health workers (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Rothschild, 2000; Lerias & Byrne, 2003). These consequences are similar to those experienced by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) sufferers themselves (Blair & Ramones, 1996).

Personal Interest in the Subject

There is much that intrigues me about my research topic. Coming from a long line of feminists, I have lived in a landscape of feminine consciousness and have for many years been aware of the disparity between the sexes. History tells us that patriarchal models of the spiritual have not been kind to women. Over millennia, women have become devalued, and their sexuality commodified (Herman, 1992). The correlation between patriarchal religion and the devaluation of women should not be ignored. “Centuries of violence in the name of religion, fanatic and terrifying crusades, inquisitions and witch hunts hovered in threatening memory for any who dared to defy the authority of the church” (Stone, 1976, p. 236). Stone goes on to state that the

Bible, believed by many to be the sacred word of the Creator, has "suggested, declared, proven, explained, announced, proclaimed, affirmed, confirmed and reaffirmed" male supremacy (p. 237).

Background

As a female growing up in rural Alberta, I did not dream that one day I would be working in the area of sexual abuse, dealing with one of the most horrific forms of violence against women. As a therapist who counsels victims who have experienced the horrific trauma of sexual abuse, I recognized myself struggling with hearing the stories of sexually abused women and children. The abusers did not discriminate. Children and adolescents of all ages are burdened with the worst imaginable pain at the hands of fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, babysitters, cousins—relationships of every sort. On the news we regularly hear of men in power sexually abusing innocent victims: coaches, teachers, priests, politicians—all in positions of authority and trust. A person cannot hear of these atrocities and not be impacted by them. I often feel that we hear of these horrors so often, that we as a society have become complacent about them and the resulting emotional/spiritual aftermath. As trauma expert Simington (2003) states:

> Our culture does not recognize soul pain. We have lost the knowledge to diagnose the symptoms of soul distress, and the skill to provide soul healing. This lack of knowledge has driven any expression of soul pain "underground", forcing those struggling with soul wounds to disguise their suffering in more socially acceptable ways. (p.28)

The victims' stories described abuse that resulted in deep and life-altering wounds. Fear, depression, substance abuse, dissociative disorders and sexual dysfunction can be lifetime impairments resulting from the abuse (Herman, 1992). Such stories are hard to hear yet they need to be shared in order for healing and growth to occur.

Reports from the science of psychoneuroimmunology indicate that as many as 80 to 90% of physical symptoms have their roots in psychological or spiritual concerns, yet soul pain is "rarely discussed, assessed, or diagnosed" (Simington, 2003, p.29).

Looking through a female lens, I am aware of the importance of understanding the social, political, and pathological forces in society that damage and constrain women and girls (as well as men). I embrace and bring the core principles of feminist therapy to the therapeutic relationship:

1. The personal is political.
2. Commitment to social change.
3. Women's and girl's voices and ways of knowing are valued and their experiences are honored.
4. The counseling relationship is egalitarian.
5. A focus on strengths and a reformulated definition of psychological distress.
6. All types of oppression are recognized. (Corey, 2009, pp. 341-366)

I began my spiritual journey in the 1990s, while volunteering for the R.C.M.P. Victim Assistance Program. I spent 10 years helping victims cope with numerous forms of violence, ranging from break and enter to murder. During that time I worked on a file that involved a little girl who had been sexually assaulted by her adolescent

male babysitter. Although I knew atrocities happened around the world daily, the exposure to this horrific crime affected me deeply. I questioned how the God I loved could allow such a thing to happen. As Killen and deBeer (1994) state, sooner or later in life we face situations that raise questions of meaning, purpose and value in our lives (pp. 1-2). It is these difficult life experiences that invite theological reflection. I felt called to consciously and critically examine my faith. I began reading a plethora of books, each one contributing more to my spiritual hunger. I was driven by feelings of existential angst.

As a young woman of 19, I saw a high school girlfriend raped and murdered. Uncharacteristically, she hitched a ride from Edmonton to Grande Prairie after completing a summer job in the Yukon. On that bright September day, a trusting and naïve girl accepted a ride with a stranger that ended in her rape and murder which forever altered her family's lives, and impacted the lives of her many friends. During the trial a friend sat near family members of the accused and heard comments suggesting she had "asked for it" because she was hitchhiking. I was enraged at hearing this attitude of entitlement. Baring and Cashford (1991) note:

> Only very recently have people questioned the law on rape, where the assumption was implicit that a woman was largely responsible for rape attacks, having somehow 'enticed' the man into believing she was inviting his assault, or that (not knowing her own mind) if she said 'no', she did not really mean it. (p. 528)

I struggle with the concept of meaning making as a goal after suffering painful life experiences. Killen and deBeer (1994) state that for human beings "the drive for meaning is stronger than the drive for physical survival".

> We need to make sense of what happens to us; to clothe our existence within an interpretive pattern that reflects back to us lives of integrity, coherence and significance. If we cannot, the will to live withers. (p.45)

I felt desperate to create a framework that would help me live in a world where senseless suffering is part of the human condition. Frankl (1985) shares his belief that difficult life situations give humans the opportunity to grow spiritually beyond themselves. "If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete" (p. 88).

CHAPTER ONE

SACRED FEMININE/GODDESS

All of my life I have felt a deep connection with nature. I feel most alive and connected to Creator when my fingers are working in soil, my feet feeling an ocean wave, or my eyes taking in the majesty of mountain peaks. Andrews (2007) coined the term "walkabout". She describes it as a knowing she has around her ability to navigate through unknown territory. I experienced my own "knowing" as a young girl on my grandparent's farm in northern British Columbia. I can still remember lying on my back on the creek bank and feeling, for a brief period of time, that the world stood still. My senses felt strangely alive. Everything around me was magnified. The sky and leaves were vibrant with color. The creek was lined with poplar and mountain ash, arched in a canopy above me. I could feel the coolness of the peaty soil against my back as I lay stretched out, savoring the sights and smells that filled my senses. In that moment I felt a deep communion with everything around me. This profound sense of interconnectedness with all life impacted me, and like Andrews, I knew I too could navigate through unknown territory, sometimes with curiosity, sometimes with anxiety, but always with a knowing I would come out stronger on the other side.

At the time I had no language for what I was experiencing, but have since learned I was having a *numinous experience*. Although it took time for the language to evolve, the feeling was one of comfort that I felt deep in my soul, and continue to carry to this day. It was not a conscious act, but I was giving Goddess permission to live in me. I was being introduced to what Monk Kidd (1996) refers to as the *feminine soul*, the "inner

depository of the Divine Feminine, her deep source, her natural instinct, guiding wisdom, and power" (p. 20).

Many years later my life journey led me to a master's degree and a practicum at an agency where I counseled women and children, using spiritually-informed psychotherapy and art therapy to help clients work toward healing the deep wounds of sexual abuse imposed on them. I began to recognize I was being affected by the daily stories of women and children who painfully shared their experiences of victimization. These feelings were not unique to me, and have led to research into the complexities and nuances of this work. The feelings of anger and a stirring deep inside could not be ignored, and led to a desire to explore these feelings through writing and art making.

Although I was raised in a Christian religion, I balk at the rigid hierarchy of the church, which identifies with a God who is outside the self and encourages an authoritarian system of dogma, law and ritual. The church's teachings on female submission and subordination to men have never sat well with me. I have no desire to live secondary to man under the sanctioned models of femininity. I do not want my own desires to always be secondary. Monk Kidd (1996) describes the result of teachings by church, home, work, school as a "feminine wound", created by internalizing the voices we hear within our culture. "If you receive often enough the message that women are inferior and secondary, you will soon believe you *are* inferior and secondary" (pp. 29-30). Psychotherapist Anne Wilson Schaef's name for the wound is "the original sin of being born female". She writes:

> To be born female in this culture means that you are born "tainted", that there is

> something intrinsically wrong with you that you can never change, that your birthright is one of innate inferiority. I am not implying that this must remain so. I do believe that we must know this and understand it as a given before it can be worked through. (Cited in Monk Kidd, 1996, p. 28)

Like Monk Kidd, I recognized women live without being conscious of the way that women and the feminine "have been wounded, devalued, and limited within culture, churches, and families" (p.18). I found myself embracing a spirituality that honored the feminine; one that encouraged the creation of a more just, peaceful and harmonious world. I chose to enter into "relation" with Her. I needed Her to midwife the emotions I had bubbling beneath the surface, waiting to inform and expand my reality. The *feminine soul* to which Monk Kidd refers holds the wisdom and power I desire (p.20). Although my feminine soul was not totally dormant, it was without the strong and confident voice I desired.

Patriarchal Religion and the Devaluation of Women

Historical literature tells us that patriarchal models of the spiritual have not been kind to women. Over millennia, women have become devalued, and their sexuality commodified (Herman, 1992). Centuries of violence in the name of religion, fanatic and terrifying crusades, inquisitions and witch hunts, hovered in threatening memory for any who dared to defy the authority of the church (Stone, 1976, p.236). Stone goes on to state that the Bible, believed by many to be the sacred word of the Creator, has "suggested, declared, proven, explained, announced, proclaimed, affirmed, confirmed and reaffirmed" male supremacy (p. 237).

Christ (1997) states the complex history of the Goddess is controversial in the scholarly world and warns us to be careful when assigning blame for the demise of the Goddess (p.43). Pointing out that patriarchy existed in the Near East and Europe long before the Hebrew Bible was written, she states that if anyone is to "blame", it is the Christian emperors whose edicts outlawed all "pagan" religions (p.47). She points out that layer upon layer of prejudice shroud the history of Goddesses, including philosophical, religious, social and political prejudices (p. 43).

> We must be careful not to repeat prejudices that are consciously and unconsciously assumed in our culture. We must base our telling of the history of the Goddesses on a careful and nuanced understanding of the past. Only then do we have the right to be critical of ideas and attitudes found in the Jewish or Christian Bibles or in Judaism or Christianity. (Christ, 1997, p. 48)

Psychologist Carl Jung, "one of the most recent doctors of the soul" said that, "every psychological problem is ultimately a matter of religion" (as cited in Moore, 1992, p. xii). The correlation between patriarchal religion and the devaluation of women should not be ignored. As Christianity evolved from a persecuted underground movement to being declared, by Emperor Constantine, the official religion of the Roman Empire, spirituality began to share the same patriarchal dominance that women's sexuality had known for thousands of years (Flinders, 1998). Historian Torjesen attributes this shift to the evolution of church architecture. Christian worship had originally been centered in the homes of members. By the fourth century, immense buildings patterned after those where Roman emperors and governors presided over public ceremonies were now the places of worship. The Christian basilica had become the "throne room" of God, and "architectural

space clearly defined Christian worship as public" (as cited in Flinders, 1998). "Public, and therefore by the logic of patriarchy, off-limits for women unless veiled and silent" (Flinders, 1998, p. 128).

The image of God as male has been deeply internalized in western culture. Museums, cathedrals and churches in western and eastern Europe and in Latin America are filled with images of God the Father as old, gray-bearded, white and male (Christ, 1997). Using descriptors for God such as Lord, King, Father and Son, referring to the world as "his" creation, we designate "his" gender as male. Feminist theologian Mary Daly (as cited in Christ, 1978) describes the psychological and political ramifications of a male "father religion" for women.

> If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling his people, then it is the nature of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male dominated. Within this context, a mystification of roles takes place: The husband dominating his wife represents God "himself". The images and values of a given society have been projected into the realm of dogmas and "Articles of Faith", and these in turn justify the social structures which have given rise to them and which sustain their plausibility. (pp. 2-3)

Daly's voice is joined by that of philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, who believes the function of patriarchal religion is to legitimize male power. In these religions, Jewish, Mohammedans, and Christians, among others, see man as Master by divine right (as cited in Christ, 1978, pp. 2-3). Thousands of years ago the church synod debated if women were human beings with souls. Women won the right to be considered human by just one vote (Hughes-Jones, 2005).

God as Female

The suggestion that God could be female creates varied responses, from panic to excitement around the possibility of some greater potential. Ruth Barrett (cited in Coleman, 2005), head of a Dianic organization for 25 years, states her experience, when sharing the idea, had been a response of "shock with some indication of hostility" (p.119). Barrett felt bewilderment that in the world of the academic study of religion and in some of its affiliated organizations, the primary methodological step in the study of religion was not being practiced. Researchers were not setting aside presuppositions and prioritizing understanding. Coleman (2005) believes that replacing the established transcendental "God" with "Goddess" causes a "rupture and displacement of the systemic structure of Western metaphysics" (pp.120-121).

Monk Kidd (1996) suggests that feminist spiritual conception can happen as late as 60 for some women. I suggest that there are many who never know the exhilaration of a feminist identity. This task of re-birthing oneself brings an awakening that will change a person forever. As Monk Kidd states:

> Bringing forth a true, instinctual powerful woman who is rooted in her own feminine center, who honors the sacredness of the feminine, and who speaks the feminine language of her own soul is never easy. (p. 12)

Stories and images of goddesses have been expressed in different cultures since the Palaeolithic era in 20,000 BC and continue to be communicated with contemporary pictures of the Virgin Mary. In their research, Baring and Cashford (1993) discovered a continuous transmission of images throughout history (p. xi). Symbolism, both visual and

verbal, has played a primary role in the reemergence of the Goddess. The sources for the symbol of the Goddess in contemporary spirituality are traditions of Goddess worship and modern women's experience, emerging spontaneously in dreams, fantasies and thoughts.

One way to look at Goddess mythology is to regard it as the evolution of these powerful symbols. Monk Kidd (1996) views these images as "transmitters of possibility", compelled by the consciousness *behind* the ancient images, where "the Divine was imagined in feminine form, women were honored as equals, and earth and nature were sacred" (p. 144). As Christ (1997) describes, the simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power. This is in sharp contrast to the predominant paradigms in Western religion and culture of female dependence on males (p. 3).

Some of the oldest artwork is of a mother-fertility goddess or goddesses, such as the famous "Venus of Willendorf". These goddess symbols were believed to have the power to give and sustain life (Baring & Cashford, 1991; Light, 1992). Vaertings (as cited in Stone, 1976) asserts that throughout history those in power determined the sex of the deity:

> The ruling sex, having the power to diffuse its own outlooks tends to generalize its specific ideology. Should the trends of the subordinate sex run counter, they are likely to be suppressed all the more forcibly in proportion as the dominant sex is more overwhelming. The result is that the hegemony of male deities is usually associated with the dominance of men and the hegemony of female deities with the dominance of women. (p.31)

Psychologist of religion, Goldenberg, (as cited in Christ, 1997) states that patriarchy's ability to function is due in part to its denial of the womb that gives birth. Goldenberg argues that the lie of patriarchy is contrary to fact and experience, since it is the Mother who gives birth. Stating that this lie is "performed, repeated, reenacted, read, told, sung, and taught again and again in so many texts" results in accepting it as truth (p.67). Gunn Allen is cited in Christ (1997) as saying, "The connection of creation with mothering is not so much to give birth…but the power to make, to create, to transform (p. 91).

Emergence of the Goddess

In the beginning, people prayed
to the Creatress of Life, the Mistress of Heaven.
At the very dawn of religion, God was a woman.
Do you remember?

(Stone, 1976, p.1)

Archaeologists trace the worship of Goddess back to the Neolithic communities as far back as 7,000 BC; some to the Upper Paleolithic cultures of about 5,000 BC. The Upper Palaeolithic period is often regarded as the spiritual "golden age". Because this period precedes written records the existence of Goddess worship remains speculative.

Theories on the origin of the Goddess in this period are based upon three separate lines of evidence:

1. The female was revered as the giver of life. People did not yet possess the conscious understanding of the relationship of sex to reproduction. With the concepts of paternity and fatherhood not yet existing, it was natural for children to take the name of their mother's tribe or clan. This social structure, referred to as matrilineal, is based upon mother-kinship, where the names, titles, possessions and territorial rights are passed along through the female line, so that they may be retained within the family clan.
2. As the earliest concepts of religion developed, they probably took the form of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship occurs among tribal people throughout the world. Certain tribes were making small statues, known as *dzuli,* which are female idols representing the human origins of the whole tribe. The concept of the creator of all human life was formulated by the clan's image of woman being their most ancient and primal ancestor, and was the basis of all sacred ritual.
3. The most tangible evidence is derived from sculptures dating back as far as 25,000 BC. Often referred to as *Venus figures,* these small figurines, some seemingly pregnant, are thought to be idols of a 'great mother' cult, practiced by the non-nomadic mammoth hunters (Stone, 1976, pp. 10-14).

It is theorized that in the Neolithic period, also known as the New Stone Age, which began about 10,000 BC and ended about 5,500 BC, the Goddess was worshipped along with feminine values of nurturing, compassion and the regenerative aspects of life. The archeological findings of Goddess worship suggest that the regenerative aspect of the feminine was a form of worship and was the basis for art. It is through this period that "a new spirit of conscious cooperation between human beings and their world was born"

(Baring & Cashford, 1991, pp.46-47). It is through this Neolithic period that archeological artifacts suggest that Mother Goddess was revered as the supreme deity.

Through this period the pattern began to be one of cooperation and mutual respect. The specialized knowledge that women needed about plants for food and medicine was acknowledged by the men. Economic and social power as well as prestige became theirs. The "remarkable nature of female experience" was recognized (Flinders, 1998, p. 105). Women were the givers and sustainers of life and their capacity to give birth and feed the young was valued (Stone, 1976, Flinders, 1998).

Judging from surviving artifacts and myths, the whole of Neolithic Europe, also known as Syria and Libya, had a religious system based on Mother Goddess. "The Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, omnipotent; and the concept of fatherhood had not yet been introduced into religious thought" (Graves as cited in Stone, 1976, p. 23). Several studies of ancient worship state the original status of Goddess was as supreme deity. In one of these studies, Mellart, studying the cultures of 9,000 to 7,000 BC, states: "The statuettes portray the goddess and the male occurs only in a subsidiary role as child or paramour" (as cited in Stone, 1976, p. 24).

> In the worship of the female deity, sex was Her gift to humanity. It was sacred and holy. She was the Goddess of Sexual Love and Procreation. But in the religions of today we find an almost totally reversed attitude. Sex, especially
>
> non-marital sex, is considered to be somewhat naughty, dirty, even sinful. (Stone, 1976, pp. 154-155)

The Temptation of Eve

Within the Judeo-Christian world, one of the greatest evils is seen to be human sexuality. Eve becomes the source of lust, and is blamed for creating sinful thoughts in the minds of men, provoking them to forbidden acts.

> Eve and women, with their greater sexuality (as envisaged by the abstinent Christian Fathers), had the power to create evil by luring men into the sin of lust and its practices: 'Man', he continues, was ' solidified in the womb, amongst all uncleanliness', and 'issues through the parts of shame'. (Tertullian as cited in Baring & Cashford, 1991, p. 526)

As a result of patriarchal brainwashing, society has lost the innate knowledge of sexual sacredness. The biblical story of Jezebel, who was labeled a harlot and whore, has endured over the millennia. Defamed by biblical writers because she was "a threat to patriarchal prerogative and monotheism", her name has incredible power. "To be a whore/harlot, as conventionally conceived, can be viewed as a challenge to the prescribed absolute right of male authority over female sexuality" (Williams, Villanueva, & Birnbaum, 2008, pp. 5-16).

Today sexual and erotic appeals are universal. "Sexual license has become a tool of patriarchy primarily through the commercialization of sex" (Williams et al., 2008, p. 16). Sex is used to sell products—media products, as well as branded goods and services. Media in western culture is full of constant sexual displays of women, from sexually gratuitous and explicit dialogue to the accentuation of physical attractiveness. Reichert (2007) cites a 2003 report, which shows that 71% of television programming contained

sexual content in a variety of forms. With cable programming, and most notably paid programming, the percentage increases (p. 5).

The myth of Eve has impacted on almost every aspect of Jewish, Christian and secular culture in the Western world. In biblical form, Eve was not a Goddess, yet in many respects was a significant female figure. The biblical story of the first woman in the Hebrew creation myth, who listened to the serpent, has held great power over women for over 2,000 years. According to Stone (1976), this myth and the image of Eve has "penetrated far into that part of women where her deepest feelings and ideas are stored" (p. 228). Those who believe in the Bible as the sacred word of the creator, which for thousands of years has "declared, proven, explained, announced, proclaimed, affirmed, confirmed, and reaffirmed" male supremacy, protect this holy concept (p. 237).

Stone (1976) believes the myth of Adam and Eve, with a gullible Eve created from Adam's rib, was designed to suppress the female religion. The symbols of serpents, sacred fruit trees and sexually-tempting women may have explained allegorically that "listening to women who revered the Goddess had once caused the expulsion of all humankind from the original home of bliss in Eden" (pp. 198-199). For eternity, every woman, every daughter of Eve, would pay for the temptation in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:16 states, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you" (as cited in Stone, 1976, p. 5). How curious that for thousands of years this belief set the course for western civilization. Where Goddess myths are still considered such, the myth of Eve has been removed from the status of myth. Now considered a patriarchal truth, presented as the divine word of Father God, it is considered an account of the first

woman's sin and punishment, to be forever visited on generations of women by a forever vengeful God.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell (as cited in Stone, 1996) shares his belief that the story of Adam and Eve was contrived and counterfeit (p. 8). Women from origin and creation legends came from the lands of Canaan, Egypt and Babylon, the same place where the myth of Adam and Eve was developed. Ashtoreth, the pagan deity of the Old Testament, disguised as being of masculine gender by biblical scribes, was actually Astarte—the Great Goddess. Archaeological evidence proves that Her religion not only existed, but flourished in the Near and Middle East for thousands of years before the patriarchal prophet Abraham (Stone, 1996, p. 9).

Baring and Cashford (1993) note that in the Hebraic myth of Eve, the sacredness and spirituality have been stripped away from goddesses and transferred to gods. Thought of as second to Adam, and having been created out of Adam, leaves her inferior.

Disempowering the Goddess

Now having a sense of who Goddess was in the past, we are able to imagine what she means in today's world. Christ (1997) states: "We cannot understand the Goddess unless we question dualistic and hierarchical assumptions about God's relation to the changing world that arose in the wake of the slaying of the Goddesses of earth" (p. 89). The earliest images of the Goddess portray solidity and strength, in contrast to traditional images of the female.

Feminist historian Lerner is an expert on the history of patriarchy and the rise of feminine consciousness. As cited in Flinders (1998), the "Law of Lerner" states that

women's history is essential to women's emancipation. Clare of Assisi, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Genoa and thousands of other women claimed their right to define the Divine and with it the right to define their own humanity. An innate sense of worth saw these women challenge the internalized sense of inferiority that women felt and which was perpetuated by religion.

For centuries patriarchy has held a tight grip on women. Jungian scholar Marian Woodman (as cited in Lesser, 2000) defines patriarchy as "a culture whose driving force is power. Individuals within that culture are driven to seek control over others and themselves in an inhuman desire for perfection" (p. 2). Sir Laurens Van Der Post (as cited in Baring & Cashford, 1991) states this neglect of the feminine half of the human spirit has resulted in "the decay of the feeling and caring values of life and in the pursuit of the masculine rationalism" (p. ix). Until this time of devaluing, archeological research reveals that the Mother Goddess was revered as the supreme deity. She not only provided human life, She was the chief producer of food. This gave women economic and social power and prestige (Stone, 1976, p. 18-19).

It took 2,500 years to see women disempowered. Lerner (as cited in Flinders, 1998) believes that in pre-civilized society women felt themselves to be at least the equals of men. In hunter-gatherer cultures, the foraging by women, provided between 60 and 80%, by weight, of what was eaten (p. 104). Typically, foragers have zoomorphic gods such as animals and plants, or they worship natural phenomena like the sun, moon and stars. They kill for immediately needed food, an act followed by seeking forgiveness for the killing (Walker as cited in Light, 1992, p. 2). As the nomadic gatherer-hunter way of life gave way to horticulture and agriculture, the position of women weakened.

Physical strength was required to push a plow and clear land and a woman's worth was now measured in her capacity to bear children to work the land. Baring and Cashford's (1993) research on early images shows humanity's first image of life was the Mother. Throughout human history, from Paleolithic times, through Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages and up to the present time, there are images of women giving birth and breast feeding. These images all express a similar vision of life on earth, one where "the creative source of life is conceived in the image of a Mother and where humanity feels itself and the rest of creation to be the Mother's children (pp. 9-10).

Social stresses that began as pressure on the environment led to competition within a group or with neighboring groups for land.

> Things developed in certain ways, which then had certain consequences which neither men nor women intended. By the time consciousness of the process and of its consequences could develop, it was too late, at least for women, to halt the process. (Lerner as cited in Flinders, 1998, p. 107)

One of the ways in which male-dominated society maintained control was by deeming women's contributions as unimportant. Not including data about women's part in history was also common (Eisler, as cited in Light, 1992, p. 6). A woman's worth was primarily measured in her capacity to bear children to work the land. As physical strength became more important due to agriculture, the position of women began to weaken. The ability to push the plow and clear the land was paramount.

> Things developed in certain ways, which then had certain consequences which neither men nor women intended…By the time consciousness of the

process and of its consequences could develop, it was too late, at least for women, to halt the process. (Flinders, 1998, p. 106)

Through her research on feminine consciousness, Lerner (as cited in Flinders, 1998) found that the most important thing she discovered "was the significance to women of their relationship with the Divine and the profound impact that severing of that relationship had on the history of women" (p. 126). It was the systematic discrediting of the Goddess of Near Eastern cultures by the architects of patriarchy that showed the real struggle of women.

The insight that religion was the primary arena on which women fought for hundreds of years for feminine consciousness was not one I had previously had…I listened to the voices of forgotten women and accepted what they told me. (Lerner as cited in Flinders, 1998, p. 126)

Soul-Womb of the Mother

Baring and Cashford (1993) discuss the fact that contemporary discoveries by archetypal psychology, which show us that all the knowledge of the human race is stored within the psyche, as the rhizome, has been largely overlooked by the doctrinal Christian position. The "collective unconscious", as Jung calls it, is the belief that no experience of the race is ever lost, but is transmitted down the race. This unconscious mind is "inherited by every member of the human race along with all the other physical, mental and spiritual characteristics by virtue of which we call ourselves human". Depth psychology is now beginning to explore the roots of consciousness in the "womb-of-the-mother"—the human soul (Baring & Cashford, 1991, p. 41). It is here, as Monk Kidd (1996) states, that

we carry not only our own wounding experiences, but the inherited wounds of our mothers and grandmothers as well. In this aspect of the psyche preexisting traces of ancestral experience are encoded (p. 31).

I have defined these wounds as *soul wounds*. The very part of me that connects me to the Divine has been wounded by centuries of patriarchal influence, yet I choose to cultivate deep beauty and power. I see little value in living a life cut off from my female essence.

As Simington (2010) states, it is possible to find healing and transformation for the soul. Transformation offers an inner freedom, freedom from bondage of the human spirit.

> When we are in circumstances in which the needs of our spirit cannot be met, our souls cringe. Entrapment of our spirit happens any time we dare not color outside the lines of the particular picture that has been designed for us rather than by us. (pp. 4-5)

Patriarchy has designed a dismal picture for the spirit of women. Being psychologically shaped to internalize the idea of their own inferiority, women have participated in the process of their own subordination (Flinders, 1998, p. 118). It is time to recapture a tradition of female strength and dignity.

CHAPTER TWO

SEXUAL TRAUMA AND ITS IMPACT ON SURVIVORS

Introduction

The subjects of traumatic victimization range from battered women, prisoners of war and war veterans, to the victims of torture, sexual abuse and workplace violence. Recovery from these atrocities is a long and challenging process. The focus of this chapter is sexual trauma, the victims of which are mainly women and children. As Herman (1992) notes, it wasn't until the women's liberation movement of the 1970s that it was recognized it was not men in war, but women in civilian life who suffered the most common post-traumatic disorders. "Women were silenced by fear and shame, and the silence of women gave license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation" (p. 28). The subordination of women and children, deeply embedded in our patriarchal culture, was finally recognized as a violation of basic human rights. The initial method of the movement was *consciousness raising*, which made it possible for women to "overcome the barriers of denial, secrecy, and shame that prevented them from naming their injuries" (p. 29).

Sexual abuse against women and children is pervasive and endemic in our culture. In the 1980s, a random sampling of 900 women discovered that one woman in three had been sexually abused as a child (Herman, 1992, p. 30). Research by Koss (cited in Schauben & Frazier, 1995), indicates that approximately one woman in five will be raped in her lifetime (p. 49).

As Levine and Kline (2007) state: “Unless you have personally experienced the deep wound of sexual trauma, it may be difficult to imagine how complex, confusing and varied the long term effects can be” (p. 239).

Levine (2005) further emphasizes that life-threatening, perceived life-threatening and overwhelming experiences are all traumatic. Considered the “most avoided, ignored, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering,” trauma can be triggered by war, sexual abuse, physical violence, and catastrophic accidents and injuries” (p. 7). A series of minor mishaps can, over time, also have a damaging effect on a person. Levine goes on to state that while all traumatic events are stressful, all stressful events are not traumatic. Responses to threats are unique to each individual and depend on genetic make-up, an individual’s history of trauma, and his or her family dynamics.

The physical and psychological manifestations of trauma are continually being researched. Rothschild (2000) underlines the tremendous value in understanding the psychophysiology of trauma, which can occur even when the traumatic event causes no direct bodily harm, and in knowing what to do about its manifestations. Fear, depression, substance abuse, dissociative disorders and sexual dysfunction can be lifetime impairments as a result of the abuse (Herman, 1992; Rothschild, 2000; Browne & Finkelhor as cited in Ross & O’Carroll, 2004).

Herman (1992) describes psychological trauma as “an affliction of the powerless,” and there are none more powerless than children. Only after 1980, when the efforts of combat veterans legitimized the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), did it become clear that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic abuse and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war. “The

common denominator of psychological trauma is a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation" (pp. 32-33).

Unresolved trauma can have devastating effects: it can affect habits and outlook on life; lead to addictions and poor decision-making; adversely affect family life and interpersonal relationships; trigger real physical pain, symptoms and disease; and it can lead to a range of self-destructive behaviors (Levine, 2005, p. 3). Rosenbloom & Williams (2010) believe that trauma affects us by undermining five basic human needs: the need to feel safe, to trust, to feel some control over one's life, to feel of value and to value others, and to feel close to others (p. 2).

Sexual abuse occurs across ages, histories and socioeconomic backgrounds**.** Trauma can have a profound impact on young children's emotional, cognitive and physical functions, and on their ongoing development. Behavioral and emotional problems often persist into adulthood. According to Gold, Seidner and Calhoun, and Silver, Boon and Stones, (cited in Ross & O'Carroll, 2003), individual differences in response to the abuse are "related to three mediating variables including severity of the abuse, availability of social support, and attributional styles regarding the cause of negative life events" (p. 53).

Trauma is a psychophysical experience, even when the traumatic event causes no direct bodily harm. It is a well-documented fact, supported by the psychiatric community, that traumatic events take a toll on both body and mind (Rothschild, 2000; Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006). As Herman (1992) states, the ordinary response to danger is a "complex, integrated system of reactions, encompassing both mind and body" (p. 34).

Physiological Results of Trauma

A recognition of danger begins with the sympathetic nervous system, which reacts with a rush of adrenaline and a state of alert. Changes in arousal, attention, perception and emotion are described as normal, adaptive reactions and result in fight or flight. When resistance or escape is not possible, the human system reacts by becoming overwhelmed or disorganized, with the traumatic symptoms "taking on a life of their own" (Herman, 1992, p. 34). The inability to integrate traumatic memory is termed *dissociation*, where traumatized people feel and act as though their nervous systems have been disconnected from the present (p. 35).

The interaction between mind and body keeps past trauma "alive", resulting in intrusive body sensations, images, smells, physical pain and constriction, numbing, and the inability to modulate arousal. These sensorimotor responses are interpreted as data about identity and self-hood, influencing a survivor's response to their environment and how they make meaning of all subsequent experience (Ogden et al., 2006).

A therapist cannot enter into a trauma therapy relationship without first understanding the physiology of trauma. The many symptoms fall into three main categories: hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction.

Hyperarousal

Traumatic events appear to recondition the human nervous system, creating psychophysiological symptoms that are both extensive and enduring. In hyperarousal, the first symptom of PTSD, a person will startle easily, react irritably to small provocation,

and sleep poorly. In an attempt at self-preservation, the human system goes into permanent alert, anticipating danger could return at any moment.

Intrusion

The traumatic memory becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory. These memories can break spontaneously into consciousness as flashbacks during waking hours and as nightmares during sleep. Because a survivor never knows when these reactions will be triggered, even normally safe environments may feel dangerous. During flashbacks and nightmares, memories often return with the same vividness and emotional force as during the original event.

Constriction

During this stage, the system of self-defense shuts down entirely. Known as a numbing stage, survivors are in a state of detached calm. This state of surrender has survivors feeling frozen or paralyzed and as though they are observing from outside their bodies. While this constrictive stage keeps painful, traumatic memories split off from ordinary awareness, survivors "narrow and deplete the quality of life and ultimately perpetuate the effects of the traumatic event" (Herman, 1992, pp. 33-47).

The outermost and more rational part of the brain is known as the cortex. The cortex is where most memory—traumatic and otherwise—is stored. It is the seat of our thinking capacity and our ability to judge, deliberate, contrast and compare. The rational cortex is in constant communication with the limbic system. The limbic system, known as the survival center of the brain, is particularly relevant to trauma. This part of the middle brain consists of two structures: the amygdala and the hippocampus.

The amygdala takes information from internal and external environments through the sensory system, and tells the body how to recognize and respond to danger. The hippocampus, which is vital for learning and memory, is also very sensitive to the impact of stress. It helps a person understand conscious thought and process factual information, including that about time and space, and marks events with a beginning, middle and end.

The body's early warning system, the amygdala, goes into high gear when there is a threat, since its goal is to protect the body. Adrenaline, sent to the hypothalamus (part of the limbic system) turns on two reactions: (1) mobilization of a fight or flight reaction by the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), and (2) the release of cortisol, which halts the alarm reaction by informing the amygdala that the threat of danger is over. The body returns to a state of homeostasis after the release of cortisol. If there is a deficiency of cortisol production, the amygdala does not receive the message that the threat of danger is over, body and mind cannot return to normal, and they continue to behave as if the trauma is ongoing. This condition is labeled Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

DSM Criterion for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder occurs when a person has been exposed to a trauma that results in intrusive recollection, avoidance of stimuli/numbing, hyper-arousal; has a duration of more than one month; and includes significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Initiating Treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Safe, successful trauma therapy must maintain stress hormone levels low enough to keep the hippocampus functioning. This is why it is crucial for both client and therapist to know how to "apply the brakes" in order to keep the hippocampus in commission and

return it to action as promptly as possible when the system goes into overload. Knowing when to apply the brakes is as important as knowing how to do so. Physical signs of autonomic system arousal, transmitted by the client's body, tone of voice and physical movements, signal the need to apply the brakes. When a client is pale, is breathing in fast, panting breaths, has dilated pupils, and shivers or feels cold, her sympathetic nervous system is aroused. Stress hormones are pouring into the body, threatening the hippocampus with shut down. These symptoms mean it is time to calm the client down. They can occur when a client is having flashbacks, or the traumatic material is addressed before the client is ready to do so (Rothschild, 2000; Levine, 2005; Simington, 2013).

When, on the other hand, clients sigh, breathe more slowly, sob deeply, or flush, their parasympathetic nervous system, which is activated in states of rest and relaxation, has been activated and their stress hormone levels are reducing. Recognition of these bodily signals is invaluable to the therapist since, with trauma clients, the therapist needs to be confident that the flow of their anxieties, emotions, memories and body sensations can be contained at will. Likewise, clients who learn to recognize them often gain a greater sense of body awareness and self-control.

> It is the therapist's responsibility to adjust the pace and process of therapy to help clients develop resources needed to self-regulate. Gradually, through the interactive regulation of the therapist combined with psycho-education, recognition of their triggers, and mindful observation of their own arousal and defensive subsystems, clients learn to become aware of when their arousal exceeds the window of tolerance and to implement resources that help them stabilize at those times. (Ogden et al., 2006, p. 210)

Psychological Effects of Trauma

Although any trauma can cause havoc in the developing core self of a child, sexual trauma is second only to neglect in its damaging long-term effects. The average age of first-time violation is 5 to 6 years, but the average child *never tells* because of fear of blame and punishment (Levine & Kline, 2007). Studies suggest that as many as 54% of females and 18% of males have been sexually abused before the age of 18 (Russell as cited in Ross & O'Carroll, 2004, p. 52). Significant scientific research shows the detrimental effects of childhood sexual abuse and trauma (Herman, 1992; Rothschild, 2000). It is inevitable that as an abused child grows, matures, and moves into adulthood, a variety of psychological, relational and/or physical problems will develop (Levine, 2005).

The psychological effect of repeated trauma in childhood is an immature system of psychological defenses. Creative and destructive capacities of coping in an unsafe environment can result in altered states of consciousness. Trapped in this altered state, children must find a way to "preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness" (Herman,1992, p. 96).

Shame and Guilt

Sexual abuse evokes the moral emotions of guilt and shame in its victims, and as Tangney and Dearing (2002) describe, shame is "an extremely ugly and painful feeling that has a negative impact on interpersonal behavior" (p. 3). This emotion is toxic to those who carry it, affecting all aspects of their lives. The alleviation of guilt and shame through the relocation of responsibility for the abuse to the offender, and the expression

of anger and rage, are all identified as key issues that are addressed in therapy (Cahill, Llewelyn and Pearson, as cited in Ross & O'Carroll, 2004, p. 54).

Helping clients name their shame is cathartic for them. Pioneer shame researcher Bradshaw (1988) supports this client catharsis when he states, "Shame is a normal human emotion and is the psychological foundation of humility" (p. 3). Healthy shame supports the basic need for structure, leading to the development of a boundary system within which people can operate safely. However, sexual abuse violates crucial boundaries and generates intense and crippling shame. It is known to be the most shaming of all abuse (p. 48).

As Tangey and Dearing (2002) state, "The most important and most intimate relationship we have is with our self" (p. 52). They describe the damage to self from shame as follows:

> When people feel shame over a particular failure or transgression, they are berating themselves not just for the specific event; rather, they are damning *themselves*-the core of their being- as flawed, useless, despicable. In this way, shame experiences pose a tremendous threat to the self. (p. 92)

It is important to give clients a conceptual framework for the way emotions work and how they influence our experience of ourselves and our interaction with others. This framework helps clients normalize their emotions and not feel "defective".

The Central Tasks of Recovery

According to Herman (1992), recovery from traumatic experience unfolds in three stages, with the central tasks being the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life (p. 155).

Safety

The effects of traumatic experience have been widely researched, and the adverse effects are many. Creating basic safety and self-care, both physically and mentally, are the first steps in trauma therapy and can create a sense of competence, self-esteem and freedom, which are foreign concepts to sexual abuse survivors. Survivors are plagued with physical and emotional sensations that are often very confusing to them. Some survivors remember every detail of the trauma, others remember very little. Two of the most salient features of trauma are flashbacks and dissociation and these lie at the heart of traumatic stress disorders.

Dissociation is the mechanism by which intense sensory and emotional experiences are disconnected from the social domain of language and memory. This disconnection leads to the silencing of victims (Van der Kolk & Fisler, as cited in Herman, 1992; Ogden et al., 2006). Helping clients understand and normalize these feelings helps in creating safety.

Survivors of trauma feel unsafe everywhere, especially in their own bodies. It is important to re-establish integrity of bodily functions—eating, sleeping, basic health needs. Once this is achieved, clients can gradually move outward to establish control in the environment (Simington, 2008, p. 115). Self-regulation is the goal in the early stages

with a client. It is the therapist's responsibility to adjust the pace and process of therapy to help clients develop resources needed to self-regulate. Gradually, through the interactive regulation of the therapist, combined with "psycho-education, recognition of their triggers, and mindful observation of their own arousal and defensive subsystems, clients learn to become aware of when their arousal exceeds the window of tolerance and to implement resources that help them stabilize at those times" (Ogden et al., 2006, p. 207).

Ogden et al. (2006) also emphasize that trauma can be easily triggered by interventions that access the body too quickly. Here attention to "pacing, boundary maintenance, and safe, conscious, mindful and gradual reconnection with the body" is necessary. Many clients feel unsafe in their bodies. The prospect of experiencing bodily sensation can be "scary, foreign, repulsive, uninteresting, tedious, or simply not possible" (p. 210). Even the awareness of ordinary sensations can trigger traumatic activation. Ogden et al. give the example of heart rate raised in response to physical exercise, describing how helplessness and panic can occur because the racing heart is an indication of the need to fight or flee from threat (pp. 206-210).

Herman (1992) stresses that although therapist and client frequently try to bypass the tasks of the first stage, they are a necessary requirement. Noting that the single most common therapeutic error is avoidance of traumatic materials, Herman states the second most common error is premature or precipitate engagement in exploratory work. Prior to moving on to the second stage, sufficient attention must be paid to the tasks of establishing safety and securing a therapeutic alliance (p. 172).

Remembrance and mourning

In the second phase, remembrance and mourning, the basic principle of empowering continues to apply. The therapist plays the role of witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor "can speak of the unspeakable" (Herman, 1992, p. 175). Here the work of reconstructing the story transforms the traumatic memory so it can be integrated into the survivor's life. The accounts can be repetitive and emotionless. The process of restructuring the story begins with a review of life before the trauma (this may be impossible if trauma was early in life). It then moves to a restructuring of the event(s) as a recitation of facts. Here there is an exploration of the event itself, the client's response to the event, and the response of others. Often victims are not believed, which can be as traumatizing as the event itself.

Reconnection

During this phase, the survivor faces the task of creating a future. Here the traumatized person acknowledges that she has been a victim and understands the effects of victimization. This is a time of becoming empowered. Connecting with self and others becomes a possibility because of a regained capacity to trust. Though resolution is never complete, survivors can move on to the tasks of ordinary life. The focus is no longer totally on the past, and pleasure can be found in the present and the possibilities of the future (Herman, 1992).

Psychologist Mary Harvey presents seven criteria for the resolution of trauma:

1. Physiological symptoms have been brought within manageable limits.
2. The person is able to bear the feelings associated with traumatic memories.

3. The person has authority over her memories, being able to remember the trauma and put the memory aside.
4. The memory of the traumatic event is a coherent narrative, linked with feeling.
5. The person's damaged self-esteem has been restored.
6. The person's important relationships have been restored.
7. The person has re-constructed a coherent system of meaning and belief that encompasses the story of the trauma. (Cited in Herman, 1992, p. 213)

The course of recovery does not follow a simple progression. Clients often double back or take detours, reviewing issues that have already been addressed. Though resolution may never be complete, survivors begin to turn their attention from the tasks of recovery to the tasks of ordinary life. Survivors begin to have a restored capacity to take pleasure in life and engage fully in relationships (Herman, 1992).

Spirituality

As well as being a psychophysical experience, trauma has spiritual ramifications (Simington, 2003). We are spiritual beings, and spiritual connectedness can be a source of strength and resilience. Looking through a spiritual lens allows a person to see hope and trust as part of the human condition.

I believe acquiring the "deep knowing", the sense of connectedness to a Greater Power inherent in a spiritual life, can move clients to a place of comfort and peace. Knowing Spirit in life does not mean a person will be without suffering and pain. Rather, by acquiring the subtle experience of being part of a larger order, clients can find meaning in the painful questions of their lives. Discovering a personal sense of meaning

can enable individuals to find and draw on unsuspected strength. In times of crisis, meaning *is* strength.

Often it is the exceptionally difficult life experiences that give people the opportunity to grow spiritually beyond themselves, allowing despair to deepen and change them. On their journey towards knowing the Sacred in their lives, people can learn to accept and perhaps even embrace brokenness as an integral part of life. Through suffering, people often lose their connection to what is sacred, and as a result lose themselves. Levine (2005) emphasizes the spiritual significance of healing trauma:

> The process of healing trauma can drop us into virtual birth canals of consciousness. From these vantage points, we can position ourselves to be propelled fully into the stream of life. Healing from trauma can be the final instinctive push, that inner shaking and trembling, "the kick" that can lead us on a journey home. (p. 80)

As a spiritually oriented therapist, clearly my spirituality is important to me. Pargament (2007) aptly shares how spirituality helps people come to terms with human limitations. Through a spiritual lens the world is viewed differently. Problems that appear insurmountable take on a different character. Words such as forbearance, faith, suffering, compassion, transformation, transcendence, sacredness, hope, surrender, love and forgiveness are part of a spiritual language. Looking through a spiritual lens people can find grounding and direction that helps them to move through the challenges of human existence.

When I look at my clients' lives through a spiritual lens, I am reminded that to be human is to know suffering. I believe pain can be enriching, giving us opportunity to

know the sustaining presence of God. Pain is unavoidable in life, and contributes to who we are as human beings. I believe that acquiring a "deep knowing", the sense of connectedness to God inherent in a spiritual life, can move clients to a place of comfort and peace. Knowing Spirit in life does not mean a person will be without suffering and pain; rather, by acquiring the subtle experience of being part of a larger order, clients can give meaning to the painful questions of their lives.

I use my spiritual beliefs as a map to guide me as I question the meaning of life experiences. There may be times when reflection creates more questions than answers, but I believe any attempt at meaning-making is still empowering.

Frankl (1985), shares his beliefs about human suffering:

> If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete. The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity-even under the most difficult circumstances- to add a deeper meaning to his life. (p. 88)

Treatment

Working with clients who have experienced the horror of sexual abuse is challenging and distressing work. Long-term psychotherapy is often necessary to heal the deep wounds. Because of this, the psychological needs of victims are likely to change during the various stages of their development, possibly resulting in the need for different interventions intermittently or throughout their childhood, and perhaps into adulthood as

well. Because trauma affects every aspect of human functioning, biological, psychological and social, treatment must be comprehensive. “The first task is to conduct a thorough and informed diagnostic evaluation, being fully aware of the many disguises in which a traumatic disorder may appear” (Herman, 1992, p. 157).

VanKatwyk (2003) tells us that counseling theories identify the therapeutic relationship as that which heals. The therapist has the role of “preparing a place” for clients to open their life stories (p. 24). It is important for me to bring *myself* to the therapy room. Critically important is the creation of a trusting and collaborative relationship. Building on the premise that the therapeutic relationship is a therapist’s primary tool, Paterson et al. (2009), use the term *joining* to describe the sense of connectedness that is desirable in the therapeutic relationship. This usually arises when a client feels understood, respected and cared for (p. 25).

When one thinks of the four aspects of a human life—physical, spiritual, emotional and mental—all are impacted by sexual abuse. Because of this, treatment must be comprehensive and appropriate at each stage of recovery.

As noted previously, Herman (1992) states that the most common therapeutic error is avoidance of the traumatic material. The second most common is being too-hasty with engagement in exploratory work, without first creating safety and ensuring a secure therapeutic alliance is in place. This alliance should be one that preserves both autonomy and connection with a goal of empowerment (p. 172).

Trauma can be easily triggered by interventions that access the body too quickly. Here attention to pacing, boundary maintenance, and safe, conscious, mindful and gradual reconnection with the body is necessary. Many clients feel unsafe in their bodies.

The prospect of experiencing bodily sensations can be scary, foreign, repulsive, uninteresting, tedious, or simply not possible. Even the awareness of ordinary sensations, like physical exercise, which raises heart rate, can trigger traumatic activation. The stage of creating safety and self-care is an important stepping-stone. Competence, self-esteem and freedom, which have been foreign concepts to survivors, are established by creating basic safety. (Ogden et al., 2006).

VanderHart and Steele (cited in Rothschild, 2000), remind us that directly addressing traumatic memories is not always helpful and can sometimes be damaging to clients. Eliciting memories into consciousness faster than a client can integrate them can overwhelm or re-traumatize. They propose that those clients who are not able to tolerate memory-oriented trauma treatment may still benefit from therapy geared towards relieving symptoms, increasing coping skills, and improving daily functioning (p. 78).

The client-therapist relationship is paramount in creating safety. Siegel (2009) describes his theory of self- psychology as bringing an "empathetic ambiance" to the consulting room (p. 287). I believe that is a characteristic that is essential in an effective therapist, and one that is supported by a clear knowledge of theories and techniques. With knowledge, kindness and care, the therapist can help clients move into healing. I believe, as a spiritually-informed art therapist, I have, as O'Donohue (2004) states, "a sacred responsibility to encourage and illuminate all that is inherently good and special in each of us" (p. 77).

> When the human voice focuses on empathetic tenderness, it can find its way across any distance to the desolate heart of another's pain. The healing voice

becomes the inner presence of the friend…there is no beauty that reaches deeper than the beauty of the healing voice. (p. 77)

Vicarious Trauma and Its Impact on Therapists

My learning as a graduate student in psychotherapy has served to add knowledge to my interest in helping others with their personal growth and healing. This knowledge has fostered an even deeper concern for the ethical imperative of self-care for those who serve the needs of others in their work. Hearing traumatic material while in a caring role can have consequences for health workers (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Rothschild, 2000; Lerias & Byrne, 2003). The term vicarious trauma (VT) as relating to therapists, was coined by McCann and Pearlman (1990) to describe how psycho-therapeutic work with trauma victims can cause distress to therapists.

A counseling career is recognized as emotionally demanding (Bober, Regehr & Zhou, 2006). Professional counselors face numerous personal and professional challenges as a function of their work. Therapists are called upon daily to be sensitive, empathetic, understanding, and giving on both intellectual and emotional levels. Emotional exhaustion, disconnection and ineffectiveness caused by complex and emotionally demanding work can result in burnout (Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Bride & Robinson, 2004; Kadambi & Ennis, 2004). These consequences are similar to those experienced by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) sufferers themselves (Blair & Ramones, 1996).

McCann and Pearlman (1990) describe vicarious traumatization (VT) as the changes that occur within the therapist as a result of empathetic engagement with clients' trauma experiences. Counselors who work with traumatized individuals are believed to be at risk of VT because of exposure to their clients' traumatic material (Schauben &

Frazier, 1995; Trippany, Kress, & Wilcoxon, 2004; Bober, Regehr & Zhou, 2006). The term is sometimes used interchangeably with other terminology, including secondary traumatization, compassion fatigue, and burnout (Sabin-Farrell & Turpin, 2003). The condition is usually less severe than that experienced by direct victims. It can, however, affect the livelihoods and careers of those with considerable training and experience working with disaster and trauma survivors (Baldwin, 2012). "VT refers to the cumulative effect of working with traumatized clients: interference with the therapist's feelings, cognitive schemas, memories, self-esteem and/or sense of safety" (Hernandez, Engstrom & Gangsei, 2010).

It has been suggested that there are three conditions that facilitate the experience of vicarious trauma. These are as follows:

1. Empathetic engagement and exposure of the therapist to graphic and traumatic material.
2. Empathetic engagement and exposure of the therapist to the reality of human cruelty.
3. The therapist's participation in traumatic re-enactments wherein client transference responses re-enact elements of the initial trauma within the therapy process (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

As Rothschild (2002) states, our brains are hardwired for empathy, and it is our gift for empathy that draws us to our work (p. 5).

> Empathy is the connective tissue of good therapy. It's what enables us to establish bonds of trust with clients, and to meet them with our hearts as well as our minds.

> Empathy enhances our insights, sharpens our hunches, and at times seems to allow us to "read" a client's mind. (Rothschild, 2004, p. 1)

Brain science has shown that a particular cluster of neurons is specifically designed and primed to mirror another's bodily emotions and responses. Rather than words from clients, the therapist's sympathetic synapses fire on seeing a client looking unhappy, tense, relieved, or enraged. Although this research suggests that human beings are more capable of connection than imagined, it also means that therapists may be exquisitely vulnerable to "catching" their clients' depression, rage and anxiety (Rothschild, 2004).

Researchers examine the impact that working with sexual violence survivors has on counselors. Due to the prevalence and trauma of sexual violence, counselors often work with women and children who have been victimized. Disturbances in basic schemas about the world can result from long-term exposure to the traumatic experiences of clients such as the belief that the world is safe and that people generally can be trusted (Schauben & Frazier, 1995). The impacts upon the therapist are experienced both at a conscious and subconscious level. It is theoretically inevitable that transformation over time will occur with therapists chronically exposed (vicariously) to a client's trauma and resulting struggle (Devilly, Wright & Varker, 2009).

Vicarious trauma, empathetic stress, and compassion fatigue remind us that there is potential for therapists to be psychologically harmed by trauma work. Vicarious resilience comes up as a key concept throughout vicarious trauma literature, counteracting the fatiguing processes that trauma therapists normally experience, strengthening therapists' motivation, helping them find new meaning and discovering

ways to take care of themselves. Thus not all the effects are negative. “The concept of vicarious resilience describes and explains how trauma therapists may strengthen their own well-being by appreciating and incorporating what they learn from their clients healing processes” (Hernandez et al., 2010, pp. 67-68).

The authors go on to state that their research found therapists could identify positive effects within themselves arising from their interactions with trauma survivors. These positive effects included:

1. reflecting on the capacity of human beings to heal
2. reaffirming the value of therapy
3. regaining hope
4. reassessing the dimensions of one’s own problems
5. understanding and valuing spiritual dimensions of healing
6. discovering the power of community healing
7. making the professional and lay public aware of the impact and multiple dimensions of violence by writing and participating in public speaking forums (pp. 72-73).

Rothschild (2004) emphasizes the greatest challenge trauma therapists face in their connection to clients in the following:

> What we’ve always imagined to be a resonance born of voice, smile, tears or touch is encoded in us, it turns out, far more deeply and inexorably than we ever knew. It may be that our mirror neurons, those tiny and escapable vessels of empathy, encapsulate one of the most exciting challenges of psychotherapy – that

> of attuning two brains, and two hearts, so that they warmly vibrate together without melting into one. (p. 7)

Fridley (2011) sums up the dangers of this empathy nicely when he states that the purpose of therapy is to effect change in the mental and behavioral functioning of the client, and that "for better or worse, both participants will be changed by this encounter" (p. 3).

As Saakvitne (2002) suggests, we need to regularly ask ourselves, "How am I doing?" She suggests employing the strategies of protection, self-care and transformation as supports for self-protection and healing. Protection is achieved through a balance of work, rest and play, and nurturing ongoing connections with others. To balance the witnessing of stories of loss and pain, room must be made for self-nurturing. Opportunities must be created for joy and sensory pleasure through fantasy, imagination, art, music and sheer foolishness. Saakvitne considers the work of transformation most important. This work focuses on meaning, perspective and community. The existential questioning requires challenging often over-generalized, negative assumptions about the world. Finding community with shared visions, beliefs, hopes, dreams and goals can transform the isolation that comes with grief and despair (pp. 443-448).

As described throughout this chapter, trauma and vicarious trauma are debilitating conditions that affect victims physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Researchers continue to work at finding ways to help those suffering with PTSD or vicarious trauma. I believe with knowledge and therapy victims can heal from the damaging effects of trauma and move on to fulfilling lives.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research is a broad concept that encompasses an immense array of philosophies, intentions and activities. Ultimately, research is focused on an investigation of a particular subject matter for the purpose of discovery. I consider it crucial to choose a research method capable of uncovering the focus of my inquiry, and one that is congruent with my sense of self. Author, instructor and researcher McNiff (1998) asks his students to discover "the thesis you are living and cannot see" (p. 146). Believing in the value of direct connection to personal history, McNiff influenced my choice of methodology when addressing the value of life experience.

As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2006), "Research seeks to explain, describe, explore, and/or critique the phenomenon chosen to study" (p.24). They describe qualitative research as "pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (p. 2). They also describe it as "often confusing, messy, intensely frustrating, and fundamentally nonlinear" (p. 23). Flick (2009) emphasizes that the goal in research is to discover and develop the new and to develop empirically grounded theories, rather than testing what is already known (p. 150).

In examining my intention, it became clear that the focus of my inquiry necessitated a qualitative rather than quantitative paradigm. The characteristics of qualitative research and researchers, as described by Marshall and Rossman (2006) are:

Research: - Takes place in the natural world

- Uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic

- Focuses on context

- Is emergent rather than tightly prefigured

- Is fundamentally interpretive

Researcher: - Views social phenomena holistically

- Systematically reflects on who she is in the inquiry

- Is sensitive to her personal biography and how it shapes the study

- Uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative (p. 3).

Gall, Borg, and Gall identified three major qualitative research genres:

a. *individual lived experience* exemplified by phenomenological approaches, some feminist inquiry, and life history and testimonials

b. *society and culture* as seen in ethnography and action research

c. *language and communication*—whether spoken or expressed in text—like that in sociolinguistic approaches, including discourse analysis. (As cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 3)

All methods of qualitative research attempt to interpret or make sense of the meaning people attach to their experiences. Creativity, sensitivity and flexibility are used to make sense of life as it unfolds, with movement, image, text, sound, etc., providing empirical sources of data. Exploring the depth and breadth of human experience can seem messy and ambiguous, yet can produce valuable knowledge about our social world (Mayan, 2009).

As a therapist, I am philosophically and personally drawn to theories and concepts that place relational processes at their core. To this end, I have chosen organic inquiry, a transpersonal research approach, along with arts-based research, as my methodology. Both methods have researchers working in partnership with liminal and spiritual influences, with a goal of transformation.

Organic Inquiry

Organic inquiry is a new and evolving holistic approach to qualitative research that combines feminist and heuristic methodologies, incorporates concepts from Jungian and transpersonal psychological theories, maintains a perspective of reverence for the research process, and holds the potential of transformative impact on researcher, co-researcher(s), and reader. This method of research gives opportunity to explore deeply personal topics that are spiritual and intimate in nature; and stands at the intersection of feminine spirituality and transpersonal psychology (Clements, Ettling, Jenett, & Shields, 1998; Clements, 2004). Organic inquiry is a form of human inquiry that engages with experience, aiming to integrate reflection and action. Although still considered a work in progress, organic inquiry continues to grow because of the desire of students to do research that is in partnership with the transpersonal and because of its strong emphasis on transformation as well as information (Clements, 2004).

Data collection and analysis in organic inquiry is governed by a three-step process of preparation, inspiration and integration. The underlying potential is transformative change, a restructuring of both mind and heart resulting in an increased connection to self, Spirit, and service. This process moves an individual from the realm of ego-control

to a liminal encounter, gathering experience and returning to integrate it into the ongoing inquiry. The terms *liminal* and *liminal realm* are used to describe a state beyond ego that may be visited by the individual psyche to gather useful experience (Clements, 2004). The terms *Spirit* and *spiritual* describe the "influences and sources beyond ego that have a seemingly beneficial impact, often accompanied by feelings of awe and a sense of direct intent on the part of the spiritual source" (p.27).

Preparation

Prior to intentionally departing from ego to the liminal realm, there are tasks to be accomplished. While in the world of ego, the researcher must firstly recognize a question or object of concern. The second task is to contain the controlling ego so that it is willing to "adopt a state of curious ignorance". In the third task, the ego adopts an attitude of respect for the values of reverence, cooperation and mutuality. The fourth and final step of preparation is the actual opening of the psyche to liminal experience. Carl Jung (cited in Clements, 2004) defined the four functions of thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation, which can be used to describe ways of moving into and out of liminal experience.

Inspiration

This step of the process is described by Jung (1969) as "a place that is liminal to the controlling ego, but not to the aware psyche", and Turner (as cited in Clements, 2004) suggests that while in this place, "an individual is in a paradoxical realm of pure possibility" (p. 36). Uncontrollable weeping, hairs rising on body, physical trembling, significant certainty have been reported as "involuntary confirming signals" by people interviewed by Clements (p. 37).

Integration

In this third and final step the role of ego shifts from protector, supporter and witness of the process, to now respectfully engaging with the material, examining its meaning, and being simultaneously changed by it. According to Clements (2004), the integration of transformative change shows up in three ways.

1. Self: One can make best use of one's abilities, experiences and resources through increased self-awareness.
2. Spirit: One begins to experience a consciousness that moves back and forth between the ego self and the "All-Self", not dissociated from either. It becomes easier to connect to the changes of heart and mind available from the liminal and spiritual realm.
3. Service: One may come to feel a greater desire to be of service in the world. Worldview becomes socially meaningful and one connects with similarly inclined people. (pp. 38-39)

   Clements (2004) shares her belief:

   To the transpersonal scientist, what is real includes not only that which is physical and that which exists as inner experience, but also, that which may originate in non-egoic states of consciousness (p. 32).

Egoic control has to be relinquished. This reiterates Braud's comments about varying realities. Braud (as cited in Clements, 2004) states that to the physical scientist, the *real* is what is external and measurable, yet to human beings, inner events, which are unobservable from the outside, can be as real or more real than outer events (p.32).

Clements points out that this research is not for everyone. There are expectations about the topic, researcher, participant, and reader and the prerequisites are as follows:

Topic

The topic should be appropriate for an organic approach. Inquiries of a psycho-spiritual nature are especially fitting for this approach to research. This is due to the ways of being and knowing that are articulated.

Researcher

It is important that those contemplating this research orientation spend a substantial and prolonged period working on their own psycho-spiritual development. Researchers must be able to determine the differences in the data between subjective and objective, spiritual and material, self and other. Egos must be strong in order to step beyond them and equally strong intellects to assess the validity of the organic process as it progresses.

Participants

When there are participants it is necessary that they have had meaningful experience with the topic. They should have an open-minded understanding of it, and have the willingness and ability to articulate their experience.

Reader

The ideal reader is willing and able to engage with the material both intellectually and personally, allowing for transformative change in the area of self, Spirit, and service. They are invited to engage with the study using both heart and mind, allowing it to impact their own experience of the topic (Clements, 2004, p. 28). Braud (2004) adds to

these expectations the greater necessity for maturity, critical thinking, mindfulness and discernment in this approach to research (p. 22).

An essential part of the research focuses on the researcher's story. Clements (2004) uses the metaphor of planting a seed to describe the initial concept for an organic study. The core of the investigation comes from the researcher's subjective experience of the topic. This sharing allows the reader to re-experience her/his own story relevant to the topic.

> This approach is best suited for topics that have a transpersonal or spiritual dimension, for exploring experiences identical or similar to those that you yourself have had, and for studying topics that have passionate meaning for you. (Braud, 2004, p. 22)

Braud adds that researchers using this method prefer inclusive, integrated both/and approaches to exclusive, compartmentalized, either/or approaches to human endeavors. Braud also points out that organic inquiry is distinctive in its strong emphasis on the organic nature of its process, its recognition of transpersonal and spiritual resources and its emphasis on releasing egoic control during certain research phases (pp. 20-22). Sela-Smith (2002) observed the following of her own heuristic process:

> The goal is to come to a deeper understanding of whatever is calling out from the inside of the self to be understood. In the process, the researcher is coming to understand something within that is also a human problem or experience. The researcher uses the data within to lift into awareness the experiences that are felt and trigger the *being* of the researcher. In this lifting, an awakening, a greater self-understanding, and personal growth occur and combine to produce

self-transformation (p. 64).

The topic of transformative change in the human experience intrigues me. Researcher Mezirow (as cited in Clements, 2004) has spent decades researching how "disorienting dilemmas" can result in a restructured worldview (p. 45). The tool of measurement in organic research is the primary researcher's story and ongoing experience. The goal is individual transformation of researcher and reader.

It is important to me to choose a research method that is congruent with my sense of self, which I found in organic inquiry and arts-based research. My research question is rooted in my own journey of questioning, and my story is the starting point of the inquiry. This methodology begins with the researcher's story and passions and culminates in a conscious or unconscious transformation of researcher and reader (Clements, 2004; Williams et al., 2008). With a goal of transforming, using a deeply subjective, relational voice can make the researcher feel emotionally vulnerable. Anthropologist Ruth Behar (as cited in Williams et al., 2008) writes about the complexity and difficulty of using personal material.

> It is far from easy to think up interesting ways to locate one's self in one's own text. Writing vulnerably takes as much skill, nuance, and willingness to follow through on all the ramifications of a complicated idea as does writing invulnerably and distantly. I would say it takes yet greater skill. The worst that can happen in an invulnerable text is that it will be boring. But when an author has made herself or himself vulnerable, the stakes are much higher: a boring self-revelation, one that fails to move the reader, is more than embarrassing; it is humiliating. (p. 101)

Since organic inquiry is rooted in respect for the feminine, and is based on feminist principles, this methodology is suited for my exploration of the effect of sexual abuse therapy on the Sacred Feminine aspect of female therapists.

Art-based Research

Every artist dips his brush in his own soul,

and paints his own nature into his pictures.

(Harriet Ward Beecher, as cited in Kerr &

Hoshino, 2008, p. vii)

A major distinction between traditional science and experiential research is the calculated and planned approach of the former, whereas art-based research employs a process-oriented mode of discovery. "The creative process typically emerges in unexpected ways from the attention we give to objects of inquiry" (McNiff, 1998, p. 145). Giorgi (as cited in McNiff, 1998) points out that "the methods of natural science were invented primarily to deal with the phenomena of nature and not experienced phenomena" (p. 146).

Art-based research, which was addressed with increasing frequency during the 1980s, is defined by McNiff (2011) as "involving the researcher in some form of direct art-making as a primary mode of systematic inquiry" (p. 385). McNiff (1998a) considers art-based research an opportunity to "apply the passion and imagination of our clinical work to the pursuit of research" (p. 18). Through an unpredictable process of exploration, a path of inquiry is used to further understand the creative experience in therapy.

Although art-based research combines personal inquiry with clinical practice involving others, the defining feature involves a significant commitment to personal inquiry. McNiff (2011) found through his work with graduate students that the practice of art and therapy and the combination of the two into creative arts therapy demanded new ways of approaching research. Where the conventional psychological thesis method required reflection on what other people did with artistic media, art-based research has the artist researching psychological aspects of experience.

The therapeutic benefits of creative expression can be viewed as subjective. According to Kaplan (2000), the debate between the scientific and spiritual views of creative expression continues due to a general lack of science-minded researchers in the arts. Alternately, researchers such as McNiff (1998) theorize that creative expression research, due to its very nature, demands a non-traditional approach. Various researchers have differing ideas as to how and why creative expression is therapeutic, including scientific, metaphorical, and spiritual explanations. In art-based research the task of making the artwork becomes the structure for a sustained therapeutic experience. Creative arts therapy is engaged in the themes of what can and cannot be known and expressed, where other disciplines base themselves on totally predictable outcomes. The tendency to identify research exclusively with science has created a limiting imbalance.

> These differences from science ultimately reinforce the value of artistic inquiry, since the former cannot cover the entire spectrum of human understanding. Art-based research in this respect models an epistemological and practical collaboration between art and science. (McNiff, 2011, p. 387)

The following sections will review some of the beliefs as to *how* and *why* creative expression is therapeutic.

Scientific explanation

Physiology literature presents the primary area of scientific support for the benefits of creative expression. For example, Samuels and Rockwood (1998) support this premise by stating:

> Images held in the right brain activate the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus activates the autonomic nervous system and results in arousal or relaxation that impacts the whole body. The autonomic nervous system is a healing system that balances and maintains the blood flow, heartbeat, breathing rate, and hormones. It is also the system that we need to heal. This system was thought to work by itself, but it is now known to be profoundly influenced by thoughts in the mind… Stimulation of the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system results in relaxation and healing. (pp. 83-84)

The parasympathetic neural response, along with the hormones and neurotransmitters, work to trigger relaxation and healing through the above described physiological response to creative expression.

Metaphorical explanation

Allen (1995) describes how working with the metaphor and archetype of an image allows an individual to know their inner being with depth. She refers to this "way of knowing" as a personal spirituality. Moon (2007) informs us that metaphors hold information that hide meaning in symbolic form and whether used consciously or

unconsciously, reflect personal experience. Tobin (2007) explains their value in a therapeutic setting:

1. Metaphors reflect the client's experience.
2. Metaphor shapes and mediates the client's experience.
3. Client metaphors may be dysfunctional; the counselor's introduction of new, more serviceable metaphors may lead to gains in a client's understanding of a problem, and to new options for solution.
4. Working in metaphor is often emotionally safer than confronting a situation in a literal way.

Spiritual explanation

The transpersonal nature of art therapy is not a new idea. Malchiodi (2002) points out that the cultivation of the sacred dimension has been the traditional purpose of art since the genesis of humanity. Allen (2005) agrees with this premise when she describes art as a spiritual path as does Rogers (1993) when she describes the connection to spirituality as "involving oneself intensely with the creative process [which] brings an alignment of mind and body, creating an opening to receive divine energy" (p. 184).

Levine (2003) posits that creativity is akin to a fire that has the potential to energize and keep us vital. With art being the link between the outer world and our souls, it assists us in creating space that invites the exploration of our inner landscape. It has been well documented that Jung (as cited in Kossak, 2012) used art in his clinical work and in his personal journey. It has also been well documented that many famous artists engaged in Jungian art-based enquiry in their own psychoanalysis.

I continue to be fascinated with Freud's concept of the unconscious. This unconscious mind contains unseen but nonetheless powerful forces that influence peoples' emotional lives and speaks to the very reason I am drawn to art therapy. With art therapy, clients work at an unconscious level, where memories, experiences and repressed material are stored. As Killen and deBeer (1994) state:

> Images invite us to relate to them. Relate is the key word here. An image that captures experiences acts like a metaphor. It discloses and surprises by revealing familiar and unexpected aspects of meaning in our experience. Both broaden and enrich our awareness and understanding (p. 38).

The aim in arts-based research is to use the arts as a method, a form of analysis, a subject, or all of the above, within qualitative research (Huss & Cwikel, 2005). Similar to art therapy, or any therapy, arts-based research aims to connect, integrate, and transform experienced behavior. Arts-based research uses imagination not only to examine how things are, but also how they could be (Mullen, 2003). The "could be" aspect is the rewarding part of working with clients. Many cannot envision a life beyond their suffering, and by helping them first envision and then move toward creating something new is the goal of therapists.

Art therapists understand that the unconscious is expressed through visual communication. Art is the guide. By providing a creative experience, where visual and verbal manifestations can happen, clients are given the opportunity to heal (Schaverian, 1991; Allen, 1995; McNiff, 1998). Allen (1995) states, "Images are a means of coming to know the richness and variety of our stories, their shadows and nuances (p. 10). Allen

describes how working with the metaphor and archetype of an image allows an individual to discover the depth of their inner being. She refers to this way of knowing as a personal spirituality. Levine (2003) shares Freud's views of trying to understand the relationship between fantasy and reality in terms of the role of the symbol as a bridge between two worlds.

McNiff (2004) shares an important concept: "Chaos theory has revealed that fragmentation leads to new and higher levels of organization which is practically a definition of the creative process" (p. 214). This fragmentation is necessary in order to find space for the newer self. Levine (as cited in McNiff, 2004) emphasizes that we must "go through the experience of disintegration" in order to create something new.

I respect both the process and the product of image making. Schavarien (1991) speaks of two highly complex processes in analytical art psychotherapy. These are the process of image making, and the processes that revolve around the image once it exists. She called these the life "in" the picture and the life "of" the picture respectively, and believed that the picture or art object, which is the product of art therapy, is of equal importance to the process of its creation (p. 79).

As Edith Kramer (as cited in Ulman, 2001) states:

> Art is a means of widening the range of human experiences by creating equivalents for such experiences. It is an area wherein experiences can be chosen, varied, repeated at will. In the creative act, conflict is re-experienced, resolved and integrated (p. 19).

The fact that art gives people the opportunity to give voice to the soul's complexities has awakened me to the power of the unconscious. I continue to be intrigued

and comforted that people can connect to the core of their being through art. Shaverien (as cited in Steinhardt, 1998) is quoted as saying, “Art takes off layers quicker than any other method” (p. 111). She goes on to compare art to a Freudian slip. A person can be stripped bare psychologically without realizing it.

I see Spirit in the artwork I do, and witness it in the work of my clients. By Spirit I mean the presence of something sacred/divine. There are times while creating that I feel my hands are being guided; that I am not alone in the creating. These feelings have me believing that we speak an unconscious truth in art, learning more about ourselves and creating potential for affirmation, healing and growth. I seek to go beyond the obvious to the shapes, the rhythm, the colors, the meaning, that reside in that place of knowing between the canvas and the paint. By risking, the opportunity is there to discover or reclaim Spirit through the process of creating. In DaVinci’s words (as cited in Andrews, 2007), “When the spirit does not work with the hand, there is no art” (p. 36).

There exists a long and intimate history of relationship between art and spirituality, and between spirituality and healing. Beginning in the mid 1980s and growing stronger in the 1990s, practitioners were challenged to meet suffering with knowledge of both Western science and the many spiritual traditions of the world. The reality of our interconnectedness and capacity for direct experiences of the Divine through art making is now being accepted (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001).

Allen (1995) states that images reveal the nature of our relationship with soul and spirit, while the soul narrates our deepest truth through image and metaphor. Further she points out that that the gift of creative energy that flows when deeply engaged in creative work should be cherished and managed (2005, p. 45). I believe viewing a client’s artwork

is like getting a look at their soul and I respect and value the opportunity. I consider viewing client art as a sacred offering and hold the space as gently as I can while helping them see the messages.

Just as my clients find messages in their artwork, I watched for the messages that appeared in the art I have created for this project. Over a period of time I used a variety of media to express my emotions as I wrote about women and children wounded by sexual abuse. I selected five pieces that I feel have had the most impact on me, mindful of any transformative change in myself as a result of the experience of trauma counseling. Clements (2004) points out that transformative changes of heart requires a temporary suspension of critical and rational thinking in order to access liminal sources and ways of knowing. Cognitive integration takes place during analysis and can result in a transformative change to the researcher's understanding and experience of the topic (pp. 26-27). The inner dialogue and reflection component of my paper discuss the effects of art on the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual totality of a human being as found in research, as well as my personal experience of creating the art. I will be describing the interpretive/meaning-making process in the final chapter.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

As Marshall and Rossman (2006) posit, "All research must respond to canons of quality—criteria against which the trustworthiness of a project can be evaluated" (pp. 200-201). Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006) propose four constructs that accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (p. 201).

Credibility: The goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was appropriately identified and described.

Transferability: Researcher argues that his/her findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice. The parameters of the research are stated by showing how data collection and analysis will be guided by concepts and models.

Dependability: The researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen to study and changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting. The concept of replication is problematic as the social world is always being constructed.

Confirmability: This construct questions if the findings of the study could be confirmed by another. The logic and interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry can be made (somewhat) transparent to others, increasing the strength of the assertions (pp. 202-202).

Clements (2004) stresses that validity in organic inquiry is "personal and not necessarily generalizable or replicable" (p. 43). Journaling has allowed me to reflect on my feelings and emotions throughout the process. I realize my experience can be unique from other therapists doing similar research, and leave it to the reader to decide if there is any similarities in experience. To this point Greenwood and Levin (1994) add that rather than judging the quality of research on criteria that devalue lived experiences, after reading carefully documented research, readers should decide the degree to which results are transferable to other settings. Similarly Ellis (1995) states that the ability to transfer

findings to new contexts is best judged by the ability of the reader to relate to the experiences and the outcomes. Therefore, while the experience of this heuristic research is unique to this researcher, other researchers can potentially benefit from the outcomes of the study.

Working subjectively, and in partnership with Spirit, makes this emerging approach to research inherently inexact, with limitations that are endemic and unavoidable. Because the researcher is the instrument of the study, he/she must be sufficiently self-aware to be able to acknowledge biases and assumptions. To approach clarity of intent, ongoing vigilance, honesty and surrender are required (Clements, 2004).

> A study has *transformative validity* when it succeeds in affecting the individual reader through identification with and change of her or his prevailing story, probably in the areas of self, Spirit, and service (p. 43).

Clements (2004) states areas that invite inspection include:

> ….. the nature of interplay in the effectiveness of stories as agents of transformative change, the reliability of confirming signals like tears or chills, the impact of personality styles on the design and process of organically framed research, the usefulness of the concept of a muse of the research, a discrimination between changes of heart and changes of mind, a validation of self, Spirit and service as effective and adequate measures of transformative change, and an examination of the concept of transformative validity (p. 45).

McNiff (1998a) points out that the interplay between subjective and objective elements takes place all the time within the creative process. He suggests that art and science are integrated into every aspect of art therapy. While embracing the significance

of felt experience and tacit knowing, there is an understanding that certain objective conditions are likely to generate a particular kind of response. Work can be assessed through empirical reactions that can be counted. McNiff also states:

> When we examine a painting that we make ourselves, we have access to a more direct encounter with inner motivations and creative forces. The heuristic dimension to this type of research increases the validity of what we say about the process of making the painting because the researcher has directly experienced the process being investigated This type of inquiry by artist-researchers will offer accounts of the inner and transformative forces which are the basis of the creative arts therapy discipline (p. 61).

As this is the story of my personal journey, the synthesis of my inquiry is not intended to provide "accurate" answers, since the results are specific to my experience alone. Rather it is to create research that may have meaning for others working in the field of sexual abuse therapy. A potential result of this project is the facilitation of workshops related to my thesis question. The research has sparked an interest, or rather fanned a spark that has been there for many years, resulting in a further desire to empower women.

Monk Kidd (1996) discusses research conducted by Gilligan and Brown. They reveal that young girls around the age of adolescence begin to lose their spirit, courage and willingness to speak. This "sleep" that starts to descend at an early age may never see an awakening. Instead these young girls "settle into the clichés and limits imposed on their gender" (pp. 21-22). I find the possibility of helping young girls and women hold on to or recover their voice and innate strength exhilarating. Recognizing and

embracing their value as females could be powerful and even life changing for some. Since I have enjoyed the research and writing process involved in this project, I am also considering the possibility of writing for journals and other educational resources in order to demonstrate the validity of this research.

Ethical Conduct

All research should be conducted in ways that respect the dignity and preserve the wellbeing of human research participants. These principles include:

a. Respect for human dignity.

b. Respect for free and informed consent.

c. Respect for vulnerable persons.

d. Respect for privacy and confidentiality.

e. Respect for justice and inclusiveness.

f. Balancing harms and benefits (St. Stephen's Manual retrieved from http://ststephenscollege.ca/).

As the sole participant in this study, many of the guiding principles of ethical research are not relevant. Of primary concern is my own self-care, which I mindfully attend to.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF ARTWORK

I said to my soul, be still and wait….

So the darkness shall be the light,

and the stillness the dancing.

T.S. Eliot (as cited in Monk Kidd, 1990).

The questions and ponderings throughout my practicum work of counseling sexual abuse victims, as well as through my thesis writing, have been many. I began to recognize I was being affected by the daily stories of women and children who painfully shared their experiences of victimization and how it felt to live in a body that had been traumatized. I felt anger and a stirring deep inside that could not be ignored, which in turn led to a desire to explore these feelings through writing and art making.

Feeling passionate about female empowerment has made it easy to engage in a study that seeks to give meaning and voice to the experience of the stressful and sometimes distressing work of trauma therapy. Physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual exhaustion can result from chronic exposure to populations that are suffering (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Rothschild, 2000; Lerias & Byrne, 2003; Pines & Arnson as cited in Newell & MacNeil, 2010). As a feminist, I want to look beyond general spiritual aspects, to the effect this work has on the Sacred Feminine.

Andrews (2007) articulates my feelings as I move into the creative aspect of this thesis: "….moving slowly down a trail whether with my physical body or in my mind, so that my whole body becomes invested in the pursuit of the unknown" (p.99). There is

much that is unknown for me as I embark on this path of spiritual inquiry. Both the journey and potential findings excite me.

I have created a private space for both writing and art making. I have surrounded myself with books and art supplies that invoke in me a sense of comfort, belonging and curiosity. I want this to be a space where I will hear my soul's voice. Although the space feels safe, the thought of exposing my subjective and personal work to the academic community brings some hesitation and resistance. The cognitive process of analysis feels contrary to the highly emotional and deeply personal nature of organic inquiry/art-based research, which results in psycho-spiritual growth. As Clements (2004) states, fully appreciating transpersonal topics requires an experiential encounter.

An anxiety crept in as I initially started doing artwork. Fear, vulnerability, inadequacy and ambiguity wanted to be my companions. I had to search for a quote that once spoke to me, and found it in Markova's (2000) book on living with passion and purpose: "Fear is passion without breath" (p. 72). I knew my passion and was prepared to move into the uncertainty. I kept thinking of the intensely personal nature of this work and questioned if I could adequately articulate the feelings and emotions that were about to unfold in both the art and reflection.

White (as cited in Clements, 2004) addresses the concept of moving beyond ego to the "All-Self", and the resulting connection to Spirit from this. When beyond ego's understanding, a new narrative in one's story can be written. When we experience ourselves as a consciousness that "moves back and forth and in between, not dissociated from either", the integration of exceptional human experience can happen (p.39).

I remind myself that the images do not have to be aesthetically pleasing and that I need to trust in the process:

> Trust in the process assumes that there is a force that moves within a group, an individual, or a situation that is distinctly "other" and not subject to control. "It" finds the way through problems and complex interactions among people as well as through conflicting forces within ourselves. (McNiff, 1998, p. 24)

Moon (2010) adds to this belief by stating: "A process emphasis often is claimed as a hallmark of art therapy, which typically means that personal expression is valued over technical skills or concern with the formal qualities of art" (p. xviii). I soothe the negative feelings as best I can and move forward.

Killen and DeBeer (1994) inform us that in theological reflection we must "give shape and form to the feelings, images, insights and musings that come to us during reflection" (p. 80). Although there are numerous ways of doing this: journaling, sculpting, dancing and prayer, I chose art and writing to externalize my thoughts and feelings. This externalizing allows me to make subtle changes in my interpretive framework.

Allen (2005) describes three aspects of art-making that constitute a spiritual path:

> *Inquiry:* Art is a place to raise any question about any subject.
>
> *Engagement:* Art is a means to enter, to play with, to dance with, to wrestle with anything that intrigues, delights, disturbs, or terrifies us.
>
> *Celebration:* Art is a path to meaning, which includes all forms of honoring, sharing, memorializing, and giving thanks. (p.1)

It is my hope that a clear path will be laid for me; leading to a sense of meaning that Allen speaks of.

The word “intention” is used by Allen (2005) to describe the first act of initiating an art experience. She points out that the word *intend* derives from a Latin root, *tendere; in-tendere* and means to stretch toward (Ayto as cited in Allen, p.12). My intention in creating artwork for this project is to stretch toward a deeper understanding of both the subject matter and myself by listening to the language of my soul.

I selected five images from art I created to which I felt inherently drawn and which bring both positive and negative emotions to the surface, encouraging a narrative that I hope will bring clarity to my research question. I will remark on what I notice about the process, my thoughts and feelings, and any emerging meanings. As McNiff (2004) encourages, I dialogue with the images, anxious for any “surprises and discoveries” that may come forth. Seeing the image as a person allows me to enter the “imaginal realm”, where taking risks and exposing vulnerability is encouraged (pp. 91-92).

The art therapy concepts I address are creativity and the transformation of self, authentic expression, and the evolving metaphor. I discuss the effects of art on the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual totality of a therapist, with particular focus of the impact on the Sacred Feminine. The interpretive/meaning-making process will be described in my final story.

A period of deep clarification and revelation is part of the process. As Sela-Smith (2002) explains:

The heuristic researcher continues the focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and

> self-disclosure…to recognize meanings that are unique and distinctive to an experience…The entire process of explication requires that researchers attend to their own awareness, feelings, thoughts, beliefs and judgments. (p. 68)

Themes from my readings resonate with me and bear a resemblance to my personal experience of creating art: metaphor, symbol, spiritual, sacred, truth, unconscious mind, personal, inner voice, growth, transformative, imagination, possibility, deep and personal, healing, revealing, intuitive voice. The words of authors and artists speak to me as if my own and invite expression. This intense focus on the question has resulted in thoughts and ideas that beg for my attention.

Short writings, quotes, long writings, poetry, sketches and scribbles have filled the pages of my journals since the inception of this thesis. Scraps of paper in my purse or vehicle hold one word or a thought. Every waking hour I am conscious of this project that has deep meaning for me, and I am open to any messages I receive. “When the question has been properly formed, it appears to have a power that draws the image of the question everywhere in the researcher’s life experience. Immersion happens naturally, not through control or planning” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 65).

My thoughts express the enormity of what I have witnessed and experienced those many hours in therapy sessions. Listening to clients tell the stories of their wounds brought a plethora of emotions. What stands out is my desire to discover the impact this witnessing of horrific pain due to sexual abuse has on the Sacred Feminine aspect of my personhood.

I acknowledge that everyone suffers at some point in life. To be human is to know suffering. Yet I also believe that creating meaning from suffering helps people survive in a world wrought with sadness. In Viktor Frankl's words:

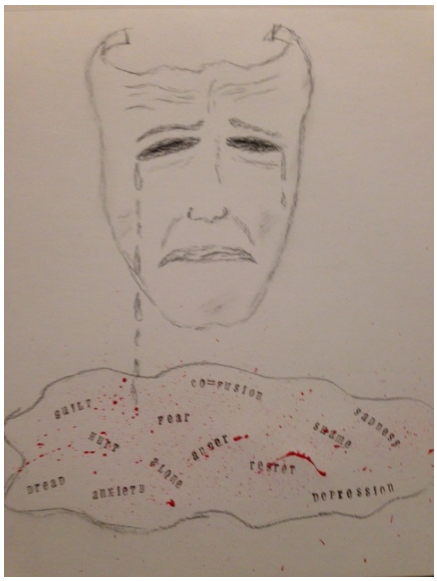
> You do not have to suffer to learn. But, if you don't learn from suffering, over which you have no control, then your life becomes truly meaningless……The way in which a man accepts his fate-those things beyond his control-can add a deeper meaning to his life. He controls how he responds. (Cited in Pattakos, 2004, p.23)

As a student of spiritually-informed psychotherapy, I address these questions around meaning and see both psychological and spiritual dimensions as parts of daily human life.

PRESENTATION OF ART IMAGES

Image One – Wounded

Put thou my tears into thy bottle. Psalms 56:8



Inner Dialogue and Reflection

Images take me apart; images put me back together again,

new, enlarged, with breathing room.

(Allen, 1995, p.ix)

As I draw the above image I have been researching the chapter on trauma. I feel anger as I recall hour after hour of painful stories of sexual abuse. Much of the journaling I did through this period expressed anger at the dehumanizing of women. I do not see this anger as a negative emotion because as Monk Kidd (1996) states, “Anger can fuel our ability to challenge, to defy injustice” (p. 75).

I now have to artistically express the emotions that led to this thesis topic. I am hesitant because I do not like to feel negative emotions within my body, and I know they will once again come flooding in: anger, rage, sadness, confusion, disgust, fear… I have to express them. This project challenges me to dig deep, to excavate a way of expressing the darkness inherent in the stories of abuse. I need to listen to my inner guidance as I ponder how to express my feelings artistically.

With all art images, the choice of materials has to be considered. Moon (2010) shares, "Materials and media provide the potential for a highly developed, nuanced and intelligible means of communication" (p. xv). Over the years I have worked with various forms of materials and media when producing art that depicted my feelings. For this specific piece, a blank white paper feels necessary. I know it will not be a "pretty" picture; that would be impossible, as I am depicting painful emotions.

I think next about what medium to use: acrylic or oil paints, pencils, pastels or watercolors. Although the color red seems appropriate for the emotions I am feeling, I trust my instincts and choose graphite pencils and charcoal. The darkness seems fitting, as does the contrast of the white and black. Drawing materials, in comparison to paints, allow intense emotions to be expressed within a safe, containing context, as they are controllable and have predictable results (Moon, 2010). Allen (1995) tells us that, "drawing is energy made visible" and that it is a way to connect with the energy of the subject matter.

Next comes what Allen (2005) terms engagement, which requires "time for things to cook and simmer on the back and front burners" (p.41). My ideas have been "simmering" for some time already, and I am looking forward to engaging with the act of

creating. I know it will not be a “pretty” picture; that would be impossible, as I am depicting painful emotions. I have written about my intention of trying to capture the pain and anguish I see in my clients’ faces as they sit across from me in each therapy session. I need the face to express the emotions my clients showed and I feel a need to depict the face as a mask; one of many that victims wear. I recall words they used to express their pain: shame, guilt, dread, hurt, anxiety, fear, alone, anger, depression, regret, sadness, confusion. I feel a fullness in each teardrop as I draw it. I want to cup my hands in a soothing gesture and catch it. I want to stroke the woman’s face and tell her things will be okay, but I do not know that they will be okay. As I look at the puddle of tearful emotions, the red asks to be included. I flick the red paint on, a metaphor for their deep wounds.

Faces of clients flash across the paper; children, teenagers, grown women and men, all wanting release from the emotional and spiritual turmoil. Some clients sit, eyes downcast, almost vibrating with emotion, yet tearless. Some need permission to cry. While for some tears flow freely, I sense from others they fear a dam will break should they allow tears to fall. Some seem void of emotion, sitting numbly. I work at building trust, and once built, a gentle touch or thoughtful questioning allows them to express long-held debilitating emotions.

Poetry was not a consideration when I wrote my thesis proposal. I felt I could articulate my emotions simply through written reflection. I find, however, a release for my thoughts and emotions in writing poetry as a response to my art. Searching for an understanding for my need for poetry I found the words of Fox (1995). Fox describes reading and writing poetry as, “A secret bridge to a part of ourselves that is sacred”

(p.25). Each time I put pen to paper, I feel the words that come to me to be deep, personal and revealing. Bearing witness to clients' stories is difficult, and although I hold their pain as I sit witness to them, I have to work at not clinging to that pain and making it a part of me.

Poetic Response to Image

The pain inside is searing,
All the darkness frightens me.
I don't want to keep on living,
I just want to be set free.
Do you see me?
Can you hear me?
Will you catch me if I fall?
Please believe me,
I'm not lying,
I was a child....I was so small.

I cannot help but think of my own childhood and those of my children when I reflect on my drawing. Existential questions arise. Why is it that some people have such difficult lives and others go through life seemingly unscathed? This is where my belief that we are souls having a human experience helps me. I believe on a soul level, life is about teaching and learning, and as evolving beings we have lessons to learn. I acknowledge that nobody will leave this earth without experiencing pain to varying

degrees and am grateful that I am able to help survivors process their pain and work on reclaiming their lives.

Image Two – Sophia Crucified

One day I saw a painting of a crucified woman hanging on the cross and thought of all the suffering, violated women throughout history. Thousands of women murdered in the name of God during witch burnings; little girls sexually abused; women beaten by husbands, harassed by "superiors", abandoned to poverty, genitally mutilated in Africa, forced into brothels by the Japanese military, tortured in Nicaragua, raped in Sarajevo. I thought of women cut off from equality, passed over at work, silenced at home, marginalized at church – women suffering in all kinds of ways from the pathology of exclusion. And once again I embraced their struggle as my own.

(Monk Kidd, 1996, p.165)

Inner Dialogue and Reflection

The Goddess Sophia represents the Sacred Feminine and the Holy Spirit of Wisdom, the guiding archetype of human evolution. Baring and Cashford (1991) describe this Holy Spirit of Wisdom as "an image that embraces all human experience, inspiring trust in the capacity of the soul to find its way back to the source" (p. 609). It was during Christian times that the relationship between Wisdom and the goddess was lost, when the image of the deity as a trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit became wholly identified with the masculine archetype. The ancient relationship between Wisdom and the image of the goddess was erased by this theological development (pp. 609-611).

Flinders (1998) states that there continue to be "invisible mechanisms that still operate in contemporary life, at every level of society, across race and clan, to keep women 'in their place' and convinced, in the depth of their being, that they belong there" (p. 103). I feel anger at the words and want an image that depicts our culture's "crucifixion" of the Sacred Feminine, which has resulted in a loss of psycho-spiritual meaning for women. I believe the absence of symbology of the feminine is most poignantly felt in the area of women's spirituality. As women begin to seek models of psycho-spiritual wholeness, it is clear that masculine developmental models have been the only models available.

The above image came to me as I was reading Monk Kidd's book *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (1996). I devoured the book once I started it. Every page spoke to me and I felt a kinship with the author. Her description and critique of the

complex system of patriarchy rang true for me. We both see patriarchy as a "wounder of women and feminine life" (p.60).

I initially want to tear pages from a Bible and glue them to a wooden cross. I go so far as to purchase a used Bible, but am hesitant; concerned that Christians will find it offensive. I settle for painting a cross, as I reflect on scripture that speaks to the subordination of women. My thoughts surround this crucified Goddess with the words that contributed to her demise.

Genesis 3:16

"To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children, your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you".

1 Corinthians 11:3

"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ".

Ephesians 5:22-25

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything".

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they

will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church".

Ecclesiastes 25:22

"Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die".

1 Timothy 2:11-14

"Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor".

Creating the image, I find it wants me to not just paint a crucified Sophia, but to include "witnesses", those standing idly by, complacent about what is happening before them. Behind Sophia I paint faceless men as a symbol of the patriarchal wound women have suffered, and which led to her death. Flames lick at her feet, reminiscent of the burning of "witches" at the stake by an ignorant and threatened public. I wonder what these faceless men are thinking as they watch this symbol of Goddess stretched on the cross, a symbol of Christianity. Do they have any understanding of what they have done? Are they threatened by her wisdom and mystery? Do they delight at the image of her on the cross? Have they any idea of the consequences of their actions? I choose to leave their faces blank, like a big question mark, guessing at what is there.

I personify Sophia as I dialogue with the image. I see her as all women through history who have been "crucified" by patriarchy; voices silenced and hearts cut out. I imagine I hear her weeping, unable to understand this alienation. I feel heaviness in my chest and a feeling of grief envelops me. Tears run down my face. I see the faces of my

grandmother, my mother and my daughter. I want to strike out at the men. I want to touch her. I want to save her. How have we allowed this to happen? How did she lose the reverence? How can we reclaim her; give her new life? I am filled with anger, strength, and a sense of urgency. I think of all of the feminist authors I have read on this journey and applaud their passion and commitment.

Poetic Response

You have neglected me, forgotten me,

You watch me suffer and turn from me.

You want me shame filled,

Broken, worthless.

My soul turns into the wind,

And a tree, and a raindrop.

Seeing me now, I ask you,

“Do you love me now?’

Image Three – The Scream

"Art's true function is to inspire us, mirror our thoughts, and embody our emotions"

(Malchiodi, 2002, p. x).

Inner Dialogue and Reflection

This is another disturbing image to create. Too often I have heard of man as predator, both in my practice and in the media. I feel like a simmering pot that gradually begins to boil over. Just as Monk Kidd did with her reactions to patriarchy, I allow anger to have its place. Yet I feel these feelings of anger need expression and I know expressing them creatively will expend some of the negative energy, reducing the heat under that pot.

I choose oil pastels for this image for their strength, richness and depth. I need the vivid colors. As Allen (1995) shares, "Color is feeling made visible" (p. 25). The scream stirring inside of me demands a loud expression of color.

I begin by drawing lips, red and sensuous Goddess lips; then begins the scream. With each stroke I am screaming for my clients. I am screaming for the victims of rape, domestic abuse, genital mutilation, and sexual slavery. I am screaming for the physical, psychological, social and spiritual violence inflicted on women throughout history. I am screaming about the "less than" attitude that women internalize; the inferiority and self-denial that becomes a part of them. I am screaming about all of the damaging social images of women in our culture. I am screaming for the young girls and women who cannot feel safe in this world. I am screaming for all women who carry a patriarchal wound, recognized or unrecognized. The scream feels guttural. Adrenaline is surging through my body as I press the pastels into the paper. I feel like I am purging. For a few seconds I feel disconnected from my body. My movements feel in slow motion. I take a break to calm myself.

I have a collection of instruments that I have purchased in my travels, and I choose to seek comfort and calming with my singing bowl. I feel the coolness of its base in my palm as I run the rubbing stick around the rim. It is like a sound massage for me, calming my mind and releasing negative energy from my body. I return to my creating.

Shortly after returning to the piece, a naked woman running appears in my mind. She has long, wild grey hair. Her arms are outstretched and her mouth is open in a voiceless scream. I once again take a break from the artwork to contemplate the image. What had my unconscious mind delivered to me? Is this me that was running? Why was I running? Is she symbolic of all women? After pondering the image for some time, I decide she is symbolic of my frustration. These many hours of writing about the wounds

of women create an unconscious response. I acknowledge the woman, bid her goodbye with a prayer, and continue.

Image Four – Hear My Voice

A girl who chooses to authorize her own life experiences by speaking openly about them resists the security of convention and moves into uncharted territory; she sets herself adrift, disconnects from the mainland; she risks being, for a time, storyless.

(Gilligan as cited in Allen, 2005, p. 107).

Inner Dialogue and Reflection

Our stories are sacred, and within them is our Truth. Yet for many women, their stories remain trapped inside. As Simington (2013) states:

Oral language is bound by culture and perhaps limited to one lifetime.

> Soul does not recognize such limitations; its language is broader, more expansive. The language of soul transcends time and space. (p. 10)

Simington goes on to share how important symbolic language is to the soul, stating it carries a “deeper truth”. Essential to spiritual evolution is the need to get in touch with our greatest strength and deepest fears. The use of symbol is a powerful and lasting way to do so.

The above image is a talking stick, which in Native American traditions is used when a council is called and passing it allows each member to speak. It is also used in teaching children, decisions regarding disputes, Pow-Wow gatherings, storytelling circles, or to conduct a ceremony where more than one person will speak (Native American Legends, n.d., retrieved from http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends). I have had many clients make talking sticks to represent finding their voice. I recall when I was introduced to this symbol. I was taking trauma recovery training and the instructor taught a variety of aboriginal healing methods. I experienced and witnessed the power in the pieces of wood we embellished. I recall thinking how powerful it could be in teaching clients to claim/reclaim their voices.

The supplies I choose for creating this talking stick are important to me. I place a chair in front of my art supplies, and wait to see what asks to be invited into this symbol of giving voice. I find myself humming. It does not take long for me to have the supplies that will decorate this symbol of empowerment.

The symbolism around the materials used is significant for me. The strength of the talking stick is part of a branch from a poplar tree. I collected it while walking at a lake, where I regularly take fallen branches for my office art supplies. It has a gnarly shape, old

and weathered by time and the elements. The imperfection speaks to me, with its crooked lines and blistering bark. It feels comfortable to use a part of nature. I research the symbolism around poplar trees, and I am even more satisfied. Andrews (2004) tells us that this tree, known for its extensive and strong root system, can grow in arid conditions without much coddling. Its spirit has the ability to teach individuals how to make dreams and projects manifest quickly, yielding great reward. Concerns for the earthly and mundane matters in the poplar's environment concern her. "She teaches us how to endure the hardships of life and to keep our roots strong" (p. 287).

It is mostly natural supplies that ask to be used; shells, pebbles and feathers. Two balls of wool attract my attention, both in earth tones—the turquoise of an ocean, and variegated wool, offering the colors of sand, clay and water. I sit comfortably with my "palette" and wait for my creative spirit to arrive.

I am caressing the bare branch as I begin, cognizant of the healing that nature offers. I pull off some loose bark that is asking to be removed. I love her shape and her imperfections. Should I leave her as she is? I ask, and she invites embellishment.

There is no sense of urgency to this project as there was to the last. I embrace a peaceful feeling as I attach pieces to the branch, feeling the interconnectedness of Goddess and Nature. In the rush of a busy world, we sometimes forget to listen and listening, I feel respect for the divinity of nature. Again I find myself humming. I am energized as I work.

I listen to flute music as I work and images of nature scenes come to me as I create, speaking of silence and solitude. Memories from my own experiences are recalled, beautiful prairie sunsets, majestic Rocky Mountains, sand and ocean, eagles soaring. I

know intuitively what this talking stick needs to look like. I feel cleansed of all but radiant energy.

Holding the talking stick after completion I felt an intimacy with her. It was as if the wood and embellishments knew “the truth” of the feminine wound. I believe that the symbolism around the talking stick could encourage the internalized sense of inferiority, the collective fear, betrayal and anger to be voiced and this thought is exhilarating. It would take courage to find that voice, that feminine spirit that has been silenced for far too long in women, yet I felt hopeful.

Poetic Response

You sit in silence, eyes downcast
What are you feeling?
Your energy enters me
And I feel sadness.

Lift your eyes and know
You are a gift to the Universe
Trust yourself
And speak your truth.

Image Five – Goddess Empowered

"When perceived through the heart, the imaged presentation of "what is"

leads to longings and imaginings of what might be"

(Mary Watkins as cited in Allen, 2005, p. 214).

Inner Dialogue and Personal Reflection

I reflect a great deal on this image that captures my longing for "what might be". This longing is to see the world recapture a tradition of female strength and dignity, honoring the Sacred Feminine and all that She embodies. This honoring of Her will see the honoring of women and girls as well. Flinders (1998) states it took 2,500 years to see women disempowered. "To realize that patriarchy was set in place, stone by stone, is to realize that it can be taken apart, too, stone by stone" (p. 102). It is time to see the pendulum swing, not once again to an imbalance of power, but to where men and women share equal value, as *human beings.*

I feel excited as I anticipate beginning this piece. I need to create an image that shows Goddess shining with an essence of empowerment. I want the reader to look at the image and be filled with a sense of possibility, seeing a clearer vision of female strength. Gimbutas (as cited in Williams et al., 2008) teaches that the symbol of the female depicts a source of empowerment. She describes these symbols of ancient art as "sacred remains of the silent forms and images that tell the story of life before ours" (p. 383). Early civilizations portrayed her as birth-giver, protectress and nurturer, known as the Earth Goddess. I see Goddess archetypes as our link to the collective unconscious.

A large canvas feels necessary, not just for its size, but for the strength it offers over paper. I know the medium needs to be powerful as well, leading to my use of paint. "The sensuous, fluid quality of paint makes possible bold, spontaneous expressions of thoughts and feelings" (Hinz, Malchiodi & Nainis as cited in Moon, 2010, p. 26). I open a heart space and invite Spirit to enter. I feel present and an authentic interest in discovery. What will She tell me?

I feel a sense of liberation and exhilaration as I dip my brush into the bright colors, and a "YES!" explodes inside as I brush the color through Goddess's hair. It is as if the energy of millions of suppressed women over the centuries is moving through my fingers! Vaughan-Lee (2009) posits, "In the cells and in the soul of every woman this ancient knowing is waiting to be awakened, so that once again the sacred feminine can make her contribution, can help the world come alive with love and joy" (p. 47). The bright colors nourish me. She feels alive. The curve of her jaw feels strong, her shoulders square to the world. I envision her tending my sacred garden, whispering to my little seedling, "Grow my love….grow".

Poetic Response

If you could look upon my soul,

What wonders you would see,

My strength, my warmth, my wisdom

My longing to be free.

If you could look upon my soul,

What wonders you would see,

My gentleness, my caring,

My prayer that you'll remember me.

Concluding Comments

"Artmaking gives us the tools to remake and enlarge our story when

it starts to chafe and bind and simply not fit anymore,

once we have unearthed it and told and retold it a while"

(Allen, 2005, p.35).

I had a period of contemplation after selecting the art images I am presenting. I recognize and acknowledge the emotions that I externalized through the artwork I created, and there were many, which I addressed throughout my reflections. The above quote shares my experience, as I found the chafing propelled me into looking at the Sacred Feminine with a goal of gaining knowledge and moving toward growth and transformation.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL TRAUMA THERAPY

Patience is everything.

(Rainer Maria Rilke as cited in Monk Kidd, 1990, p.3)

Through this thesis process I have been looking for a deeper awareness and expression of how trauma therapy work impacts on the sacred feminine aspect of the therapist. This chapter is devoted to a synthesis of my thesis journey, including a discussion of implications, findings, and future direction of this organic inquiry. I mimic the words Cameron (1996) used to describe her own quest: "fascinating, arduous, magical, difficult, rewarding, and above all, personal" (p. 3). These words aptly describe my feelings through the months of research, writing and creating. Moustakas (1990) describes the creative synthesis of the heuristic experience:

> Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis. This usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples, but it may be expressed in other creative form. (p. 31-32)

The soul of my journey lives within the words of this chapter. Much of this personal journey can be described by the term for the Catholic monastic tradition, *lectio divina,* which implies a real pondering (Flinders, 1998, p. 23). I have sat, focused on the raw data of my experience and invited any feelings and teachings into my consciousness.

Allen (1995) tells us that, “Feelings are rarely unadulterated. More often feelings are complex, mixed, muted, even at times kaleidoscopic, changing even as we try to name them” (p. 29). Naming my emotions has been a challenge. I can definitely identify anger when it enters my thoughts and body. I respond on every level to it: mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. I have had questions, tears, deep sadness, goose bumps and gratefully, moments of hopefulness. “There are steps to transformation and we are wise to invite divine energy to enter our lives with some gentleness, allowing ourselves time to integrate our new learning” (Allen, 2005, p. 113). I have felt this divine energy, which I choose to think of as the Divine Feminine, illuminating my path as I made my way through this project, a project that has been an act of declaration regarding my personal values and how I choose to walk in the world.

There are many metaphors I could use to describe my journey of researching and writing about my research question. Planting a garden feels the most suitable. A seed was planted during my practicum, where I counseled sexual abuse survivors. My thesis topic began percolating in my mind at that time, after pondering various topics that interested me. Just as a plant looks to soil, sunlight and water for growth, this seed was nurtured with my passion for the topic, books, research articles, art and the encouragement of others. I cared tenderly for this tiny seedling, wanting it to develop strong roots, envisioning it growing and blossoming into something beautiful. There were times of drought, when writer’s block kept me from my little seedling, and there were weeds; those times of self-doubt, where I wondered if I was a skilled enough gardener to bring this seed to maturity. The fulfilling times were when the writing came effortlessly and I felt fertile with words and new knowledge and felt eager to share them.

As Clements (2004) states, “Organic inquiry uses the context of a particular topic to offer *transformative change,* defined as a resulting restructuring of one’s worldview that provides some discrete degree of movement along one’s lifetime path toward further transpersonal development” (p. 26). One of the most impactful results of this study for me is a much deeper personal awareness of what it means to live in a female body on this planet. This awareness at times fills me with anger and a deep sadness at the injustice of the disparity between men and women, and at times I am grateful for how it has enhanced my understanding of the central part Goddess plays in the work of global healing and transformation. As Monk Kidd (1996) declares: “The transition into Sacred Feminine experience can be beautiful and deeply moving, even cataclysmic in its effect on our lives” (p. 88). Although there have been threads of feminism running through my life since adolescence, they are now abundant and much stronger.

It is the transformation of the anger that has been the most interesting and significant for me. Educating myself on Goddess mythology fanned the anger as I learned more about a time when woman were honored and revered, not overlooked and neglected. After acknowledging that women have experienced centuries of patriarchal repression, I now feel a tentative hopefulness as I read women’s stories focused on seeking wholeness and sharing the central role Goddess has in the work of global healing and transformation. These stories of repression are “truth telling”, as Flinders (1998, p. 228) describes them, but are not and should not be the ultimate endpoint. We must look the beast of patriarchy squarely in the eye and shout, “You will not take me down!” Then we can begin to reclaim the Sacred Feminine and build a better world with relationships

of mutual respect and dignity. Only by stepping over the boundaries that patriarchy has drawn for women will we see truth, justice and equality.

The Root of Women's Suffering

This journey began as a result of my work with sexual trauma survivors. The work affected me on a soul level and led to many hours of research and writing as I delved into my thesis question. Violence against women and children is an assault upon all that is sacred and I wanted something productive to come from the anger I felt at such atrocities.

I believe part of the blame lies with a culture that has become obsessed with sex, as evidenced by the rampant popularity of pornography. Damaging social images of women abound. Beauty pageants, starting in childhood, encourage parents to sexualize young girls, as do music videos and films, selling vulnerable youth the notion that this is what they should look like. For centuries men have projected onto women their inner image of femininity, but women are now becoming "custodians of their own feminine consciousness" (Woodman, as cited in Allen, 2005, p. 107). "For the body to be considered holy once again, the Goddess (the female aspect of the deity) must return, for it is only through a Goddess consciousness that matter can be perceived as having a sacred dimension" (Bolen, as cited in Monk Kidd, 1996, p. 162). As women we need to reclaim parts of ourselves that have been assaulted by these beliefs and revive the deep authenticity of being female.

Religion, through the promotion of exclusivity, has also played a part in inflicting the wounds of the world, by separating our human family. Through her own spiritual

journey, Simington (2013) discovered much of the doctrine of Christianity was a way of controlling the masses and ensuring power for a select few. Acknowledging the restrictions of such control, Simington moved beyond fear-based practices that she found restricting, disempowering and controlling, to gently reclaiming her birthright (pp. 20-21). These religious restraints are the same ones that guarantee that women internalize feminine inferiority. We need a spirituality that recognizes that we are one with the earth and all of creation. We separate our human family by our beliefs in Christ, Buddha, Allah or Gaia. How healing it would be to embrace the words of the eleventh century Chinese official Chang Tsai who hung the following inscription in his office:

> Heaven is my father and earth my mother and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in its midst. That which extends throughout the universe, I regard as my body and that which directs the universe, I regard as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters and all things are my companion. (Cited in Roberts & Amidon, 1991, p. xxi)

Why We Need the Sacred in Our Lives

As spiritual beings we search for answers during life's challenges, hungering for spiritual guidance and wisdom. Killen and deBeer (1994) share that sooner or later we face situations that raise questions of meaning, purpose and value in our lives. For me counseling sexual abuse survivors was one of those times and I needed to create personal meaning around what I was experiencing. "For those who go deep into spiritual practice, at some moment the veil slips and you see what *is,* and everything that is has a spiritual essence" (Monk Kidd, 1996, p. 163). As Pargament (2007) points out, spirituality is an

aspect of the ordinary lives of people, something that becomes especially apparent at critical moments in life's journey. When disaster strikes, spirituality becomes part of the struggle to understand that which defies understanding, and to cope with that which seems unmanageable.

I believe that we are all on this great planet as souls having a human experience. We are intended to know the joy of being connected to the Divine and to feel that Oneness. I believe our souls long for connection with the sacred, and painful and difficult life experiences are an opportunity for us to cultivate that connection. Pargament (2007) believes that the solutions prescribed by modern psychology are insufficient, stating that deep questions call for a spiritual response, and that the solutions prescribed by modern psychology do not suffice. Through suffering, people often lose their connection to what is sacred, resulting in a loss of their connection to themselves. The need for connection is especially true for women as we face an "ongoing war against women" (Walker as cited in Flinders, 1998, p. 211).

Working with Clients

I consider it a sacred honor to be invited into the most private part of a person's life, where their pains and insecurities lie, and help them move to a place of wholeness. People seek help at shattered and confusing times. My goal as a spiritually informed psychotherapist is to empower clients to draw on their own strengths and resources and facilitate ways for them to move beyond difficult life situations to healed and stronger selves. I believe that spiritual integration can enhance clients' psychological, social and physical wellbeing, as spirituality is woven into the fabric of our lives. Pargament (2007)

notes that people do not leave their spirituality at the door when they visit a therapist. They bring their complex array of beliefs, practices, values, and struggles with them into the therapeutic process. Pargament further points out that therapists have a commitment to help clients discover and live out the truths of their lives as they perceive and experience these truths. Bakan (as cited in Pargament, 2007) compares religion to science, in that both share a level of openness to, and wonder at, the mysteries of the universe, and both reflect a desire to bring that which is hidden to the fore.

For me, a residual effect of connecting with clients has been my own personal growth. To walk with others in a helpful and meaningful way is humbling and has expanded my life. Yalom (2002) says there are times when the therapist is "midwife to the birth of something new, liberating and elevating" (p. 258). I am hopeful that by working with my clients in a gentle, patient and affirming way, the burdens of their pain can be lifted, their wounds healed, and the vision for a meaningful life realized.

A Feminine Spirituality

Feminism contains its own inherent spirituality that deconstructs patriarchy and creates a world that celebrates the sacred marriage of goddess and god, feminine and masculine and spirit and matter. This spirituality is capable of inspiring and empowering women, but more importantly, of creating a world where we embrace our essential connection to each other, to nature and our promise for our planet. On a troubled planet that sees environmental degradation, worldwide poverty, widespread terrorism and global violence, we need to look to an alternative way of thinking and being; we need to learn to see the sacred in everyday life. Vaughan-Lee (2009) shares my belief that our masculine

culture has created a sense of separation and isolation. By ignoring our sacred connection with life, the earth, and our own souls, we risk losing the connections that sustain life itself. “Because women are closer to creation than men are, they are more awake to the sorrow of the earth and can hear more clearly its cry of despair as our present culture continues to desecrate and pollute it” (p. 53).

I find myself embracing a spirituality that honors the feminine, one that encourages the creation of a more just, peaceful and harmonious world. In Western cultures we are beginning to see a celebration and reimagining of the Divine Feminine. We see this by the growing influence of holistic medicines that honor the interconnectedness of mind and body. Sacred mind-body disciplines such as reiki, meditation and yoga are helping people enter the sacred joy of embodiment. People look for spiritual nourishment in poetry and prayer as they seek to align their spirits with the creative power that pervades the material world.

It has taken years of hard work and commitment by feminists to begin to liberate woman from the shackles of a patriarchal society, to lift the veil and begin to see the beauty of being born a woman. Lesser (2000) points out that recognizing the harm that patriarchy has done does not mean taking sides. It is not that men are wrong and women are right; rather it is “a call for new organizational forms and for relishing gender differences within a context of equality” (p. 8). Flinders (1998) shares that men of today did not invent this culture; they inherited it. Importantly she points out that they are only culpable if they do nothing to change it (p. 216).

Future Possibilities

Come to the edge, he said.

They said: We are afraid.

Come to the edge, he said.

They came.

He pushed them….and they flew.

(Logue as cited in Simington, 2013, p. 16)

The thesis process, from seed to fruition, has been profoundly moving for me. The passion I feel for empowering women has been expanded by the words of the many authors and poets whose wisdom and talents speak to the sacredness of being a woman. The words of Martin Luther King Jr. (as cited in Markova, 2000) touch me. "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" (p. 111). I am committed to living my values, not just talking about them.

I believe, sadly, that the doctrine of Christianity created a split between matter and spirit, resulting in the world being seen as separate from its Creator. The *anima mundi*—the soul of the world—is a spiritual essence (Vaughan-Lee, 2009, p. xx). Just as we are a physical body with a soul, so is the world a physical body with a soul. Yet the patriarchal structure of the Church, with no understanding of the divine feminine, split heaven and earth, putting God in heaven and seeing everything on earth as sinful. No longer was the earth seen as a place of divine expression. "Man himself has ceased to be a microcosm and his anima is no longer the consubstantial *scintilla* or spark of the *Anima Mundi,* the World Soul" (Jung as cited in Vaughan-Lee, 2009, p. 127). We have forgotten that this spark within us, known as soul, has a direct relationship to the soul of the world. I believe

if we listen with our hearts, we will hear the call to create a more peaceful, loving world, one that recognizes the universal marriage of matter and spirit. We will begin to recognize we are, body and spirit, one with the Earth and all of creation.

I have embraced the term "soulmaking" (Monk Kidd, 1990, p. ix) as I journeyed through this process. I think of my own soul and those of my clients. As a spiritually informed therapist, I take with me into each session the belief that we are all souls having a human experience. The most challenging times in life are the painful experiences and how to weave them into our lives. As Jung (cited in Sittser, 2004) states: "In the last resort it is highly improbable that there could ever be a therapy which gets rid of all difficulties. Man needs difficulties; they are necessary for health" (p. 30). Christ (1997) points out that experience contributes to our beliefs, and can be a limitation as well as a resource. As she states, personal theology is not universal or definitive, but is dependent on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, background and experience. How do we individually and collectively create experiences that will create a new world, one where women are valued as much as men; no longer denied dignity, value and power? (p. 39). Religions too often separate our human family with exclusivity. We need a spirituality that returns wisdom back to our relationship with nature, our educational systems, our political systems, our work, and all of our relationships. We need a spirituality that will speak to the hearts of the younger generation who will soon be the stewards of this great planet that we have been blessed to live on.

> I know of nothing needed more in the world just now than an image of Divine presence that affirms the importance of relationship – a Divine Mother, perhaps, who draws all humanity into her lap and makes us into a global

family (Monk Kidd, 1996, p. 155).

I choose not to dwell on the darkness described throughout my thesis. As Buddha states, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought” (as cited in Flinders, 1998, p. 207). I want my thoughts to move toward creating deep personal and social awareness. In an interdependent world, we need to create a culture of caring and equality, one that nurtures all people into wholeness. I believe that God cares deeply about the injustices of the world.

> God is dreaming of a world where all people, black and white, rich and poor, clever and not so clever, are drawn into one family, a world where all of us participate as agents in God’s inexorable transfiguration of evil into good. (Tutu, as cited in Goudzwaard, Van der Vennen & Van Heemst, 2007, p. 11)

We need to work together for a world that creates and celebrates the marriage of God and Goddess, masculine and feminine, and spirit and matter and embraces an alternative to patriarchal thinking.

The following is a lengthy quote, but as I have been telling the story of feminine wounds, I feel strongly about including it. Its strong message makes me grateful to be able to shout my anger and cry my tears.

> We have all been, and all shall be, wounded by life. There is not choice in the matter. It is an inescapable condition of living. Despite the fairy tales, no one lives happily ever after. The question is not whether we will be wounded by life. We will be. The question is: How do we respond to the wounding? And, furthermore: What do we do with our wounds? Beyond our wounding lies our

> power….Beyond our wounding, we have choices that are crucial to our health and well-being. We can choose to hide our wounds and go on bleeding throughout our lives – or we can tell the story of our wounds. The problem, however, is that we have been taught to do otherwise. We have been trained from birth to hide our wounds. So we do as we have been taught: We hide our wounds in the darkness within us, often hiding them even from ourselves. But the problem does not end there, for hiding our wounds brings us up against another truth: Ultimately, everything gets published. That is, if I do not say my hurts, do not cry my tears, do not shout my anger, do not tell my stories….they will eventually translate themselves into other languages and publish themselves into my very being, into the acts of my life (Nelson, 2004, p. 111).

I agree with Monk Kidd's (1996) comment that the spirituality women have inherited from patriarchy is "laced with denial of the natural" (p. 219). Monk Kidd believes our sacred experience needs to include the earthly, the now, and the ordinary. We need to be fully alive, present to our lives, knowing that this moment is all that we have. We need to see the sacredness of the ordinariness of each day, even if only in glimpses. When we live in and value these everyday moments we nourish both ourselves and the world. "All sacred experience and all journeys of soul lead us to the smallest moment of the most ordinary day" (Monk Kidd, 1996, p. 221). If we learn to pause and enter into these sacred moments and attune ourselves to the wonders around us in each new day, we will learn to see the sacred in all things.

Jung was well versed on our dissociation from nature. Valuing its sacredness, at times he would capitalize the word "nature" to acknowledge its divinity. Describing this

state of dissociation as a “neurosis”, Jung (as cited in Sabini, 2008), felt that the cure would need to awaken both spirit and nature to a new life. He attributed America’s “pathological fascination with conquest, speed, success and machines” to its divorce from nature (p. 9). Alienation from the natural world that evolved and sustained us alienates us from our souls. Our lack of attention to nature and soul leads to untold damage to both (Plotkin, 2008, p. 6).

We have created an environment that is out of natural balance. The consequences of acid rain, holes in the ozone, global warming and toxins in our food and water should lead to a sense of urgency to fashion ways of living that are conducive to sustaining and honoring our planet. Modern humanity, dissociated from nature, has lost any awareness of the enchantment of our world. By understanding that we are body and spirit, connected with all of creation, the stars, the trees, the birds, the oceans, we can look compassionately at our world. Only then can we begin the work of healing our plant.

> The more knowledge we acquire the more mystery we find. A human being is part of the whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest- a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security (Einstein, as cited in McGaa, 1990,

p. xiv).

The disempowering of women took about 2,500 years and has continued despite a history of resistance. “Women were not brought into line easily or swiftly at all. Steps had to be taken: laws written, edicts issued, scripture reinterpreted” (Flinders, 1998, p. 102). The birthing of feminist ideals and holding strong to them is not easy. To create a new feminine spiritual consciousness that is strong enough to carry us into the future, we must stop “retreating into hand-me-down sureties or resisting the tensions that truth ignited” (Monk Kidd, 1996, p. 147). Once you hear the stories and read the history, you cannot “unknow” what you know. You can no longer be “tamed into silence” (p. 166).

Einstein (as cited in Simington, 2013) believed, “Problems cannot be solved with the same level of thinking that created them” (p. 32). Flinders (1998) shares an alternative model to the development of self, as proposed by psychologist Dana Jack, where “intimacy facilitates the developing authentic self and the developing self deepens the possibility of intimacy” (p. 296). Stating that his model of “self-in-relation is dynamic and reciprocal”, Flinders posits that it is “utterly compatible with the very embodied, relational, and down-to-earth version of spirituality that is associated with reverence for the sacred feminine and its insistence that we are all parts of her” (pp. 295-296).

This new version of spirituality calls on women to change the way they live in the world. The following are Flinders’ (1998) suggestions for enriching the lives of women.

- Find your voice; tell your story, make yourself heard at the highest levels of every institution that affects your life
- Know who you are. Establish your authentic identity or selfhood. Identify your needs and learn how to meet them

- Reclaim your body, and its desires, from all who would objectify and demean it, whether it is the fashion industry, pornographers, or even the medical establishment. Recognize the hatred of the female body that pervades contemporary culture, and oppose it
- Move about freely and fearlessly. Take back the streets. Take back the night and the day. (p. 85)

We are being called to unearth our connection to the feminine principle and become transformative agents of healing and wholeness. There is a need to bring Her back into consciousness. The resurrection of the divine feminine as a guiding principle requires an inclusion of collaboration, sensitivity and a consideration of the effects of our actions on future generations. It is time for the Goddess to awaken, to regain her place as the Feminine Divine. Only then will Her loving, revitalizing energy help us to reclaim and renew our world.

Final Remarks

I try to not have my feminism impact me only in negative ways. At times I feel the anger and frustration bubbling as a result of my knowledge surrounding the struggles of women. I work hard to not let these emotions contaminate my world and my relationships. Flinders (1998) shares that Ghandi spoke often of transmuting anger into the capacity to make change (p. 224). I want the transmuting of my anger to see me empowering my clients by offering my knowledge, support and compassion and holding their pain in a respectful and gentle way. My feelings are similar to those of Krista Moya Zoog, co-creator of an action group called “Born a Woman”. In a conversation recorded

in Flinders (1998), she said, “Initially so much of what you’re doing is fueled by anger, and after awhile you’ve moved beyond the anger, and it isn’t clear what you’ll be drawing on instead, and what direction to go with it…” (p. 232).

I certainly do not have a road map to direct me, yet I resonate with Clements’ (2004) comments “Organic inquiry offers transformative change, or restructuring of one’s worldview. The intention is to see forward movement along one’s lifetime path, toward further transpersonal development” (p. 26). Although my path is not yet clear, I do know that I choose to work at increasing the power of good in the world and seeing the sacred in everyday life. I refute the message that women are inferior and secondary and refuse to be paralyzed by a patriarchal attitude that rejects and limits women and the feminine.

I acknowledge that this journey is mine and mine alone, unique from other travelers. I have educated myself in Goddess history, and where once I felt anger I now sit comfortably with knowing that I am indeed an embodiment of Goddess, as are all of my “sisters”. I realize I cannot have a huge impact on the world, but I can toss my pebble of feminist beliefs into the waters that surround me, and hope that the ripple effect will be one of questioning, growth and transformation to those who are touched by it. I will continue providing art therapy and am excited about facilitating workshops focused on empowering women. The enjoyment I have found in the research and writing may lead to the creation of articles or a book. Time will tell. For now I comfort myself with the hopeful and wise words of T. S. Eliot: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well” (as cited in Flinders, 1998, p. 29).

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