**St. Stephen's College**

# Sex, Shame, and Spirituality: A Study of Lived Experience

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY


Fall 2016
Edmonton, Alberta

*Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one. May I reckon the wise to be the wealthy, and may I have such a quantity of gold as none but the temperate can carry.*

- *A prayer of Socrates,* Phaedrus

*This work is dedicated to those whose courage calls them to venture into questions not with expectation of explication, but with a yearning for movement towards further depth; to those who choose the path where questions long to be lived and are never quite answered.*

## Abstract

The concept of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2000) marks a new independence from social roles and normative expectations. While sexual and spiritual identities are important aspects of self, with such freedom comes an increased vulnerability to experience shame, an example of this being the many faith communities morally opposed to premarital sexual behaviours (Barkan, 2006). A review of relevant literature on the topics of shame and a history of sexuality is provided, and offers a critique of several major theorists while identifying gaps in the literature related to this research. Guided by the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990), individuals' shameful sexual experiences were explored through interviewing, reflecting an in-depth investigation aimed to describe and better understand the essence of shame. Findings include a rich and nuanced description of many layers of shame, which can better assist one to infer the influences of shame on the self, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual well-being. A discussion of the description of shame links aspects of individuals' lived experiences back to relevant literature, and an exploration into several directions of future research is provided. Inferences gleaned from this research might assist individuals and helping professionals to alleviate harmful aspects of the experience of shame among themselves and their clients and equip individuals to develop healthier understandings of themselves, while also contributing to quality relationships and community-building. Closely looking at shame through this lens can prepare counsellors who work with clients struggling with such experiences.

## Acknowledgements

**Mom and Dad**, for the never-ending love, encouragement, and support.

**Dr. Alexandra Fidyk**, for the new eyes, for introducing me to the writer and scholar within, and for encouraging me to write from this deep, dark, and wonderful place.

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# Chapter One: Living the Question

## A Personal Experience of Shame

Growing up there always seemed to be a pull towards uncovering a deeper sense of spiritual connection between the world and myself. For many years I searched for solid answers to the questions I had through my church, where I wrestled with difficult topics and was open to being moulded by what my pastors might teach. I tried on different roles, from being a church volunteer to an overseas missionary, searching for a greater sense of peace within myself.

As I matured, I experienced tension when certain experiences, feelings, or behaviours occurred that did not line up with the sanctions expressed by my church. Some of this tension was experienced with the emergence of my sense of sexuality, bringing about its expected changes and struggles during my adolescence. The experience of such tension was the result of my sexuality asking several things from me, while at a similar time I was in the process of being taught the rules and standards of sexual behaviour from my church. Masturbating was wrong; pornography was an addiction; and after a certain amount of touching another person, one was spoiled, impure, and had lost something that he or she could never get back. My church's answer to relieving such tension seemed to be through a healthy amount of prayer, as well as several other methods that seemed to resemble 'home remedies' for curing a cold or flu.

I found myself struggling, not only with a way to rein in my sexuality, but how to handle such a response from my church to it. Shame resulted in several forms – shame that there was this part of myself that even existed, that there were other people of my church who seemed to be controlling and successfully warding off their sexuality, and in

my spiritual life, that because of my failures in controlling my sexuality, my spiritual life was suffering. I felt as though there was distance between God and myself because of this struggle. In relation to others, to what I *should* be, and what I wanted to be with God, I was a failure. After spending time to work on and alleviate my experience of shame, I have become curious about other people's experiences of shame in this regard, and wonder how and in what ways such shame might affect their relationships, not only with others, but also with themselves, their experience of God, and their faith community.

An online blog article titled "I Waited Until My Wedding Night To Lose My Virginity And I Wish I Hadn't" (Pugsley, 2014) states an explicit view. This article shares how one woman's relationship to her faith community affected her experience of sex. She describes her journey from viewing her virginity as her identity to shame affecting her to the point of not being able to look anyone in the eye after having her first sexual experience on her wedding night. She explains how "sex felt dirty and wrong and sinful even though I was married and it was supposed to be okay now" and her feelings of being "soiled and tarnished" (Pugsley, 2014). It is clear that although her experience of shame came in the aftermath of the act, it affected her entire sense of self.

The purpose of this study is to investigate similar instances that are described above and explore the lived experience of shame surrounding such behaviours. I have a hunch that shame plays a large role in such a process, and her experience as well as mine might be a familiar one for many individuals exploring their spirituality along with their sexuality.

**Relevance of the Topic to Psychospirituality**

This timely topic is of great relevance to the area of psychospirituality. Recent results of studies have shown that, among Danish adults aged eighteen to thirty, 68% of men and 18% of women use pornography on a weekly basis (Hald, 2006). Furthermore, among pastors, 37% identified that viewing porn was a "current struggle" for them (Leadership Journal, 2000, as cited in Covenant Eyes, 2013). With studies showing that an increase in pornography viewing is correlated with loneliness and major depression (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), and a decrease in support for women's rights and a trivialization of rape (Zillmann & Bryant, 1984, as cited in Covenant Eyes, 2013), such practices seem related to sexual harassment and abuse, such as the recent allegations made by eight women accusing Jian Ghomeshi of violence involving sexual harassment (CTV, 2014). Because of these statistics and the effects such practices have, a description of the essence of shame among emerging adults might help to infer the effects it has in relation to these instances. Such a description might also allow for individuals to reflect upon what influences the experience of shame might have on the self, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual well-being.

In addition, there has also been a recent increase in focus and research on 'hook up culture,' defined as sexual relationships experienced without any sense of commitment or exclusivity (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). Along with this research, there has been increased attention paid to the concept of the emerging adult, characterized by people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, which marks a new independence from social roles and normative expectations (Arnett, 2000). While sexual and spiritual identities are important aspects of self, a vulnerability to experience shame

exists when freedom from societal roles and expectations is met with strict rules and standards, an example of this being the many faith communities morally opposed to premarital sexual behaviours (Barkan, 2006). Both the concepts of 'hook up' culture and emerging adulthood create a rich landscape for exploration, and when overlapping these ideas with spirituality, sexuality, and relationship with a faith community, it can be seen how navigating such important terrain at such a time in life can be a challenge. The desire to understand one's place in his or her faith community, peer group, and family, as well as his or her own sexual identity, illustrates the many social forces that are also at play within one's development. A study such as this can be key to the healthy formation of a more complete, holistic sense of self, as the harmonious functioning of an integrated human involves the integration of the spiritual as well as the sexual (Helminiak, 1998).

This study is also important for faith communities who are interested in the healthy development of their congregation. Should certain practices result in experiences of shame among the communities' members, further exploration and understanding of the phenomenon of shame opens the door for institutions of faith to implement practices to alleviate such experiences, nurturing healthy psychospiritual development within this demographic. A lack of understanding of the phenomenology of shame might therefore result in such communities contributing to shame-related trauma experienced by its members. Along with faith communities, institutions such as counselling training centres and mental health services can benefit from this research. Because shame has been deemed an emotion central to an individual's human experience (Heller, 1982), any institution with the goal of promoting complete, holistic development of individuals can benefit from this study.

With a greater emphasis being placed on the study of the emerging adulthood demographic, more focus is needed to explore how individuals of this group are developing in all aspects of their life. As mentioned previously, harmonious functioning of both spiritual and sexual components of an individual's sense of self are key components to the integration of a healthy individual (Helminiak, 1998). With such knowledge, both individuals and societal systems such as families and faith communities might better understand how to further alleviate negative aspects of the experience of shame, equipping individuals to develop healthier understandings of themselves, while also contributing to healthy relationships between individuals and communities.

Not only can the findings of this research help individuals, it can also better prepare counsellors and helping professionals to greater understand shame experienced in those whom they serve, expanding their knowledge base and assisting them in being effective in the human services field.

**Research Problem and Question**

Shame affects both the soul and the body (Heller, 2003). Simply for this reason, a further exploration into the experience of shame is needed and relevant. If shame has the capacity to debilitate our spiritual connection with our self, others, and our world, how are we meant to live satisfying and meaningful lives? Because of the high prevalence of shame in Western culture along with its difficulty in being easily noticed (Scheff, 1988), it is extremely important that effort is spent to shed light on this experience.

For these reasons, the aim of this study is an attempt to describe and better understand the lived experience of shame regarding sexual behaviour. Because shame causes withdrawal and isolation (Wong & Tsai, 2007), if we are able to discuss our

shame through understanding the experience more, we might effectively fight against it through reflecting upon what influences shame might have on the self, interpersonal relationships and spiritual well-being, as well as its relationships with communities and institutions.

As discussed, the concepts of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and hook up culture (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012) create a rich space for such a topic to be studied. For example, the Christian tradition has certain normative practices concerning sexual behaviours. Because an individual might belong to the emerging adulthood demographic as well as a Christian faith community, it is reasonable to consider that he or she might experience shame when navigating his or her spiritual as well as sexual development. For this reason, the research question is as follows: What is the experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community? Before continuing, it is important to address several understandings within the research question.

The term 'sexuality' as it is used throughout this work will be defined as the aspect of oneself that includes one's sexual interest, attraction to others, and one's capacity to have erotic experiences and responses (Boundless, 2016). The understanding of sexual behaviour will include a wide range of behaviours and warrants explanation in order to reach a sense of clarity. In this context, sexual behaviour is defined as any physical and sexual contact between two or more consenting persons, or experienced by an individual. This definition includes acts such as masturbation, kissing, sexual touching, oral sex, and vaginal or anal intercourse. Furthermore, this research can bring about just as important and relevant results from the shame experienced by the thoughts,

desires, fantasies, and the like, of such sexual behaviours. For this reason, I have opted for the word 'surrounding' in my research question as opposed to 'resulting from' or 'involving.' Having such thoughts in relation to behaviours can very well bring about feelings of shame; thus, they are important to include in such research. Furthermore, interesting description might come as the result of shame experienced from certain behaviours, and how shame influences the thoughts and actions related to other sexual behaviours the same individual has yet to experience. It is important to state that this study is not interested solely in LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, queer) or heterosexual relationships. Although the way someone identifies him or herself might influence the study, it is not of interest to ensure that only one sexual identity is represented, thereby delimiting the study as a non-determining factor.

The context of faith community also warrants exploration. Although very relevant and important work could be done by exploring the experience of shame among different religions or churches, that is not the aim of this work. Instead, which religion one subscribes to or one's faith is of little importance. What is of importance is that the individual's spirituality is grounded in some form of membership to a spiritual institution, which is what I will refer to as a faith community. What is critical, and is required of the participants, is that they currently self-identify as being spiritually grounded in a faith community. A lack of restriction on the denomination or religion the faith community from which each participant originates will potentially open up space for discussion regarding differences of shame experiences among denominations or religions; however, I reiterate that this will not be the primary focus of this research, and thus creates another delimiting aspect of the study.

Furthermore, while I often use the term ‘spirituality’ in this work, I do not acknowledge spirituality to solely relate to the Christian faith. At times I also refer to Christian text and Christian story, and do so not as to ground this work in Christianity, but instead bring such narratives into this writing from my exposure to such texts in my personal history. The term ‘spirituality’ will be understood in this work through the interpretation of Helminiak (1998), who considers it “that dimension of the human mind that makes us self-aware, self-transcending, open-ended, always one step beyond our explicit articulations” (p. 121).

Despite the importance of exploring the lived experience of shame among individuals identifying with a particular religious denomination or as a certain sexual minority, these parameters are not directly relevant to this study into the phenomenology of shame and thus are not included as criteria, although individuals identifying within these groups will still be considered for this study. Other factors, such as the participant’s socioeconomic status or any cultural variations, will also not be directly considered, despite these factors potentially influencing the specific faith or denomination of faith community to which the individual belongs. Furthermore, this study is limited in that it will explore the lived experience of shame among individuals between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Although the experience of shame among other age groups might have similarities to emerging adults’ experience of shame, this will only be an inference that can be made from the results of this study.

Concerning the limitations, or constraints on generalizability, of this study, it is important that my own identity be understood as an aspect to this study that limits it. I identify as a heterosexual Caucasian male with a liberal Christian background, and

because these identities belong to the hegemonic discourse of today's Canadian culture, the possibility exists for a certain blindness to occur with how I approach this study, along with my various readings and interpretations of the texts incorporated into this research. Through my own reflectivity and reflexivity with my supervisor I am continually monitoring and working to understand how my identity impacts this work; however, it might not be fully known how my own self is a bias, and therefore, a limitation, to this research at this time.

It is important to reiterate that the aim of this study is an attempt to describe and better understand the lived experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community. It will be natural to want to generalize or interpret the result of this study to apply to individuals outside of the parameters of this study, or to shame experiences that are not directly related to sexual behaviour; however, the number of participants and the specified criteria limit this study and so any generalizations or inferences made from the result will be purely speculative. Because the chosen approach is interested solely in describing the essence of the experience of shame, the result is therefore an attempt at such description. This study does not aim to make new or ground-breaking connections to the ongoing body of research on shame, and thus it is contained in this way. It is also important to note that this work shifts from future, to present, and finally to past tense, as it is written in real time. This shifting verb tense was done purposefully as a means of bringing the reader along with me through the work.

There are also are many aspects of this study that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the work, which will be considered its delimitations. The decision to use

the broad term ‘faith community’ in this research allows for a breadth of respondents across multiple religious faiths and therefore provides a boundary, or lack thereof, of a specific faith or religion to study. Further, the questions outlined and chosen for the interviews are grounded in a single methodology, providing a limit to the scope of the inquiry. Other such delimitations, such as chosen literature to review, are noted within and throughout the work and are justified with appropriate criteria.

## Chapter Two: Conversations with Shame and Sexuality

No one likes to talk about his or her shame, let alone experience it. While often deemed an emotion, it usually conjures up imagery of averted eyes, a flushed face, and withdrawal from those around us. It has been described as a "sickness of the soul" (Tomkins, Sedgwick, & Frank, 1995, p. 133, as cited in Wong & Tsai, 2007). Yet despite our fear of discussing or experiencing shame, it has also been nominated as the premier social emotion (Scheff, 2000). How is it that an experience so central to our humanness can at the same time be treated as an 'avoid at all costs' experience? Such a question is a starting place for an exploration into the history of shame, a discovery in how shame operates within and between individuals, and a commentary on the ramifications of such an experience related to how we live our lives in the systems that make up our society as a whole. Furthermore, the topic of shame is one of great complexity, and because of this it warrants close observation. The focus of my specific question in relation to shame grew not from one certain place in time; however, it represents more of a culmination of hunch and experience, with some literature acting as the catalyst in the 'leap of faith' experience that began this process.

Being an individual who spent a number of years within a faith community meant that, in one way or another, I was influenced by it. Through such influence I worked hard to be what it was I felt my church wanted me to be. Meanwhile, I also experienced influences from other systems in my life to which I belonged. Because of this multi-directional pull, I experienced several aspects and levels of shame, until I recognized the experience and adjusted my circumstances for the better, thus alleviating it.

Recently there has been an increase in non-committing sexual relationships in Western culture (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012), especially among emerging adults (Arnett, 2000), and these two understandings, along with an acknowledgement of the many faith communities morally opposed to premarital sexual behaviours (Barkan, 2006), creates a landscape for an abundance of shame to be experienced when attempting to conform to sexual norms of the culture, and at the same time conform to the standards set forth by an individual's faith community.

The following review aims to explore the existing literature relevant to the topic of shame and its relationship to sexuality and faith throughout history. Prominent scholars focused on the study of shame will be explored and their theories and research critiqued as a means of properly orienting the reader before continuing with this study of the lived experience of shame. Because shame is a complex and multilayered emotion affecting many aspects of the human condition (Heller, 2003), a brief and concise critique of relevant literature will be a challenge to present. Furthermore, because the experience of shame is grounded in the social matrix (Scheff, 1988), it is important to explore the role history has played in how shame is understood today, as well as how sexuality and spirituality are related to the experience of shame. For this reason, this literature review will be divided into an exploration of the psychosocial components of shame as well as an historical exploration of sexuality.

Within the exploration of the psychosocial components of shame, this review will follow a chronological order, organized by theorist, highlighting the contributions of prominent scholars to the literature of shame. Because many recent shame researchers have built upon and commented on past conceptualizations of shame, brief deviations

from a chronological timeline will occur throughout this review; however, the thread of this exploration will flow from the early twentieth century until the present. When discussing the history of sexuality, this review will greatly focus on the contributions of Foucault (1978, 1985, 1986), but will also be coloured by several authors who have critiqued his work, as well as other shame and history of sexuality theorists. Finally, this review will include commentary on the links among shame, sexuality, and spirituality, highlighting the importance of these three terms, their connection to each other, and how each of these terms is relevant to the present research. It is my aim that this exploration will result in a critical commentary that frames and informs this study.

**Psychosocial Components of Shame**

**Shame goes largely unnoticed.** Often considered to be the father of modern psychology, the exploration into the psychosocial phenomenon of shame begins with Sigmund Freud. In Freud's early work shame played an important role, as it was believed that hysteria was the result of hidden affects, one of which was shame, and that shame was an agent in causing repression within an individual (Freud, [1895] 1966, as cited in Scheff, 2003; Emad, 1972). Unfortunately, Freud later renounced this understanding and replaced shame with concepts of anxiety and guilt (Scheff, 2000), believing that guilt was closer related to psychopathology than shame (Gilbert, Pehl, & Allan, 1994). A reason for this belief was Freud's viewing of shame as a regressive emotion existing only in children, women, and savages (Scheff, 2000), potentially due to the lack of shame he noticed in himself and colleagues (Scheff, 2003), which is no doubt a limitation of Freud's understanding of shame and raises an important point worthy of exploration.

It has been noted that despite overlooking the concept of shame, themes of shame existed in abundance in Freud's own dreams (Kilborne, 1992), suggesting that shame did in fact play a larger role than Freud understood. How could it be that such a prominent figure failed to recognize the importance of such a fundamental experience? It has been argued there was an emphasis placed on guilt over shame because of a greater comfort in working with guilt in psychoanalysis than with shame, since often one's shame appears when dealing with another's (Bertelsen, 1996). Although Freud initially believed that shame was an agent of repression (Emad, 1972), it would appear that Freud's repression of his own shame resulted in the failure of the experience playing a central role in his work. When Freud claims that shame is a regressive emotion, he seems to base such a belief on his own experiences of shame, which he could not access potentially because of his own repression of such emotions. This limitation prevents Freud's work on shame to be considered central to present understandings of the experience, yet it alludes to the power shame might have in one's experience, making Freud's understanding of shame, or lack thereof, important and beneficial to this review.

Despite shame today being understood by many as a social emotion (Scheff, 2000), Freud focused on the location of shame within individuals as opposed to viewing it within the social matrix (Kilborne, 1992; Scheff, 2000; Scheff, 2003). This inability to include a social context when working with shame is a limitation of Freud's contribution to shame literature as it prevented Freud from fully developing an understanding of it in his work. What is more, shame has been an often neglected experience in early depth psychology (Hultberg, 1988) due to a struggle in converting from drive theory to include

aspects of the social world, which has potentially held back the study of shame from unfolding (Scheff, 2003).

A struggle to include social aspects in the study of shame elucidates an important aspect of the power of the experience. The field of psychoanalysis, founded upon careful and meticulous examination of one's own and another's psyche, failed for years to fully recognize and elaborate on a central social emotion (Scheff, 2000). I submit that this failure is not the result of haphazard or poorly developed theories, but instead due to the power of shame itself. Lewis (1971) recognizes that "unanalyzed shame in the patient-therapist relationship is a special contributor for the negative therapeutic reaction" (p. 419). If shame does not want to be noticed, thrives in silence, and lashes out when it is called upon, it appears essential to fight against its wishes by bringing it to the surface, and although dis-ease will come along with it, such a process will be necessary in order to further understand the means by which shame operates. As explored above, shame appears to have been cast into silence throughout the beginning stages of modern psychology by bubbling to the surface within the analyst any time it was decided that shame needed to be looked at more closely.

Shame continued to evade psychologists and psychoanalysts who came after Freud, and although some were able to include examples or imply shame in their theories of personality and development, it often eluded definition or even naming (Scheff, 2003). At this point in the early 1900s it appears that shame was able to evade a careful analysis or phenomenological understanding due to the focus of such prominent scholars focusing the majority of their efforts on the intrapersonal workings of the human psyche, rather

than developing theories to include the role of greater society on the functioning of an individual's experience.

**Shame as a psychosocial stage of development.** Despite a conceptualization of shame that spanned the breadth of the human life cycle, it was in 1950 that Erik Erikson proposed a theory of human development, grounded in psychoanalytic drive theory, which outlined a concept of shame including aspects of the social matrix and benefited the field of shame research. Of his eight stages of human development the crisis of his second stage was labeled "autonomy vs. shame and doubt" and was experienced in children aged one-and-a-half to three years old (Erikson, 1950, as cited in Bentley, 2007). Erikson put forth simply that, as the child begins to stand on his or her own two feet and learn to control his or her anal sphincter muscles, the child is entering a new world of experiences (Jacoby, 1994). The crisis for the child exists in his or her ability to successfully control the sphincter muscles and develop consequent autonomy, or fail to do so, resulting in the child's first experience of shame and doubt. The sensitivity to this crisis, according to Erikson, is also challenged because it occurs at a time when the child learns to stand, and in his or her ability to do so, realizes just how small the child is in relation to the rest of the world, resulting in a threat to the child's self-confidence (Jacoby, 1994). According to Erikson, because of a child's lack of size and power compared to an adult, accompanied by an inability to achieve what Erikson considered autonomy, the child then develops a conscience which compulsively turns in on itself instead of successfully experimenting with the external world (Jacoby, 1994).

Because Erikson's theory suggests that one cannot move on to the next stage of development until the prior stage has been resolved (Erikson, 1950, as cited in Bentley,

2007) the result of this is a susceptibility to shame experiences as the child continues to mature. This view limits the scope of shame to a small window of development in which an individual either resolves his or her crisis and develops greater autonomy, or fails and remains subject to shameful experiences until the crisis is resolved. As later theories of shame were developed, this limiting view was abandoned for conceptualizations that saw shame occurring across the majority of an individual's lifespan.

Despite this limited view of shame, Jacoby (1994) makes a connection between drive-theory, put forth by Freud (1965, as cited in Jacoby, 1994) and used to inform Erikson's theory, and the contribution Erikson made to the study of shame. He explains "feelings of shame manifest themselves whenever conscience prohibits the urgent desire to show oneself. In such cases, feelings of shame rather than pleasure and desire accompany sexual activity" (Jacoby, 1994, p. 53). Considering this commentary on Erikson's theory in relation to my research question, it can be inferred that there is a strong connection among shame and sexual activity, specifically resulting from an individual's conscience that has turned inward on itself, hindering the suggested natural pleasure and desire that should accompany sexual activity. The shame experienced in nakedness in front of another is the result of the individual's conscience condemning the pleasure and excitement in the experience. There are many connections that can be made to this concept that will be explored later.

Erikson (1950, as cited in Bentley, 2007) made important contributions to the study of shame with his theory of psychosocial development, in part from the inclusion of influences from the social world on an individual's experience of shame. The social matrix had yet to be adequately explored and included in theories up until this point.

Erikson also suggested that when an individual has an impulse to hide one's face, i.e., a shame experience, the result is an experience of rage expressed inward, towards oneself (Jacoby, 1994). This initial understanding of the role of anger in relation to shame will have more implications as I continue to explore relevant literature. Although Freud's concept of shame did not play a major role in his theory, Erikson was able to build upon Freudian thinking and expand on it by involving the influence of others on the experience of shame. Because his theory requires an individual to solve a psychosocial crisis before moving on to the next stage of development, the experience of shame is one that can be first experienced before the age of three, and if not successfully resolved, can result in an individual living with shame for many years, whether conscious or unconsciously. When Erikson takes this position he assumes, similar to Freud, that shame is experienced primarily in childhood, and regressive, so long as the crisis of the stage is successfully resolved.

This concept of shame in relation to my research question suggests that an individual will either be susceptible to shameful experiences or have developed resilience to shame before he or she reach the age of emerging adulthood. If this were valid, the belonging of the individual to a faith community during emerging adulthood or even adolescence would be of little importance in Erikson's view. Instead, the focus would rest significantly on the child's experience between the ages of one-and-a-half to three years of age, when he or she faced this shame-related psychosocial stage of development. It is here, according to Erikson, where the child would develop either a resiliency or susceptibility to shame or to autonomy. Although childhood development is extremely important and greatly influences who we become as adults, I do not think it is reasonable

to be taken as the sole experience that shapes who we are as emerging adults and onward through development and cannot accept such a simple and one dimensional approach to the development of shame within an individual. I posit that even if an individual develops resilience to shame experiences, a change in their social environment (e.g., entering into a faith community) may result in new experiences of shame the individual had not felt before. Furthermore, an individual can relate to his or her experience of shame differently across time. If one has an experience of shame in adolescence, the experience has the potential to be felt in different ways for the individual when he or she enters emerging adulthood, middle age, and so on.

Although Erikson succeeded in including an aspect of the social matrix within his conceptualization of shame and early childhood experiences are an important concept to the study of shame that should not be ignored, his simple theory of shame developing within a single psychosocial stage does not account for the multitude of other factors which might be at play within an individual and his or her environment in order for shame experiences to be experienced or for resilience to be developed. To place such great importance upon an eighteen-month period of time within a child's development to suggest how they might handle shame experiences for the rest of their life is difficult to accept and limiting considering the broad range of harmful effects of shame experienced among individuals across their lifespan in the literature today. I struggle with the notion that the origins of shame are solely the result of when one learns to control their sphincter muscles and the response of the caregivers to this process.

Furthermore, Erikson is still considered to be grouped together with other psychologists who were unable to explicitly define shame and use it as a central

component of their work related to the development of self-esteem or its role in psychopathology up to this point in history (Scheff, 2003). Despite these shortcomings, his work in *Childhood and Society* in 1950 is a benchmark in shame literature for its acknowledgement of the social matrix in relation to the experience of shame, and allowed for those who came afterward to build upon important aspects of his theory.

**The social component of shame.** It was an American sociologist by the name of Helen Lynd who was the first to attempt to integrate the social and psychological components of shame in her work *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (1958), which makes her a prominent figure in the study of shame. Up until this point, the concepts of shame and guilt had not been differentiated, and in many scenarios were used synonymously. Lynd (1958) expertly suggests the distinction that guilt surrounds standards that have been internalized, whereas shame is a response to others, identifying that "others are related to oneself as audience – whether the audience gives approval or disapproval" (p. 21). She also comments that guilt and shame often overlap, and offers this belief as one reason why the study of shame has fallen to the wayside of guilt. The majority of her work finds the nature of shame grounded within historical literature, such as poems, plays, and novels. This approach is beneficial to the exploration of shame, as up until this point it had still continued to be viewed solely as an intrapersonal phenomenon. By Lynd (1958) viewing shame through the lens of popular literature, she enmeshes the social component of the lifeworld into her description of the nature of shame.

In her book, Lynd (1958) identifies the following important aspects of the experience of shame:

1. Exposure, Particularly Unexpected Exposure – "The exposure may be to others, but whether others are or are not involved, it is always . . . exposure to one's own eyes." (pp. 27-28)
2. Incongruity or Inappropriateness – "Being taken unawares is shameful when what is suddenly exposed is incongruous with, or glaringly inappropriate to, the situation, or to our previous image of ourselves in it." (p. 34)
3. Threat to Trust – "In an experience of shame trust is seriously jeopardized or destroyed." (p. 43)
4. Involvement of the Whole Self – "Experiences of shame throw a flooding light on what and who we are and what the world we live in is." (p. 49)
5. Confronting of Tragedy – "Identifications with other persons in situations that make them feel ashamed lead beyond such experiences of shame… to the confrontation of the human condition and the possibilities and the tragic limitations of man's [sic] lot." (p. 56)
6. Difficulty in Communicating Shame – "The very fact that shame is an isolating experience also means that if one can find ways of sharing and communicating it this communication can bring about particular closeness with other persons and with other groups." (p. 66)

Lynd's (1958) description of the nature of shame is the first to shed a light on the significance of shame to the human experience in its entirety. Her work comments on the importance of studying shame and its pervasiveness in our culture; and, as noted above, begins to explore the importance of communicating our shameful experiences. She suggests that, despite the difficulty in speaking of such experiences, communicating

shame can be an experience of "entering into the mind and feelings of another person" (Lynd, 1958, p. 249), arguing that such a risk can bring about connection between two people. This connection is of great benefit to the literature on shame, and can be considered a work that shed light on the importance of the study of shame and its effects. Brown (2012) recently published her book *Daring Greatly,* based on her own qualitative research on shame, in which she eloquently agrees with Lynd when she writes: "If we speak shame, it begins to wither" (p. 58).

A significant component of Lynd's (1958) conceptualization of shame is her wise understanding that successfully facing and communicating our shameful experiences can "inform the self, and become a revelation of oneself, of one's society, and of the human situation" (p. 71); however, it is of extreme importance to note the pervasive result of not successfully communicating our shameful experiences, which results in "refusing to recognize the wound, covering the isolating effect of shame through depersonalization and adaptation to any approved codes" (p. 71). The significance of the effects of not communicating shame cannot be understated. If a failure to successfully communicate our shameful experiences breaks connection with others and results in depersonalization and adaptation to external codes of conduct and behaviour, it is understandable that shame has the capability of affecting "the whole person – the psyche or soul and the body" (Heller, 2003, p. 1016).

Lynd's (1958) work inevitably makes one consider the state of Western society today. If it is valid that depersonalization and an acceptance of norms of conduct communicated to us from an institution in society is experienced from attempting to cover up shame, is it any wonder that the wounds of shame affect individuals in ways that

make us “more debt-ridden, obese, medicated, and addicted than we ever have been” (Brown, 2012, p. 138)? If shame can result in a loss of the very things that make us human, what are we doing, how are we acting, and where are we going in an attempt to replace this loss of self?

As noted above, Lynd (1958) describes how we might connect with others from our shameful experiences. Despite shame causing isolation (Lynd, 1958), it appears to exist in an oil-and-water relationship with connection and love, as described by German philosopher Riezler’s (1943) article “Comment on the Social Psychology of Shame”: “Shame decreases with increasing love, increases with decreasing love. It takes its leave when love reaches its peak and reappears when love takes its leave. Shame protects love in sex against sex without love” (p. 462).

When considering the above descriptors of shame in relation to this present study, it can be inferred just how complex shame experiences might be when they surround sexual behaviour and faith communities. Love is considered by most to be related to sex, and in my experience love is often a central message delivered by faith communities to their members. It is understandable how an individual might be confused who is exposed to messages of love and connection, but is also exposed to messages of conditions of sexual behaviour and ideas regarding sexuality, opening the door for shame to be experienced. If shame, by its very nature, contributes to the break in connection with the experience of love, how is it that faith communities can successfully send a message of love and connection to their members, while also placing conditions and norms of certain behaviours upon those same individuals? A study into the lived

experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belong to faith communities might allow one to infer how this question might be answered.

Along with the above outlined contributions to the study of shame, Lynd (1958) also shed light on an important concept of the nature of shame that could also explain why shame failed to play a prominent role in theories up until this point.

> However much schools of psychoanalysis may differ in their explanations of fear of exposure, shame, humiliation, there can be no doubt of the extent to which shame operates in the analytic hour, nor of the intensification of shame if there is a lack of understanding, or any sign of contempt, on the part of the analyst. But, here again, shame is the outcome not only of exposing oneself to another person but of the exposure to oneself of parts of the self that one has not recognized and whose existence one is reluctant to admit. (p. 31)

This idea put forth by Lynd (1958), along with her contributions on the nature and effects of communicating shame to others, was important work upon which others would later build. It is clear how her conceptualization of shame through historical literature brought aspects of the experience to light that had once existed in darkness, which can be seen as a great benefit to the literature on shame up until this point. This approach, of course, differed greatly from psychoanalytic conceptualizations of shame, concerned largely with the inner workings of the individual psyche. In order to develop a full experiential understanding of the nature of shame it can be seen how both approaches are necessary, and without such an understanding from Lynd (1958), her conceptualization is limited in that it is grounded solely in viewing shame from a social and historical context. Despite

this, her work called attention for a need to merge these approaches together when seeking a conceptualization of this complex and multilayered experience.

**The categorization of shame.** Several years later, Lewis (1971), in her book *Guilt and Shame in Neurosis*, included social aspects of Lynd's (1958) conceptualization of shame to her psychoanalytic background. Her in-depth study of shame among patients and their therapists categorized and made a distinction between acknowledged and unacknowledged shame, noting that, between both the therapist as well as the patient, shame experiences went largely unnoticed and unacknowledged (Lewis, 1971; Scheff, 2003). She classified the unacknowledged shame experiences into *overt, undifferentiated* shame and *bypassed* shame. Both of these categories of unacknowledged shame include a perception of the negative evaluation of self (Lewis, 1971; Scheff, 1988), but they differ in an important way. In an overt, undifferentiated shame experience, painful emotions are felt; however, they are not identified as shame, and instead include feeling foolish, inadequate, vulnerable, as having low self-esteem, etc. (Lewis, 1971; Scheff, 1988). Along with the inability to identify the experience as shame, the experiencer also exhibits hiding behaviour such as an averted gaze, blushing, or speech disruption (Lewis 1971; Scheff, 1988).

The experience of bypassed shame differs from an overt, undifferentiated shame experience in that the overt shame markers found in overt, undifferentiated shame become "subtle and covert" and "although thought and speech are not obviously disrupted, they take on a speeded-up, repetitive quality that Lewis refers to as *obsessive*" (Scheff, 1988, p. 401). The detail, extent, and depth of the work Lewis (1971) carried out into the study of shame made a pivotal impact on how the experience of shame is studied

today. This study was the first of its kind to reach such depth in understanding the physical signs of shame experiences, calling attention to the complexity of the experience and making it a benchmark in the history of shame literature.

Another important aspect of Lewis' (1971) work that would later be built upon came from her connection of a shame experience resulting in a further shame experience. In one of the cases she carefully explores the incongruous experience of a patient commenting how she hates a situation, where the comment was immediately followed by a laugh. Lewis describes how the acknowledgment of the incongruity can result in a further shame experience, where one is ashamed for being ashamed. She expands on this belief, exploring how self-directed anger can result from the helplessness one feels from a shame experience, resulting in anger directed outwardly, which she termed as 'humiliated fury.' Such a reaction can once again result in a shame experience; due to the individual becoming outwardly angry, which has the effect of increasing the initial experience of shame. This conclusion assumes that one would feel helpless in such a situation; however, this concept is one expanded upon from Erikson (1950) and still considered and studied today (see Scheff, 1988; Bushman, Nezlek, Olthof, Stegge, & Thomaes, 2011), showing its ability to be generalized. These reaction patterns, especially if the initial shame reaction goes unacknowledged, can create quite the dilemma for an individual seeking to make sense of their experience.

In her exploration of the phenomenology of shame, Lewis (1971) described shame as being "contagious" (p. 15), and suggests "shame is probably a universal reaction to unrequited or thwarted love." (p. 16). The explicit connection between shame and love is sparse within the literature; however, it should not go understated. Although

it is merely suggested in this case, there might very well be a deep connection between the two experiences, especially considering how individuals are able to heal from shameful experiences, as will be discussed later.

Lewis also introduced the important concept of the Other to experiences of shame, stating, "Shame brings into focal awareness both the self and the "other", with the imagery that the "other" rejects the self." (Lewis, 1971, p. 25). The concept of the Other in relation to the self in shame reactions is a major point that differentiates shame from guilt, as the Other does not come into play in a guilt reaction, while it is responsible for paralyzing the self in a shame reaction (Lewis, 1971). Here is where Lewis' work is significantly impacted by the work of Lynd (1958): her concept of the Other is a merging of Lynd's important contribution of the role the social matrix plays in the experience of shame, combined with Lewis' in-depth and intrapersonal and interpersonal study of the phenomenology of shame from a psychoanalytic framework. Together, these two understandings seem to strengthen the understanding of shame to a level which further conceptualizes it as an experience affecting an individual intrapersonally, interpersonally, and to a larger extent among the society to which one belongs.

Michael Lewis (2003) later used the metaphor of a machine when describing the distinction between shame and guilt. In a guilt reaction, he explains that the command to the machine is to stop functioning and alter the behaviour in order to not make the same error. This reaction is healthy for the machine because it helps to correct questionable behaviour. In a shame reaction the command is also to stop the functioning of the machine, but "rather than resetting the machine toward action, it stops the machine. Any action becomes impossible since the machine itself is wrong" (Lewis, 2003, p. 1188).

A final distinction to help understand the difference between these experiences is offered by Brown (2012): "Guilt = I did something bad. Shame = I am bad." (p. 71). The concept of the Other is crucial to understand when we compare the two states. Because the Other is not at play in a guilt reaction, the concept of self does not come into question. According to Lewis (1971), the self is only involved in a shame reaction when we are comparing the condition of our self to some Other. Guilt is therefore a healthy response when compared to shame because it helps to correct behaviour without there being a harmful effect on who the individual is as a person. Because of the role of the Other in a shame reaction and the rejection, either actual or perceived, of the self from the Other, it can be seen how our sense of self is called into question and can then result in depersonalization and acceptance of codes we perceive to be important to the Other, as was discussed earlier in relation to Lynd's (1958) work.

In the context of faith communities, it can be seen what a major role the Other might play in shame experiences for individuals who hold a belief in God and how significant these experiences might be. For example, the omnipresent God of my upbringing could be seen as the Other, whose omnipotence had the ability to punish, scorn, and disapprove of everything that He saw, which so happened to be *everything*. His presence was inescapable and, because I was required to be a certain way, accomplish certain things, or measure myself up against a certain standard, I inevitably fell short and thus the door opened for the experience of shame to affect my self. If this understanding is valid, it is clear not only how pervasive an experience of shame can be in this context, but just how damaging it can be to individuals who are unable to communicate their lived experience of shame to another.

It is important to also consider Lewis' (1971) understanding of shame as a "universal reaction to unrequited . . . love" (p. 16), which has particular importance to this study in the context of faith communities. If the door allowing shame to be felt opens as the result of love an individual shows another but is unable to feel in return, an individual's belief of the nature of God might then be called into question. If an individual were to believe in God as an unconditional lover, and if, as Lewis suggests, shame is a reaction to love we experience as unreturned, this seems to assume there exists a break in the connection between experiencing some aspect of love from God for that individual if their experience of shame is related to their faith in God.

Considering Lynd's (1958) conceptualization of shame, if it is also the case that depersonalization and the adherence to other norms is the result of an effort to cover up a shame experience, could it be that shame hijacks individuals' understanding and acceptance of their selves, and this hijacking is the very break which separates them from experiencing the love they seek from the Other, in this case, the God they believe in? If so, how might shame initially enter the equation? The rules and norms existing in faith communities are often grounded on interpretations of biblical principles, and these interpretations outline how the faith community and its members exist within the community – they act as a 'way of life' for the people of the institution and hold the community together. However, shame can enter the experience of an individual when the norms or rules instituted by the faith community are not upheld by the individual, which immediately results in the separation of self from the Other, as understood by Lewis (1971). Could it be that the very existence of norms and rules creates space for shame to be experienced when the same norms and rules are not lived up to, and the inevitable

shame reactions experienced by individuals failing to live up to those norms then begin to lose their sense of self, resulting in an inability for them to feel love from the Other, in this case, the very God they are seeking?

If this experience is possible, faith communities who are attempting to better understand how to relate to their congregation might gain insight from this present study, especially in relation to matters of sexuality, which Lewis (1971) considered to be closely linked with experiences of shame. Heller (1982) comments, "It is not true that we cannot be ashamed of a feeling or a desire: we can, if, for instance, we desire something which supposedly no one else does" (p. 217). If norms exist concerning sexual behaviour within faith communities, and the members desire something that goes against these norms, it holds veracity that shame can be experienced when the desire does not appear to be desired by others. With the recent appearance of hook up culture (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012) within our society among emerging adults, it is natural that these adults would experience a tendency towards this behaviour. Should they also belong to a faith community, when shame inevitably enters, it encourages isolation (Lynd, 1958), making communication of the experience difficult.

When considering the communication of shame from one to another, Lewis (1971) recognized the significant challenges in doing so, observing "just as shame has an intrinsic tendency to encourage hiding, so there is a tendency for the observer of another's shame to turn away from it" (pp. 15-16). This understanding is of great importance to the field of shame research, as theorists would later use such a concept to explore how individuals are able to heal from their shameful experiences (van Vliet, 2009), which will be discussed later. Lewis (1971) related this understanding to the

therapeutic relationship, noting that shame existing within the patient or the therapist will negatively affect the treatment and exacerbate the presenting symptoms of the patient. Not only is this belief a starting point for an exploration into how therapists and their clients react to their experiences of shame within the context of therapy, it sheds light on the power of shame and what a challenge it is to discuss the lived experience of shame in order to resolve it. The psychotherapists that Lewis (1971) studied might be considered similar to the role of a pastor within a faith community, as a power differential exists between the pastor and member of the congregation or the psychotherapist and the client, and both of these roles have the capacity to exhibit influence over those they aim to help. According to the isolating effects of shame suggested by Lynd (1958), along with its capacity for even observers to turn away from it suggested by Lewis (1971), without proper understanding, accepting, and communicating of our own individual lived experience of shame as a universal human experience, it might not matter what role an individual takes up within society, the contagiousness of shame could affect an individual regardless.

An interesting aspect of Lewis' (1971) research is her connection between the experience of shame and sexual behaviour. She considers shame to be involved in at least certain aspects of the sex drive as well as sexual frustration, and is so pervasive that it "occurs in connection with sexual activity even when there is no moral transgression" (p. 85). Connecting this statement once again to the study of lived experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community, it appears that shame is felt surrounding sexual behaviour *even if one does not act against his or her moral code*. This understanding suggests there is an important link between

shame and sexual behaviour, regardless of whether or not an individual holds personal moral codes surrounding sexual behaviours. This relationship will be explored in greater detail later.

Although Lewis' (1971) work in the area of shame research was greatly influential, Scheff (2003) notes the inability of her as well as her predecessors to explore and include the history of shame and how it has come to be such a prevalent experience in today's world, despite it being largely unacknowledged (Lewis, 1971). Furthermore, notwithstanding Lewis (1971) making initial important connections among sexuality and the experience of shame, her discoveries are the results of individual cases, largely scattered throughout her work, and she fails to fully conceptualize a reason for this close relationship among the two. Perhaps due to the fact that Lewis' (1971) work is centred in psychoanalysis, she too fails to fully incorporate the social implications of her findings despite her ground-breaking strides in merging Lynd's (1958) understandings of the phenomenology of shame with her own. Thankfully, later sociologists will connect her pivotal work with sociological theory.

The above outlines some of the most influential works concerning the conceptualizing of the experience of shame in the twentieth century. In more recent years there has gradually been more attention paid to shame as a self-conscious emotion in research, which has resulted in more collective cross-disciplinary collaboration of ideas regarding the theoretical understanding of shame, the most important of which will now be explored.

**Shame versus guilt.** Tangney and Dearing (2002) wrote an important and exciting work, *Shame and Guilt*, which brought many aspects of previous theorists views

of shame and guilt together, and found empirical evidence to support many of their claims. For example, a study carried out examining individual's counterfactual thinking (creating alternate outcomes of past events) showed strong support for Lewis' (1971) initial distinction between shame and guilt, believing they differ in focus on self versus behaviour (Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994, as cited in Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Results of this study showed that when individuals were asked to complete the phrase "If only…" in relation to the past event, people were more often to replace aspects of the self in connection with shame experiences, and replace aspects of the behaviour in connection with guilt experiences.

In a related study of the same series, individuals were directed to counterfactualize either the self or the behaviour in a hypothetical scenario and rate how much shame or guilt they would feel in such a situation. Researchers found that counterfactualizing the self resulted in greater feelings of shame, whereas counterfactualizing the behaviour in the scenario resulted in greater feelings of guilt (Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994, as cited in Tangney & Dearing, 2002). This research is important to the field of shame as it replicates and expands upon initial conceptualizations of the experience of shame thirty years after its beginning.

Through this research, Tangney and Dearing (2002) showed support for the position that shame and guilt are very distinct experiences, differing "not so much in the content or structure of the situations that engender them, but rather in the manner in which people construe self-relevant negative events" (p. 24). Tangney and Dearing also summarized important research involving the role of attributions in the experience of shame and guilt (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978, as cited in Tangney & Dearing,

2002), positing that in a guilt experience attributions are specific (an individual tends to focus on one single event or behaviour), internal (that individual acknowledges that the guilt experience occurred from something under his or her control), and unstable (the cause of the guilt event is related to temporary or unstable conditions). A shame experience is similar in that the individual attributes the event to internal factors; however, the individual sees the transgression as global (he or she attributes the event as a fault of the whole sense of self) and that this is a stable attribution (the relationship to the sense of self is relatively enduring) (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978, as cited in Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

It is also important to note research concerned with the role of empathy in experiences of shame and guilt. In one such study, children and adults reported experiences of shame and guilt and the results were coded (Tangney et al., 1994, as cited in Tangney & Dearing, 2002). They found that shame experiences often involved a concern with others' evaluation of the individual, whereas guilt experiences involved a concern about the effect the experiencer had on others. Their findings led them to believe that when an individual experiences guilt, he or she is more likely to feel empathy towards others than he or she would in a shame episode suggesting that "by its very nature, guilt forms a bridge to other-oriented empathic concern" (Tangney et al., 1994, as cited in Tangney & Dearing, 2002, p. 82). They provide evidence in another study to argue that shame operates in an opposite way in that it interferes with empathic responsiveness (Tangney, 1991, 1995, as cited in Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Despite the conclusions that were drawn from the research documented by Tangney and Dearing (2002), not all of their contributions neatly align with some of the

original conceptualizations and consequences of the experience of shame, which reflect a limitation in either their work, that done by original shame theorists such as Lewis (1971), or both. Tangney and Dearing (2002) seem to view guilt more as an adaptive emotion, as compared to their belief in the overarching maladaptive nature of shame. This view is supported by their research, showing that the nature of guilt focuses on reparative and correcting behaviours, as opposed to shame reactions that result in withdrawal, anger, and/or blame. Because of this belief, the pair diverges from Lewis' (1971) understanding that both shame and guilt create grounds for individuals to show symptoms of psychopathology. Tangney and Dearing's (2002) response to this is an understanding that "in guilt, there is an implicit distinction between self and behaviour that essentially protects the self from unwarranted global devaluation while keeping the door open for changing the guilt-inducing behaviour and/or for making amends for its consequences" (p. 118) making it a "hopeful, future-oriented moral-emotional experience" (pp. 118-119) which they argue is most likely unrelated to psychopathology.

It is important to note the different theoretical backgrounds of these two distinct positions that might reflect the divergence in conceptualizations or fundamental biases of either research team, as Lewis' (1971) work seems to ground itself within a psychoanalytic framework, whereas Tangney and Dearing (2002) have tended to focus their research and ground their arguments more on a scientific model of quantitative research. It is important to note the potential limitation of such an approach to research, as Tangney and Dearing (2002) are basing many of their results on scores from several measures of guilt-proneness and shame-proneness (most often the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ), the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory (SCAAI), and

the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA) and its variants) in order to condense a large sample population into several categories of values. Furthermore, such an approach contains the experience of shame and guilt to definitions upon which these measures are based. Although this process is necessary and provides exciting and significant results with great breadth across a population, it is important to highlight once again the aim of this present study, which is to describe, to a level of great depth, the essence of shame among a small population.

In a brief section of their work, Tangney and Dearing (2002) discuss the role of religious background in the propensity to experience shame and guilt. Although none of their studies directly focused on the role religious background plays in the experience of shame, which this review sees as a limitation of their work, they found no difference in proneness to guilt or shame as a function of individual's religious background. The pair admits their surprise with these findings, and also states "further research is needed . . . to take a more detailed look at the role of religion in the development of moral emotions" (p. 153).

From their important work, Tangney and Dearing (2002) brought together past studies of shame and guilt and challenged such claims with their own thorough research, making it a benchmark in how theorists understand shame and guilt today. From their understanding of shame it can be seen how these experiences might differ and the effects such differences might have on behavioural outcomes and individual understandings of self.

**The role of shame in conformity.** Sociologist Thomas Scheff explored an important link between the experience of shame and resulting social conformity, arguing

that conformity arises from the deference with pride and shame (Note: pride in this argument exists along a spectrum and is the opposite of shame, which was derived from work done by Charles Cooley, and greatly informed the work of Scheff) (Scheff, 1988). Connecting to what has already been explored on the nature of shame and what this present study will investigate, the concept of conformity is an important aspect when considering faith communities. The depersonalization and adaptation to external codes of conduct as a result of an effort to protect oneself from a shame experience explored by Lynd (1958) creates an understanding of how shame plays a role in conformity. If an individual has a shame reaction and experiences a sense of depersonalization, it is natural, according to Lynd (1958), that this individual would then more easily adopt external codes of conduct. In a faith community, an individual experiencing shame would more easily adhere to the norms and codes of conduct that the faith community subscribes to, which describes conformity, and, as Scheff (1988) argues, results in pride. When codes of conduct are in place surrounding sexual behaviour, one can infer how tension might develop as a result of shame experienced when an individual does not live up to the codes instituted by the community, and struggles between acting in order to conform and against conforming, potentially towards one's sexual desire.

Scheff (1988) strengthens the relationship between shame and conformity by considering Asch's (1956; as cited in Scheff, 1988) "Studies of Independence and Conformity. A Minority of One Against a Unanimous Majority" study, wherein participants conformed to the majority in a line length comparison task, despite the awareness that in doing so, they were failing at the task. Shame in Asch's study, as argued by Scheff , acts as the agent towards conformity, since the participants conformed

as a means of avoiding the shame of appearing different from the group. This argument by Scheff brings back into the conversation the experience of shame related to sexual behaviour, as Lewis (1971) described the experience of shame within individuals surrounding sexual behaviour despite there being no moral transgression. Connecting the work of both Lewis (1971) and Scheff (1988), according to these theorists in relation to the present study, even if an individual saw nothing personally morally wrong with a certain sexual behaviour, they would be more likely to conform to the known accepted practices of the group, so long as the individual agrees with the faith community's views towards sexual behaviour, and in doing so would still experience shame. If this understanding holds validity, it seems that shame within faith communities is an unavoidable experience for individuals, which reinforces the importance, timing, and relevance of this study. From the literature reviewed up to this point, it can be seen what important role conformity can play in the experience of shame. Scheff, approaching shame from the sociological standpoint from which he orients himself, appears to exercise a great deal of restraint from leaning his work towards a largely sociological orientation. He adeptly acknowledges the important work of psychological theory and contributions towards the nature of shame and because of this, his work proves to be extremely beneficial when attempting to understand a cross-disciplinary conceptualization of shame.

Considering Lewis' (1971) appraisal of one experiencing shame as a result of being ashamed, Scheff (1988) elaborates on this concept by first labeling such an experience as an "*intrapersonal* [feeling] trap" (p. 396). He then includes Goffman's (1967; as cited in Scheff, 1988) conceptualization of shame as an *interpersonal* feeling

trap, one where an individual recognizes shame within another, and consequently experiences shame within themself. This understanding of shame existing in spirals within and between individuals that feed upon themselves is an elucidation of Lewis' (1971) initial explanation of shame as being contagious. Scheff (1988) explains that such spirals, accompanied by shame's close relationship to anger (Erikson, 1950, as cited in Bentley, 2007; Lewis, 1971; Jacoby, 1994) and low visibility results in explosions of shame expressed as anger directed on the self *and* towards others, referred to as triple spirals (one shame spiral occurring within each of two individuals as well as a third spiral occurring between the individuals). He adds that these can occur within groups as well as nations, and can even be handed down "from generation to generation" (Scheff, 1988, p. 397). This position on the gravity of shame might seem extreme and has not gone without opposition, as Tangney and Dearing (2002) have warned, "shame is not at the root of everything" (p. 8) and "one of our long-standing concerns is the problem of treating shame as an 'elastic construct,' as is especially likely among theorists who endorse H. B. Lewis's (1971) notion of 'by-passed' shame" (pp. 8-9). Despite this caution, Scheff would go on to consider shame as the premier social emotion (Scheff, 2003).

Although this present study is not directly investigating the experience of shame beyond what Scheff (1988) would consider an intrapersonal shame spiral, it is important to understand the potential pervasiveness and severity of shame within and between individuals and groups. Such understanding can help to infer how shame might operate within systems in our society, such as faith communities and even larger institutions within society, a suggested example being Franco-German relations in the nineteenth and

twentieth century, which Scheff interprets as being related to spirals of this kind. This understanding is central when considering further topics of investigation on the nature of shame.

As more attention was paid to the social aspect of the experience of shame, the link between shame and conformity outlined by Scheff (1988) was expanded. Greenwald and Harder (1998) interestingly included conformity as one of four key evolutionary important roles to which stigma and shame are focused upon, along with prosocial behaviour, resource competition, and sexual behaviours. In these categories, shame acts as an evolutionary tool towards the advancement of society by controlling behaviour. This thinking is an important and exciting shift in the literature, as it views shame not as a fundamentally harmful experience, but instead as a potentially beneficial and necessary component of socialization.

Greenwald and Harder (1998) are not the first theorists to describe shame as a socially adaptive emotion, a common belief grounded in evolutionary theory which is an important aspect of shame and beneficial to explore. According to Gilbert (1998), within the human species there is a need to appear socially attractive to others and, when in a state of shame, "I must compare my action against some standard, either my own or someone else's" (Lewis, 2003, p. 1181). Furthermore, van Vliet (2008) comments, "Shame results from a perceived loss of social attractiveness and serves the adaptive function of alerting individuals to threats to their power and status in society" (p. 233). Heller (1982) describes shame as "the very affect which makes us conform to our cultural environment" (p. 215). She goes on to describe how we learn what to be shameful of from our environment others, and the function of shame as ambition regulation, using the

example of the rich man who sees poverty as a shame because he is "exposed to the eye of his wealthy fellows" (p. 1020).

Further exploring the nature and experience of shame in the social world, Gilbert (2003) comments, "In religious groups you might be stigmatized for breaking religious laws" (p. 1217). In relation to Scheff's (1988) understanding of the link between shame and conformity, Gilbert's (2003) comment begs the question: Could faith communities use shame (presumably subtly, with little or no awareness of doing so) to conform their members to the norms and rules of the community, and if so, what is the cost of this action on the individual? In a previous work, Heller (1982) explains:

> [Shame] is the feeling which regulates the person's general behaviour in order to conform to the regulations, norms and rituals of his or her community. In all societies with homogeneous rules of conduct, it is the shame-response which expresses that the person has not acted in keeping with the rules, or that he or she has exceeded others in observing the rules. (p. 216)

She describes that if a community is small, not stratified, and predominantly closed, the external authority (in the case of the present study, the external authority would be a faith community) can regulate human conduct "perfectly well" (p. 216). Considering the above conditions, we can assume that most faith communities are certainly small enough and non-stratified, making this type of conduct regulation possible. It could also be valid that because these communities are not closed, since members are able to leave the community should they choose and new members are generally openly welcomed, it creates space for individuals to assess their own behaviour within the norms of their faith community *against* their own internal norms or perhaps against a greater community they

are a part of, i.e., larger society. Heller (2003) describes this assessment as our "internal moral authority of moral judgment" (p. 1020), or conscience. This discussion reminds me of the emerging adult who waited to lose her virginity and still felt "soiled and tarnished" (Pugsley, 2014). What role might her internal moral authority have played in how she lived her life until she was married, and how might it have changed after she lost her virginity? Although many theorists describe shame as a functional emotion moving society forward, it must be considered whether the resulting harmful aspects of shame still outweigh the advantages of it as an evolutionary tool. Perhaps, as suggested by Tangney and Dearing (2002), shame was beneficial for societies before human's cognitive processes were as sophisticated as they are now, and from an evolutionary standpoint the best question we can ask is "what purpose might [shame] have served at earlier stages of evolution?" (p. 126).

Despite these adaptive functions, it is clear at what cost they come, as along with the exploration of the nature of shame in this review of the literature, shame has also been linked to many mental illnesses (for a list of authors who have written on this topic see Tangney & Dearing, 2002, p. 120). A discussion into a cost benefit analysis of shame in our society is beyond the scope of this literature review and present study; however, it is important to understand that along with the harmful aspects of the current understanding of the nature of shame, from the evolutionary perspective taken by Gilbert (1998; 2003) and Greenwald and Harder (1998), it very well could serve, or could have served, a purpose so great as to be responsible for holding our entire social world together.

**Overcoming shame.** After considering how shame might hijack one's sense of individuality and can result in depersonalization and the adaptation of external codes

(Lynd, 1958), it might be seen how difficult it can be for an individual to overcome a shameful experience, especially when an individual sees him or herself as powerless to change as the result of shame (Van Vliet, 2009). Van Vliet (2008, 2009) has carried out research on the process of overcoming shameful experiences. She found that, consistent with past research, individuals primarily blamed themselves for the shameful event, and that within the self-blame, there was anger directed inwardly as well as negative self-judgments negatively affecting their entire self-concept, not just aspects of their self (Van Vliet, 2009), which aligns with Lynd (1958) and Lewis' (1971) initial conceptualizations of shame. She notes that the power of shame "can result in social isolation and prevent individuals from accessing the social supports and professional help that are often critical for moderating psychological distress" (Lee et al., 2001; Stone, 1992; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996; as cited in Van Vliet, 2008, p. 234). Along with these responses to shame, the individuals studied felt that they had fallen short of their own internal standards and ideals, as well as other people's expectations, and felt "exposed, lowered, and unattractive in the eyes of other people" (Van Vliet, 2009, p. 144). Finally, they viewed themselves as powerless to fix their situations (Van Vliet, 2009).

Despite the serious and harmful effects shame experiences had on these individuals, Van Vliet (2009) found that they were able to recover by identifying external causes and influences, shrinking global self-judgment, which involved a shift from shame to guilt, and believing in the possibility of change. In another study, she described the five primary processes as connecting, refocusing, accepting, understanding, and resisting, and their subcategories as necessary towards rebuilding after a shameful experience (Van Vliet, 2008). This important categorization of individuals' process in overcoming shame

is beneficial work in the field of shame research, and proceeds to orient current research towards a greater exploration into the healing process of individuals' experiences of shame.

It is interesting to note that although the pervasiveness of shame is well defined in van Vliet's (2008, 2009) important studies, it is possible for individuals to successfully heal from shameful experiences. There are aspects of the shame experience that seem to cripple the individual's self and yet, there is, in the examples from this study, something that allows for an individual to act against his or her experience of shame despite an inability to act. It seems possible that over time the power of shame fades, allowing an individual to begin to act against it, and yet there are examples of shame lasting beyond lifetimes, such as the spiralling conflict causing shame between nations proposed by Scheff (1988). Whether it is a sense of time, resilience, or a new way of understanding the experience of shame, greater research is needed in order to expand upon what has been discovered regarding how individuals heal from their lived experience of shame and further understand the nature of shame.

**Gender differences in the experience of shame.** Brown's (2012) recent work on shame includes information on how the experience of shame is different between men and women, which will be important when considering this present study on the lived experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour. Brown posits that shame equally affects both men and women and that the experience of shame is universal, but it is the messages and expectations that differ between genders. This position assumes that what shame tells people originates from the social matrix; that it is embedded within the Other. Based on her interviews, Brown found that the top two categories of female shame were

surrounding body image and motherhood, noting that women are "expected to be perfect, yet we're not allowed to look as if we're working for it" (p. 87). In contrast, Brown's (2012) research showed that the message men hear from shame is "do not be perceived as weak" (p. 92) and that their response to being perceived this way is either anger or withdrawal, similar to what has already been covered on the isolating effects of shame (Lynd, 1958) and its resulting humiliated fury (Lewis, 1971).

Michael Lewis (2003) reinforces Brown's (2012) understanding that gender differences exist between men and women in the experience of shame, and suggests that such differences are evident as early as three years of age. Interestingly enough, this age corresponds nicely with Erikson's (1950) developmental stage of autonomy vs. shame and guilt, reinforcing the validity within his theory. Lewis (2003) also shows that, among three to eight year olds, females experience shame to a greater extent than do males, and suggests that these findings extend into adulthood (Lewis, 1995, as cited in Lewis, 2003). His understanding of the level of shame experienced between males and females is consistent with the work of Helen Lewis (1971). In her study, she found not only that women have a lower threshold for the experience of shame, but also that women are more affected by shaming stimuli, concluding, "the 'self' in women is more vulnerable than in men" (Lewis, 1971, p. 148). These results are consistent with the work done by Tangney and Dearing (2002), who found that across all ages, females report a greater propensity to experience both shame and guilt.

These studies provide a preliminary investigation into the gender differences between the experiences of shame. Such research is critical in greater exploring the phenomenology of shame, and important connections between these experiences can help

individuals infer how the nature of shame is related to aspects of sexuality as well as individual faith. This present study will not include criteria for having a predetermined number of females and males to participate; however, should the study include both males and females, the data might allow for a deep and rich description of the essence of shame for both males and female emerging adults' lived experiences of shame surrounding sexual behaviour.

The above exploration represents an overview of the prominent shame theorists and their contributions to the literature we now have on the nature of shame. Through a critique of their contributions it can be seen just how many layers of shame there are, how difficult it is to include all relevant aspects of this complex experience to the human experience, and how much has yet to be explored and understood. With this current understanding, it will now be important to explore, from an historical standpoint, how we have come to understand sexuality today and how this understanding can be related to the present study of the nature of shame.

**Historical Exploration of Sexuality**

As previously stated, shame does share a relationship with conformity (Scheff, 1988) and is grounded in the social framework. For this reason, it is critical to examine not only the psychological and sociological framework, but also the cultural context within which shame is understood. The purpose of an exploration of the history of sexuality in the West will be to orient oneself to the ways to approach the experience of shame within the context of sexuality and faith, as exercised by the faith communities to which the participants of this study will be involved. This account primarily follows the work of Foucault (1978, 1985, 1986), but also includes commentary from those who have

critiqued or opposed his views. From the work of Elias (1994), it is important to note that shame is largely associated with the age of modernity (Elias, 1994; as cited in Scheff, 2003).

Michel Foucault's (1978, 1985, 1986) three volumes series of *The History of Sexuality* is a social constructivist approach to the nature of sexuality and explores how societies throughout history have governed the use of sexuality. His prominent work is considered to be a central piece of the literature on the history of sexuality, despite it failing to escape criticism (Cocks & Houlbrook, 2006). It is important to note Foucault's (1978, 1985, 1986) bias towards social constructivism, which assumes that sexuality is not biological or intrinsic, but instead socially constructed by society (Cocks & Houlbrook, 2006), and holds a bias towards the role of power relations in modern societies and therefore limits the influence of his work in relation to this present study. Despite this nature of his work, the impact of his three volume series contributing to the literature of the history of sexuality cannot be understated, as it is still greatly cited and criticised today, which is the reason for it being the central component for the exploration of the history of sexuality within this literature review.

Beginning with ancient Greece, Foucault (1985) notes the "moral problematization of pleasures" (p. 33) among the society, to which a focus on the moderation of the three pleasures of drink, sex, and food was a pursuit of humankind. The concept of freedom in Greek culture came alongside what was considered by Foucault to be healthy-mindedness, and in order for one to live such a life, it was critical to exercise self-mastery among these three pleasures (Foucault, 1985). It is already the case that an ethic concerning such desires plays a role that allows for shame to enter into

the human experience. If one is unable to master such desires, then one is no longer considered to be living freely (as freedom, according to Foucault, was found through domination of such desires) and thus he or she might be considered exposed or lowered in the eyes of others. Although this situation may have been the case, it is also important to note, "they never imagined that sexual pleasure was in itself an evil or that it could be counted among the natural stigmata of a transgression" (Foucault, 1985, p. 97); rather, it was of concern to doctors of the time that sexual behaviour might be injurious to health, and theories upon which were then developed. Foucault also quotes Plato, who believed that the law itself was not enough to regulate sexual conduct, and even cites shame as an important tool used to prevent sexual acts from being committed too publicly (Plato, n.d., as cited in Foucault, 1985). Although not central to his work, Foucault's (1985) acknowledgment of the concept of shame benefits this present study as his orientation towards the role of social constructivism allows for attention to be paid to the role society might play on individuals' experiences of shame.

This belief of the Greeks created a sense of anxiety concerning sexual behaviour despite it not being considered immoral, for it was believed that acting too frequently upon sexual desire might be linked to death. Thus it appeared that among the Greeks, the pursuit of humankind towards freedom, the self-mastery of earthly pleasures, would prove to be healthy for the body and showed others how a man was able to master a household once married. From this understanding, more attention began to be paid on the physical body and the effects of sexual behaviour on it, and as the gaze shifted towards the inner-workings of the physical self, theories were developed in relation to sex as to what was healthy for the body and what was not.

The introduction of morality in relation to sexual behaviour seemed to appear alongside Christian prominence in history. Foucault (1978) argues that the Christian confession acted as a means to transform desire into discourse. By communicating sexual fantasies, desires, thoughts, and actions to one with a higher power as a means to be forgiven and held of a certain accord in God's eyes, the very fantasies, desires, thoughts, and actions became immoral within the society. He posits that over time we fail to see this process as a power that constrains society because of how deeply ingrained such processes become, and instead we see "truth" buried somewhere within the act of confessing. Somewhat of a paradox comes to light when Foucault (1978) comments, "confession frees, but power reduces one to silence" (p. 60).

It is clear how shame is given space to enter the human experience when we consider Foucault's (1978) idea of the Christian confession. In the very act of confessing, we are admitting to one of higher power a moral transgression we have committed. With such a confession, there is hope that we will be redeemed. This process brings to life Lewis' (1971) concept of the Other. In the admission of wrongdoing, one's inner urge, desire, or thought is now exposed; presented to the Other in hopes that we are forgiven. Somewhat literally the self of the confessing individual is presented. The experience of shame seems personified when we view it in terms of the Christian confession – it takes place in secret; physically isolated and withdrawn within the booth of admission, just as a shame experience causes isolation and withdrawal as one feels their self be put on display for the Other to view without filter. The process of the Christian confession, which Foucault (1978) argues is a code that governed sexual

behaviour across history, allowed for shame to be experienced because its existence was grounded in a set of moral codes concerning sexual behaviour.

With the rise of rationality through a history, the discourse of the Christian confession was expanded, and the effects of confession became medicalized (Foucault, 1978). Experts began to focus on "reproduction, evolutionary processes, and deviance, including sexual deviance" (Cocks & Houlbrook, 2006, p. 8). This "discursive explosion" (p. 8) in the exploration of sex resulted in considerations of what 'normal' sex was. With experts from various disciplines studying ideas about sexuality, a belief that "outward acts were a sign of an inner condition" (p. 8) emerged, which led to a pathologization of sexual behaviours.

An example of this pathologization is found when Reverend Thomas Malthus in the nineteenth century provided a social caution when he understood that sexual desire was a central part of the human experience, and yet excessive sex could result in the destruction of society through reproducing to the point of outstripping the food supply (Cocks, 2006). His contributions were considered to be a simultaneous "valuation and problematization of the body" (p. 159) and this contradiction became a central theme of the age. An example of this contradiction appearing elsewhere is in the pedagogization of children's sex, what Foucault (1978) termed "the masturbating child" (p. 105). In this paradox, it was understood that sexual activity for a child was prone to occur, but also that "the 'good' child did not entertain impure thoughts. Thus sexuality in children was both 'natural' or 'normal' and 'perverse' or 'contrary to nature'" (Jackson, 2006, p. 234). This pedagogization elucidates the importance society might play in sexualizing an individual; however, a limitation of Foucault's (1978, 1985, 1986) work also appears in

his denial of other factors, such as physiology, and what role they might play in how sexuality is understood and born within an individual.

It can be seen in these examples how the discussion of sexuality through history was an attempt to understand it more within its societal assumptions and ideologies, and with understanding there also appeared to be an aspect that maintained a mystery. As sex began to be spoken about more and more through various disciplines in society, there seemed to be an inability to uncover what people were seeking. If sexuality by its very nature thrives in mystery, the elusiveness of sex will not allow for its full discovery. Foucault (1978) sheds light on an important clue when he writes, "what is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadowy existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret" (p. 35). Perhaps this reality is the grand contradiction within the history of sexuality – we must discuss, describe, categorize, and pathologize sexuality in order to fully understand it, and yet it must always remain quiet, secretive, and behind closed doors. This contradiction outlined by Foucault is significant and benefits this present study, as the literature outlined would suggest that shame is engrained within the context of society. If this paradox between speaking about sexuality while simultaneously maintaining its secrecy holds validity, a similar contradiction might occur intrapersonally, and might be related to the role shame plays in the experience.

There is a relationship between the focus on what is considered 'normal' sexuality in the modern era and the experience of shame that comes along with it. As the discourse of sexuality permeates through all of these disciplines – religion, sociology, psychology, medicine, criminology, etc. – there comes to existence the idea of what is

'right' and 'wrong,' a norm of sexuality. This norm, when related to the literature explored on shame, becomes the gaze of the Other, observing our actions, thoughts, and desires, and opens the door for individuals to experience shame. When an individual experiences some aspect of his or her sexuality, whether it be a behaviour, desire, or thought, the potential exists for the individual to hold his or her behaviour up to what the Other, the norm of sexuality, is and such an experience "brings into focal awareness both the self and the 'other,' with the imagery that the 'other' rejects the self" (Lewis, 1971, p. 25). As Lewis' (1971) understanding of self is called into question, according to Lewis and the theorists covered in this literature review, an individual is then subject to experiencing shame.

In relation to a faith community, the Other becomes the sexual norm of the community to which an individual belongs. It is also important to understand that although an emerging adult might belong to a faith community which views certain norms in relation to sexuality, there is also larger society to which the individual is embedded within, which might have a differing opinion of sexual norms. For example, with the rise of "hook up culture" in recent years (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012) among adolescents and emerging adults, it can be seen how an individual experiences pressure to conform to both norms, both gazes of the Other, within both their faith community and perhaps other systems to which they belong. It is understandable how it might be impossible for one not to experience shame with competing Others influencing the lived experience of the individual.

When considering this example within the rise of modernity, Scheff (2003) comments on Elias' (1994) work that such shame in relation to sexuality is largely what

Lewis (1971) considered to be unacknowledged shame. It is this unacknowledged shame, existing across society and buried within the web of discourses on sexuality that came to be through the age of modernity, that Scheff (2003) believes is the cause of "shame [going] underground, leading to behaviour that is outside of awareness" (p. 249). From what has been reviewed on the literature of shame, such experiences of unacknowledged shame can be felt as foolishness, inadequacy, vulnerability, low self-esteem, etc. (Lewis, 1971; Scheff, 1988). If what is suggested here is valid, there is no arguing that such harmful emotions are widespread across society today. Furthermore, it would seem that these damaging experiences act as a mask covering the experience of unacknowledged shame, which occurs outside of an individual's awareness and is experienced as a host of other injurious emotions as listed above (Lewis, 1971).

Although this brief overview of a history of sexuality has predominantly revolved around the influential writings of Foucault (1978, 1985, 1986), his work has not gone without objection. His central premise being that sexuality will always be a story of power and power relations, implicates that sexuality, even individual sexual desire, is nothing but a social construction, which has been contested by others, stating that sexual behaviours have always been set within certain parameters across societies throughout history (Cocks & Houlbrook, 2006). It is important not to understate the relevance of power relationships within a study of history or the impact such relationships have on modern societies; however, Foucault's (1978, 1985, 1986) claims assume that power relationships are the whole story, denying that instinct, genetics, or physiology play any role in sexuality. I also acknowledge that Foucault's writing goes against the accepted popular belief that sexuality in Western society has largely been silenced and repressed

(Leonard, 2006), as instead he argues that imperatives existed throughout history to discuss sex, whether it be in the doctor's office, the church confession, or the psychiatrist's couch (Foucault, 1978). Leonard (2006) offers this example to explain Foucault's argument:

> Western societies 'spoke' of sex through the arrangement of physical spaces – middle-class Victorian homes, for example, 'spoke' of the sex that took place between adults by placing children far from their parents' bedrooms and therefore implying that something took place that was secret and even shameful. (p. 189)

Despite the criticisms of Foucault's work or responses to his arguments regarding the history of sexuality, his writing succeeds in orienting oneself to the role of sexual behaviour in this study in an important way. Although Foucault's argument of sexuality being solely socially constructed has been criticized, it prevents this study from underestimating the role of society in the relationship between sexual behaviour and the experience of shame. Because it has been argued that shame is the premier social emotion (Scheff, 2003), this study aiming to describe and better understand the lived experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community would be a failure if it did not adequately consider the role society played in the experience.

**The inextricable links among shame, sexuality, and spirituality.** The Genesis story of Adam and Eve found in the biblical narrative is perhaps the first example of an experience of shame in Western written history (Gilbert, Pehl, & Allan, 1994; Heller, 2003; Jacoby, 1994; Lewis, 2003). It is directly stated that initially Adam and Eve were both naked and "felt no shame" (Gen 2:25, New International Version), but upon eating

the fruit from the tree of knowledge they "realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (Gen 3:7). Not only does this story suggest that shame was experienced from the recognition of their nakedness and illustrate shame as a self-conscious experience in need of individual awareness (as Adam and Eve gained knowledge and awareness from eating the fruit and *then* experienced shame), but it also suggests a link among nakedness, both metaphorically and physically, in relation to shame, as well as assumes an intrinsic impurity or wrongness in the state of being naked.

Considering this story, Jacoby (1994) connects the function of the fig leaves to the Jungian concept of the persona – described as "a mask compatible with a socially accepted 'role,' a device the individual uses to adapt to his or her environment" (p. 55). The idea of the persona is closely related to shame, for if we were to act in a way that does not fit with our ideal self-image, we experience shame should someone notice the action that has protruded from under our mask, the persona. The fig leaves used to cover their bodies in the Genesis story function as the persona which they have suddenly created from the awareness of their naked bodies; wherein nakedness is suggested to have resulted in their shame in this biblical narrative. The difference of course being that the persona functions to protect our authentic self, while the fig leaves serve as a physical covering.

Connecting these two, May (1969), in his book *Love and Will*, describes how *Playboy* magazine has shifted the fig leaf "from the genitals to the face" (p. 57) when they publish the naked bodies of women in print with "detached, mechanical, uninviting, vacuous" (p. 57) expressions on their faces. The expressions themselves, expanding on

May's (1969) thinking, act as the mask of the persona, preventing the viewer of the magazine from experiencing anything human about the model on the page, despite the viewer's ability to visually experience the entire human body. If sex is related to human experience, the magazine known for glorifying sexuality seems to have removed humanity from the equation.

In order to understand the connection among the concepts of shame, sexuality, and spirituality, we will begin with the two latter concepts. Helminiak (1998) describes spirituality as the dimension of the mind that is self-transcending and self-aware, and that such awareness is spiritual, resulting in "spontaneous wonder, question, marvel, awe, which leads us on a path of unbounded unfolding" (p. 121). He goes on to argue that because humans are male or female and human psyches are also divided by gender, it is the sexually undifferentiated *spirit* that both males and females possess that connects us together through the physical act of sex. Therefore, the physical act of sex is a profoundly spiritual experience. Furthermore, "the integration of the sexual and the spiritual is nothing other than the harmonious functioning of the integrated human being – organism, psyche, and spirit" (p. 123).

Considering the norms surrounding sexual behaviour put in place by faith communities, it has already been explored how such norms might allow for individuals to experience shame. I have also previously explored the important work of Lynd (1958) on the nature of shame and her understanding of experiencing depersonalization in order to cover up the isolating wound of shame when we are unable to share our shame with another. When we put the pieces of these examples together, we begin to see how shame might operate within an individual and the effects it might have on his or her self. If an

individual belonging to a faith community were to act against a norm surrounding sexual behaviour in a way that he or she would experience shame, the isolating effects of such a shame experience might prevent the individual from sharing his or her experience with another in order to begin to heal. If depersonalization acts as the fig leaves covering up the wound of sexual shame, does it not follow that the individual would sacrifice an aspect of his or her *personhood* in order to mask the wound of shame? If this loss is occurs, what becomes of his or her sense of sexuality? What becomes of his or her sense of spirituality? If, as Helminiak (1998) argues, our sexuality and spirituality are so intimately linked, and our sexuality is severed as a result of our shame experience, it is impossible for us to function harmoniously as a human. We become disintegrated as shame severs the bond between our sexuality and our spirituality, and without healing the effects of the shame experience, are we not failing to be fully human? "In a person who is integrated, sex is not just a physical thing nor even merely an emotional thing . . . [It] includes also a world of meaning and value" (pp. 123-124).

Should this position hold veracity, we can begin to see more clearly the ways the concepts of shame, sexuality, and spirituality are intimately connected. Based on Helminiak's (1998) position, it is no wonder in the Genesis story Adam and Eve felt shame and needed to cover themselves; they became immediately aware of their bodies, their opposing sexes, and the resulting differentiation between themselves. From this position, it can be inferred that with the action of eating the fruit they became disintegrated; their sexual and spiritual selves were no longer intimately connected and when they gained self-awareness from eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge they gained the awareness of their physical bodies being unique from one another, different

from the Other; the very awareness needed for shame to enter into their experience. Their fig leaves became the persona we now require in order to hide our "naked truth" (Jacoby, 1994, p. 55). As the persona is used in society by individuals to adapt to their environment by covering their intimate core, it can be seen how influential the social system is to our behaviour. If a young man enters into a faith community with norms surrounding sexual behaviour, what is the nature of his persona, and how does his behaviour alter in order to cover up his 'naked truth' and protect him from experiencing shame? I am hopeful that with an attempt to describe and better understand the experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community, it might allow for inferences to be made through implication to better understand the link between sexuality and spirituality, and how shame might disintegrate the harmonious functioning of living a life fully alive.

## Chapter Three: Bringing the Experiences to Life

The paradigm from which I write and locate this research is post-modernity. I am interested in exploring structures in society and how such systems relate to individual growth and development. The work is grounded in an interpretivist framework, acknowledging that realities are multiple, constructed, and able to be altered by the knower (Laverty, 2003). This position is in contrast to positivist and post-positivist paradigms in which there is a singular objective reality, existing outside of us, capable of being obtained in order to discover fundamental truths about our world (Munhall, 1989, as cited in Laverty, 2003). Because we each develop in a unique environment, exposed to different societal systems and structures, we each come to know and become an expert, the only expert, on our own self at a certain place in time. We come to know truth only by means of how we experience our own reality and how we choose to understand the systems and structures in society. Thereby, each of our truths is our own, and no two people's truths will ever be exactly the same due to subjectivity and language; however, the possibility for underlying similarities exists between two individuals' truths, an understanding which underscores the aim of this work. Through a description of several participants' experiences of shame, this study aims to capture their lived experience of shame. No full essence of experience can ever be captured by anyone outside of the experiencer; because interpretation exists the moment language is used and thus, some of the essence is lost (van Manen, 2002).

In addition, our lived experience is grounded in time. During interviewing participants, I will inquire about experiences that have occurred days, months, or perhaps years in the past. As time passes the experience changes, regarding the ways we think of

it, relate to it, and perhaps repress it as well. I seek to uncover and describe the essence, or becoming, of the experience of shame, acknowledging that one's relationship to the experience will change over time. Heraclitus' famous line applies here: "No man [sic] ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man [sic]" ("Heraclitus Quotes", n.d.). The same can be said in the effort to describe a lived experience, yet the being-ness of the experience cannot change – what makes the experience the experience will always be, and yet one's relationship to the phenomenon and his or her orientation to it will remain fluid. The experiencer has grown, developed, and made meaning out of his or her experience; thus, the individual's understanding of truth and self has shifted and changed because of the re-creation of meaning by the self from moment to moment. Kvale (1996, as cited in Laverty, 2003) posits that we reach a conclusion in our research "when one has reached a place of sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions, *for the moment*" (p. 25, italics added).

There has been debate surrounding the role and place of God within the post-modern paradigm, which warrants exploration for this study. A French post-modern philosopher and theorist named Jean-François Lyotard, in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, defined post-modernism as "an incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). This understanding of post-modernism proved difficult for religiously aligned philosophers, as at first glance it would suggest that post-modernity must, by definition, reject the notion of the Christian God and the biblical narrative. Kubsch (2008) posits that Christianity does fall under such a definition, but can still exist alongside post-modernity through the means by which the narrative is legitimized. There have also been several theorists who have argued that the biblical

narrative does not fall under Lyotard's (1984) definition of a metanarrative (Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Bauerschmidt, 1999, as cited in Sweetman, 2005). Smith (2001) argues that such claims are based on an incorrect reading of Lyotard's (1984) text and the biblical narrative would not be included as a metanarrative as it is trusted in faith as opposed to being legitimized by scientific reason.

Although this discussion holds a place within academic, philosophical, and theological discourses, navigating the literature with the aim of reaching a conclusion regarding what place God and the biblical narrative have in this present study is beyond the scope of this work. It is therefore important to state that my work proceeds by acknowledging both the position of Lyotard (1984) as well as those who agree, critique, and criticize him (Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Smith, 2001; Sweetman, 2005; Kubsch, 2008). It will not be necessary to accept or reject such notions of God or the biblical narrative, but instead to allow for whatever belief each participant in this study holds to be valid for himself or herself.

For the above reasons, the approach that best serves this study and my orientation to it is hermeneutic phenomenology. The act of shedding light onto the experience of shame requires an attempt to capture the essence of such lived experiences through obtaining thick and rich descriptions of the experience from participants. According to Willis (1991), the goal of such deep exploration of these essences is to "ultimately discover within one's own consciousness the same essential structures which are found within everyone else's consciousness" (p. 177). In this study I will aim for such an experience, and as well I hope that this exploration into participants' stories supports others to make meaning of their experience of shame, albeit in a different,

perhaps fuller and more complete way. Along with such a goal, the exploration will also serve to expand my own understanding of my lived experience of shame. Van Manen (1990) explains that the main goal of such research is "the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are" (p. 12). It is clear how such a research approach is infinitely complex, and van Manen (1990) describes the challenge in this way:

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

The aim of this study is to uncover and describe the essencing of the lived experience of shame of emerging adults. Shame, being the aspect of the lifeworld in question, needs to therefore be approached with a sense of humility, acknowledging that obtaining any description will never be able to fully describe the complexity of shame. It is for this reason that hermeneutic phenomenology is key for this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology approaches lived experience first by awakening "a profound sense of wonder and amazement at the mysteriousness of the belief in the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 185). Such awakening is meant to energize the way we question our world, and orient ourselves to how we approach the phenomenon in question. It is natural to assign meaning to our experiences, but hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that the what-ness of being we are seeking to describe will always exist on the other side of the concrete description upon which we arrive (van Manen, 1990). Despite this evasion of this becoming of the phenomenon, engaging in this process is the practice of hermeneutic

phenomenology, and from this process we are able to move back into the world in a deeper and more enriched way (van Manen, 1990).

I felt drawn towards van Manen's (1990) concept of lifeworld existentials of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation as guides to reflection. Although aspects of these concepts will guide my interviewing, reflection, and writing through the process of the study, I feel it will also be important to remain open to the emergent, accepting the possibility of occurrences that I might not expect or be ready for, as such experiences are important since they can be personally reflected upon and can be included in the research itself. Because these existentials "all form an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld" (van Manen, 1990, p. 105), I see it as being necessary to hold them in my awareness as I navigate the unfolding terrain.

An important point worthy of clarity is my role as a researcher entering into such a journey. It is necessary that an individual prevent his or her personal history or preunderstandings from abstracting from the phenomenon in question (van Manen, 1990). As previously discussed, the topic of this study has personal significance to my own journey. Because of my close connection to this research, it is clear that who I am and how I enter into the data will result in a unique interpretation of the stories that will be shared by the participants in this study. Although at the outset this position from which I stand might appear to be a limitation to the research, Moules (2002) understands that "I cannot remove my subjectivity from my work, but I can take it up with a sense of responsibility in recognizing how it translates into the way I listen to my participants, what I hear, what stands out to me, and how I interpret it" (p. 12).

Self-reflection on my part throughout the study will be a fundamental component of the research. I do not assume that my personal assumptions, beliefs and opinions about shame and sex can be fully removed from my consciousness in order to protect my study from being affected by them. From this acknowledgement, my aim is to accept and acknowledge these preunderstandings, while attending to prevent them from attenuating the complete essence I hope to describe. It can also be seen how my own experiences might be utilized when approaching this research, as van Manen (1990) understands that "to be aware of the structure of one's own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all the other stages of phenomenological research" (p. 57). Having a significant understanding of the importance of my own journey and personal connection to this research can assist me in correctly orienting myself to the phenomenon I aim to describe. Laverty (2003) describes how the "researcher is called, on an ongoing basis, to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched" (p. 28). This idea should not be viewed as a limitation, but instead enrichment to the study. My own lived experience is complex and sacred, and I do not think it should, or can be, removed from the study. Instead, through careful and diligent reflexive practice and a degree of bracketing, I anticipate my experience will assist in the exploration of others' lived experiences.

My own experience plays an unavoidable role in this research, and because of this, interpretation is a fundamental and necessary aspect to this study. Interpretation is a cornerstone of hermeneutic research and is based on and created from each of our own

intimate histories. Because we all have complex and multilayered experiences resulting from how we live in the world and are affected by the systems and structures influencing our world, each of us have a unique and sacred history that informs the decisions we make in the present. Laverty (2003) explains that meaning is found "as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences" (p. 24). This journey we undertake requires that we make meaning of our experiences and histories in order to understand, and this understanding is the result of interpretation (Chang, 2010). In order for individuals to come to an understanding, they are engaging with their current understanding, deeply rooted in their intimate history of experiences they have interpreted and made meaning from, and further interpreting in order to come to a greater understanding of their present moment.

Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to approach the lived experience of the participants pre-reflectively, without being affected by prior understanding of classifications or categories concerning the phenomenon in question (van Manen, 1990). As a researcher, removing prior understandings can be a demanding task, since our daily life is very much caught up in abstracting ideas about aspects of the lifeworld. However, with diligence, this pre-reflectivity can be accomplished. Van Manen (1990) describes the importance of not adopting a disinterested attitude towards the research topic to avoid bias or the like, but instead offers this advice: "To be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense. To be strong in our orientation means that we will not settle for superficialities and falsities" (p. 33). Acknowledging and understanding who I am as a researcher throughout the process of researching is

critical in order to orient myself appropriately towards the experience of shame lived by the participants in the study. A continued ability to properly orient myself as a researcher results in upholding the integrity of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, preventing the "profound sense of wonder and amazement at the mysteriousness of the belief in the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 185) to be lost.

**Witnessing the Experiences**

Chang (2010) describes the cyclical nature of hermeneutic interviewing as "interacting with a phenomenon based on one's pre-understanding and history, negotiating successive new interpretations, taking new understandings and merging them with what is already known" (p. 22). This concept aligns with van Manen (1990) when he discusses obtaining experiential descriptions from others as "borrowing" in order to "better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole human experience" (p. 62). It involves an acknowledgement of the interviewer's own history before delving into the depths of the phenomenon in question in an attempt to bring to the surface a new understanding or interpretation of the lived experience. It is then necessary to contemplate how the newly acknowledged meaning can be used to once again submerge the interviewer into the same depths, bringing the newly discovered meaning alongside in order to further thicken the understanding of the phenomenon.

In order to begin the interview process, it was necessary to recruit individuals interested in participating in this study. In recent past I have had several individuals suggest faith communities that I might consider approaching in order to find participants for this research. These initial faith communities I approached through email were either

unresponsive, unwilling, or for other reasons unable to assist with recruiting individuals for my research. After contacting many faith communities in the surrounding area, I had several who were open to passing along the Letter of Initial Contact about my research to individuals who they felt might be interested in the research.

Criteria existed in order for the individuals to be involved in the research, primarily requiring the individual to identify as belonging to a faith community, as well as falling between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, as a means of aligning with Arnett's (2000) concept of the emerging adult. I have come across little information regarding gender differences in the specific lived experience of shame, which has already been discussed in the literature review. Studies have explored levels of shame and guilt proneness and correlated them between genders (Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik, 2005), connected narcissism and shame to men while depression and shame to women (Wright, O'Leary, & Balkin, 1989), but I have yet to discover any literature concerned with the lived experiences of shame connected to concepts of sexuality and spirituality. Even concerning quantitative research, Murray, Ciarrocchi, and Murray-Swank (2007) note, "there has been relatively little research investigating sexual shame in relation to levels of spirituality and sexuality, as well as to sexual attitudes and experiences" (p. 225).

My ideal number of participants for this research is within the range of four to six. Any more participants and I will have too much data to analyze for the institutional parameters of a master's thesis. If I have less than four participants there exists the possibility that I will not have enough data to create a landscape that is both deep and rich. There exists a trade-off between having two little data and too much, and for this research the healthy balance would seem to fit between four and six participants.

Because of the length of time it took contacting and attempting to recruit individuals, I received enough interest from individuals to meet the minimum four participant requirement of the research, and chose not to pursue recruiting any more.

After receiving interest from an individual about the research, I distributed to him or her a Letter of Consent form by email they were required to sign in order to participate. I provided contact information should individuals have any questions or concerns regarding the study, and I encouraged them to ask me any questions before signing consent forms.

Upon having signed consent forms from all individuals involved in the study, it was time to conduct interviews. Interviews were held in a private room at St. Stephen's College, as I felt this space was both a professional and welcoming atmosphere for participants. The audio from each interview was recorded.

At the outset of the interview, I asked several preliminary open-ended questions (See Appendix A) with the goal of gaining some background information about the participant and helping him or her to feel relaxed and comfortable in the environment. I then began to ask the main interview questions, which were composed of two in-depth questions that were open-ended in nature (See Appendix A) in order for myself to remain open to the emergent while staying focused on the phenomenon in question and allowing the participant to have a sense of control in the interview. Questions followed after each main interview question that were also open-ended, and the nature of which depended on the description of the experience told by the participant. The purpose of these questions was to further uncover and describe the essence of the experience of shame. Phenomenologically-oriented clarifying questions and supportive encouraging questions

related to van Manen's (1990) concept of the lifeworld existentials of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation were also used in the interview as necessary, with the goal of reaching a greater depth of the participant's experience and being empathic about the information he or she is sharing.

**Meaningful Meaning Making**

Once I completed the first round of interviews, I transcribed the recordings, including verbal tics and silences. After an interview had been transcribed, it was important for myself as a researcher to reflect on what was said in the interview. This process involved orienting myself once again to van Manen's lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1990), and identifying statements that were made by each participant and developing questions to ask in the subsequent interview in order to deepen the description of the phenomenon offered by the participant.

As I revisited the participant's shared experience in the context of a second interview, it was the process of entering once again into the participant's experience, seeking to reach a thicker and more rich description of the essence of shame (Chang, 2010; van Manen, 1990). The second interview questions rose organically from the first transcript, in any situation where the shared experience required clarification or deepening.

Upon completing this process to each transcript, I returned it to the participant by email with my identified reflections and questions included. At this point I asked the participant to reflect on what was said in the initial interview as well as what notes were identified by me, with the goal of the participant interpreting the significance of the reflections (van Manen, 1990). When this interpretation has been completed, a second

interview was scheduled with the aim of collaboratively reflecting on themes that were presented during the first interview. The second interview became "an interpretive conversation wherein both partners self-reflectively orient themselves to the interpersonal or collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99). Further open-ended questions were asked in order to gain deeper understanding of the lived experience of shame and the interview was once again recorded.

Upon transcribing the second interview, engaging in the same reflective practice, and returning the transcript to the participant, we scheduled and conducted a third interview with the same goal and procedure. After this interview had been transcribed and reflected upon, a collaborative decision needed to be made between myself and each participant as to whether or not a fourth interview will be necessary. If we both felt as though the lived experience of shame had been suitably uncovered and described with increasing depth from the three interviews, a fourth would not be required and this would signal the end of the data gathering process for the participant. Upon reaching this point in the interview process, I felt as though I had reached a level of depth with each participant that did not require a fourth interview. Every participant was comfortable in ending the interview process at this point.

Once all of the interviews were complete, it was time to attune to patterns arising from the data. The approach I took in order to accomplish this process was the selective approach of isolating thematic statements (van Manen, 1990, pp. 92-93), which involved locating thematic phrases or sentences that stand out from the text and highlighting accordingly. As previously mentioned, van Manen's concept of the lifeworld existentials

of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation informed my reflection and identification of thematic phrases (van Manen, 1990). When reflecting on the transcripts, a word or phrase was considered thematic and isolated accordingly when I felt it connected to the one or more of the lifeworld existentials. Each of these thematic phrases was important to personally reflect upon as a researcher, paying attention to what about the essence of shame might exist in each phrase. Van Manen (1990) describes the aim of this attention as an "attempt to interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in the light of the original phenomenological question" (p. 99).

As discussed previously, it was important in this stage how I viewed my own history and preunderstandings about the phenomenon in question (van Manen, 1990). My own responses to the data, in the form of personal field notes taken during and after the interviews and selecting important phrases from the transcriptions, informed by van Manen's lifeworld existentials, were important and valuable pieces to the research; however, it is crucial that I am consistently using those preunderstandings to appropriately orient myself to the participant's lived experience of shame. It is also critical that I simultaneously maintain a 'not knowing' position. Chang (2010) explains:

> 'Not knowing', in the context of a research interview, does not mean that the interviewer knows nothing of the phenomenon under study, but that he or she is aware of his or her preunderstandings, and permits the participant's account to emerge. (p. 26)

It is this emergence of the participant's account that allows for a description of the essence of the lived experience of shame to occur. Through hearing the account of the participant, the researcher's vision in relation to the phenomenon is expanded.

**Protecting the Experiences**

Once individuals expressed interest in participating in the study, I distributed a Letter of Consent to them by email. Even though the nature and purpose of the study are outlined in the Letter of Initial Contact, it was realistic that participants would have questions surrounding the study, in which case such questions could be answered through email conversation. In no way did I pressure participants to participate in the study, and it was made clear to them via the Letter of Initial Contact and Letter of Consent that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time, and that they have up to one week after the final interview to withdraw all of their data from the study. Once I ensured the participants understood what the study entailed, I asked them to sign and return the Letter of Consent at which point they were then considered a participant in the study.

Upon receiving a signed copy from the individual, it was stored in a locked file along with other confidential forms. Concepts such as confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation including the right to opt out are included in the Letter of Initial Contact, and I was open to discussing such concepts with individuals should they have had any questions. It was also important to check in with each participant during the interview process, either before or after each interview, to discuss how the participant was responding to the process. If anything arose where participants were unsure about their continuation in the study, I would remind them of their voluntary participation, and that they have a right to withdraw from the study without penalty. Participants were able to opt out at any point in time of the study, up until the end of the third interview. Should an individual wish to opt out of the study, he or she will have my contact information and can contact me saying they wish to quit the study. Upon a participant opting out, I would

destroy any records, including all transcripts, both paper and digital copies, of him or her having participated.

To exercise appropriate anonymity and confidentiality, I made an effort to prevent participants from coming in contact with other participants by not booking interview times close enough that they might cross paths. Further, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts. Any files being stored in hardcopy will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and any electronic data will be password protected or encrypted.

Because the topic of this research is shame, it was likely that unpleasant emotions or a re-experiencing of the shameful experience might come to the surface during the interview process. Although there are skills I can use in order to help the participants process these feelings, I was acting in the capacity of a researcher and not a psychotherapist. Because of this role, should participants become distressed at any point as a result of the content of the study, I will offer counselling referrals to the participants should they feel they need some form of psychotherapy in order to process their experience in a therapeutic way. It should also be mentioned that it is a possibility for the participants to feel a sense of healing or relief after exploring personal lived experiences of shame with a respectful other, as such discussions might allow for a deeper understanding and integration of their experience into their present being.

Should I wish to use the data from this study for any secondary purpose, such as publishing a work based on this data, an ethical review will be required from another body, in which case the use of such data will be done in an ethical manner and with the rights remaining with the participant to whom the data belongs.

## Chapter Four: The Lived Experience of Shame

A familiar yet strange feeling comes over me as I sit at my desk; a stack of folders to my right containing hundreds of well-used pages of highlighted transcripts, rife with mark ups and folded corners. On my left sits a pad of paper comprised of hand scribbled notes, illegible to most, which I attempt to use as my trail guide, although moving forward on some journey I have yet to take. One of the hurriedly marked pages is home to words penned at some hour of the night; the result of orienting myself back into consciousness from a hypnopompic state, leaping from my bed in a flash of insight to make note of an important concept worthy of exploration in the pages ahead. Beyond the periphery of these two sides of my desk there is another stack of literature, and as I glance beyond, I notice more stacks of papers, books, and notepads, all of which have contributed in some way to my orientation to this work and project. And here I sit, with the voices of my participants echoing in my ears; their stories of courage, struggle, and suffering I wrestle with, and wonder how I will honour those stories as I transform their experiences into words on the coming pages. The feeling is familiar in that I have sat in front of blank pages before; strange in this new weight I feel in my hands.

My wristwatch is removed and lies parallel to the edge of my laptop on the left of my computer. There are moments when its hands move faster than I can comprehend, as felt experience flows from a sacred place into the words now being read on these pages. In other moments, I question whether or not the same watch is dead. A candle marking the ritual of my process sits in the far right corner of my desk. To honour the writing experience it is lit before my hands meet the keys, and extinguished after each day of writing, whether it is fruitful or painstaking. Most days I don't notice how the

candle reduces in size as it clings to life, but slowly over time I see how its flame sinks beneath the curling edges of the wax, yet still produces light enough to keep the ritual and the ceremony of writing alive.

I look out my window in front of me and notice the yellow leaves of my neighbour's backyard tree. Through the coming weeks and months as I continue to write, this same tree will undress into silence as it bares its soul for the predictable long winter ahead. I will look out the same window at the same tree, and it will be the same, yet quite different. Its beauty might be gone as it descends into dark hibernation for the winter, and yet there is something about its essence that will remain. The tree will be calm. I might be able to experience its essence in a way I never could while I watched the leaves flutter to the cold earth, as I sit at my desk wrestling with how to write and capture my participants' experiences of their shame.

**Re-Connecting to the World of Lived Experience**

As I ebb and flow through the process of producing the words fit to find their way to these pages, I am reminded that phenomenological writing "is the very act of making contact with the things of our world" (van Manen, 2002, p. 237). Orienting myself to this concept helps me to understand that I have been engaging in the practice of phenomenology for the past several months, despite very few words being put to paper. Phenomenology calls us to enter into the lived experiences of each of my participants, and so it is practiced in the midst of each interview. Phenomenology then, is practiced through attending to the spoken word of the individual, experiencing with my eyes their bodies' reaction to how they tell of their experiences of shame, and reflecting in those moments to how I am connecting with their stories. It is also practiced as I re-listen to

their interviews, transcribing the spoken word, and sitting with the text in front of me. Later on as I reflect on each line of script, I notice the feelings this brings up in me, the personal experiences of my own it connects me with, and how each of these stories is similar or different, and in what ways. All of these experiences are involved in the practice of phenomenology and extends beyond writing, and yet "research is the work of writing – writing is at the very heart of the process" (van Manen, 2011, para. 1).

Upon entering into the space of the text, in the form of all of the mentioned practices involved in phenomenology, it is important to understand what it is phenomenological writing aims to accomplish. Van Manen (1990) understands that "it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result" (p. 13). Phenomenology does not result in concrete answers or an arrival at a certain place, but instead the aim is for the reader to "become possessed by the allusive power of text" (van Manen, 2002, p. 238). The aim of the following pages is to compose writing capable of possessing the reader of this work; it is to present the lived experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour in a way that is palpable, able to be taken in, and possible for the reader to feel, to hold, and to touch, in a way they can then integrate their own understanding of the phenomenon in question in order to "become more fully who we are" (van Manen, 1990, p. 12).

**The writing as a relationship to the data.** As was previously discussed, interpretation plays an inevitable role in this work and is a cornerstone in the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology. Because I cannot fully bracket my personal experiences and preunderstandings of shame surrounding sexual behaviour, they will inform the

phenomenological description of shame in this work. However, it is imperative that the lived experience of shame expressed by the participants of this research is what is captured and described in the following pages.

In my process of reading, re-reading, and reflecting upon the transcripts, I began to see how I was able to relate to the data collected. I see the folders sitting next to me containing these pages as a living entity I can relate to and am in relationship with, and so the aim of the writing is not to report what I have uncovered, but describe the experience of the participants' shame through my relationship with their stories. The participants have created meaning of their experiences through selected spoken words in their interviews, and in working with the data through reading and reflection I have interpreted and produced meaning from the texts. The transcripts, my notes, and my memories and feelings associated with the interview process evoke and call me to this work and influence my interpretation, and because of this influence it is impossible to separate my experiences from the data and simply report what it is participants have told me. It is clear how a simple report would rob the reader of touching the lived experience of shame and dilute the aim of this work. Instead, it is my own history and experience that brings me into relationship with each participant, their spoken words, and their transcripts. For this reason, I have chosen to write from the perspective of the experiencers, the participants, and their descriptions of shame. It will be important to understand that words of my own might be used to describe what they are experiencing; however, chosen words have come as the result of my subjective experiencing of the participants' experiences.

The result is a collection of words born from my relationship to this data, the foundation of which being the stories and experiences of shame told by the participants. In relation to interpretation, it is important to remember that for hermeneutic phenomenology "no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge" (van Manen, 2002, p. 237).

**Organization of the data.** I considered several factors surrounding how the data should be presented in this research. Because the research involved four participants, all with very unique backgrounds and histories, it was important to avoid presenting the data in a way that acted similar to four individual profiles or case studies on each participant's experience of shame. Not only would presenting data this way sacrifice a sense of anonymity for the participants, but also I believe it would work against the aim of this research to richly and deeply describe the lived experience of shame among emerging adults of faith communities. Instead, I have organized the descriptions into van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials of corporeality, relationality, spatiality, and temporality, which will also be considered lived body, lived relation, lived space, and lived time, respectively. The aim of this organization was to help the reader focus on the phenomenon in question and prevent the potential for becoming lost in the identity of each participant. It might also allow for the reader to more intimately connect to his or her own understanding of the phenomenon, which is also one of the greater aims of hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). It is important to note that any quotations used without citation represent a direct quotation from one of the four participants, with only verbal tics, such as inapposite use of the word 'like' or 'umm,' removed from the quotation for matters of clarity.

Van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials was also the chosen framework used to formulate the questions that outlined each interview, and indeed "what first of all characterizes phenomenological research is that it always begins in the lifeworld" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). In order to uncover the phenomenology of shame, it was important that not only each question and statement, but also every personal reflection and categorization of transcript, was done with the aim of achieving a closer orientation to one or more of the lifeworld existentials. By this practice, each step in the process was able to draw each participant and myself into a deeper understanding and a greater unravelling of the participant's lived experience of shame.

**The use of literary and poetic devices.** Reflecting upon the transcripts left me wondering how I might best present the stories and descriptions told by the individual participants. The role literary and poetic devices will play in my writing became apparent. Van Manen (2014) suggests that in phenomenological investigations and analyses, "the imagination may offer suppositional material that neither art nor life might present" (p. 248). In order to draw myself and the reader nearer to the meanings made through the descriptions of the participants, it is necessary to include literary and poetic devices that are "mediated by empirical material drawn from life, such as anecdotes, stories, fragments, aphorisms, metaphors, memories, riddles, and saying" (van Manen, 2014, p. 248). The use of these devices allows one to draw deeper into lived meaning and closer to human truths (van Manen, 2014). Because of this, and in the act of drawing nearer to the participant's experiences through phenomenological writing, the use of such devices is incorporated throughout the lived experience of the participant's accounts; the

purpose of which is to evoke the experience of the phenomenon in the reader, "so that its reverberative meanings seduce us to attentive recognition" (van Manen, 2014, p. 249).

As dusk approaches, I begin to prepare myself not only for the end of a day of writing, but also to look forward onto what tomorrow might bring. I glance outside once again to my neighbour's tree. The wind is picking up; many leaves will be unbuttoned tonight. I feel a sense of emptiness at this loss of life, until I am reminded of what lies beneath the vibrant leaves that once were – the coming of the essence of the tree. Its strong foundation is planted firmly in the ground, able to withstand whatever the coming cold season will bring. Its soul cannot be known without having to survive what is to come. I connect once again to my participant's experiences of shame.

The hands have traveled enough for one day. I breathe in. It is time to lay my candle to rest.

## The Lived Body of Shame

### Shame moving in the body.

> "I felt like I had let the entire world down, and I felt like instantaneously I wanted to throw up. That entire night we were in bed we were trying to watch this movie, it wasn't working, and he turned it off and said 'This isn't, this isn't working' and I went to the bathroom and I cried, for hours."

My participant tells me of the night she failed her self, her man, and her gender, as the pornographic film she agreed to watch with her boyfriend was not enough to gratify him. She describes the initial shock of shame as being freezing cold; the covering of her self is being ripped from her, a feeling of being exposed and naked. Not only has she failed her relationship and her gender, but everything about who she is as a woman and a human is

quickly recognized as wrong. There is no wonder a retreat to the bathroom for hours of tears, a withdrawal of self from the situation, is necessary. After the instantaneous chill of shame may set itself into the head, it needs to find a home. It may quickly increase in temperature and begins to lay its foundation throughout the body. The immediate experience after the icy burn of shame is described as feeling "hot and sweaty, like an adrenaline rush," "almost like having a panic attack," and "instantaneous heartburn." It is clear now that the shame may no longer be a small seed, although perhaps it began as such, but quickly it may be recognized as a noxious weed, roots spreading downward throughout the body.

The naming of "heartburn" helps to shed light on this phenomenon. Certainly the heart begins to burn, an indication once again of the rising temperature experienced as the roots of shame seek refuge to build their foundation. Although shame was described with consensus as "all-encompassing," it appears to focus primarily on the centre or core of the body. From the heart it might continue to move downward into the stomach, and is experienced as an "unsettled stomach," "like getting punched in the stomach," and it "makes your stomach turn." The stomach is "wanting to throw up;" the body's response as an attempt to rid itself of the foreign poison it has just identified within it. It is here, in the stomach, where shame seems to build some of its primary roots. One participant described her pit in her stomach as "anxious," which brings up the notion of fear; perhaps a fear of what now exists in the body, fear of the future state of this new poison within the self and after experiencing the speed at which it can take hold, fear of what other effects it might have on the body and mind. The shame might not leave the stomach immediately, and sometimes is carried there "until the situation would be fixed."

Shame seems to have the ability to hijack the body's temperature control. One participant describes this experience as the following:

> "I would say my head gets really hot, and my stomach gets really cold, and it's two separate things that are really hard, because I get really hot and panicky, but the pain in my stomach feels like you've stabbed it with an ice pick and it's cold. . . . so it's just definitely two different temperatures. . . [but] the stomach overpowers the head."

As shame appears to move from the head downward and begins to spend time in the core of the body, it can be seen how the experience of temperature is split between these two areas. Another participant describes the experience of being "very cold" but then "sitting there thinking about it, I got very heated . . . like very upset and heated." This description mirrors the distinction of the cognitive component of shame being an experience of an increase in temperature, whereas once shame takes root in the individual it is felt as cold in the core of the body. The same participant described the experience of shame as being both hot and cold at the same time, and stated that this temperature experience felt "very discomforted."

Shame might have the ability to pull sensation away from the appendages, turning the focus of the experiencer onto the experience in the head and the core of the body. One participant spoke of this power when he noticed a feeling of weakness in his legs when he "broke right down" after his experience of shame. "I just felt like I could . . . just get down on my knees. That's probably why [there is] that symbol of getting on your knees to cry out to God." The deep burn of pain along with the cold roots it plants in the stomach coincides with the imagery of someone on their knees, crying out, asking their

God for some relief from the pain of this poison taking hold of their body. A belief of their self as wrong is undoubtedly playing a role in the repentance they now seek from a higher power.

The potential physical collapse of the self incurred through the experience of shame may not only result from the bodily sensations and temperature dis-regulation experienced in body, but also from the physical pain and weight shame causes one to experience. "My body feels heavy . . . I literally feel it everywhere. It's like an ambient, hard, awful feeling in my body . . . it hurts down into my feet, like there's just nowhere that I don't feel it . . . I have a very visceral reaction to shame." Each participant describes his or her experience of shame as having a physical weight associated to it. This weight has the ability to "pull on your heart," it "holds you down" and acts as an "emotional anchor." There can be a greater understanding of the experience of weak legs now, once the all-encompassing lead jacket of shame is yours to be worn, sinking you down to the earth. This experience can be felt as "rock bottom," and was even described as a feeling that "my world was ending."

The pain and weight that takes root in the body is consistently described using dark colours. This absence of light is reminiscent of sinking underwater, as one's surroundings slowly become darker, losing the brightness of the sun above, until the person indeed finds his or her "rock bottom," where it may begin to envelop, encompassing all parts of the body, and continue to add weight until the thought is had, as it was by one participant, "[this is] the worst thing. This is the end of all the things." The texture of the experience is often associated with unevenness, being described as "rough," like "sandpaper," or "rigid in the way that it went very bumpy very quickly, and

you can't fix that." Certainly whatever the experience of shame feels like in the body, it lets the experiencer know it is there, taking hold of the self and pulling it into the ground through coarse pain inflicted wherever it sees fit. Shame may be a venom the body meets intravenously; the same heart that pumps life through the canals of the being is now an imposter, spreading fire and ice and lead through the veins until he or she collapses under the pain, weight, and darkness of the experience.

If the texture was not described as something coarse, it was viewed as "slimy," "dirty," and "scummy." All of these terms can be related to the very earth shame might be pulling the body down into, as though shame cannot wait for death to take care of the corpse and return it to earth, and so it takes the responsibility as its own. This description is strengthened as shame is described as an experience that "eats away at you;" it may be beginning to rot from the inside the body that once stood steadfast just moments ago, resulting in the body feeling "sick," "gross," and "disgusting."

The movement of shame in a downward direction, the descriptors of shame associated with the earth, and concepts of sickness and rotting in relation to shame suggest that the lived experience of shame in the body is one that is experienced as death and burial. The capacity shame may have to bring the body to illness, sink an individual to "rock bottom," or feel as though one's "world was ending," calls into question the body being whole, healthy, and alive. From a corporeal standpoint, shame seems to prevent the individual from experiencing their body as functioning properly, and instead uses physical weight to pull the body to the ground. This movement to the earth and collapse of the physical self might only be the beginning of the felt sense of shame in the body.

**Frozen in body and time.** Once shame begins to settle in the body, squeezing its weight onto the shoulders of its victim, its effects on thought and action appear to take hold. One participant understood shame's ability to cause a sense of tension between the head and the heart, suggesting disconnection between these two aspects of the body. Of course it is known that we cease to live without either of these two organs, whether they are viewed organically or spiritually, and shame seems to know this, and attacks accordingly. Shame may have the ability to "harden up your heart;" the organ known for giving life through the trusted and constant rhythm it provides to the choir of the body functioning in harmony and unison, has now lost its beat. How should the band continue without its core, the drummer keeping all who play in check? How can one live in tune with the world, function in relationship with the beating heart and soul of another, when shame has robbed the same being of the ability to listen to his or her own rhythm? I am reminded of Beethoven's increasing deafness over the course of his life; his darker and louder compositions of his later period being attributed to his loss of hearing, an increasing disconnection to the rhythm of the world. No doubt, the darkness and volume of his later works reflect, in some sense, a cathartic release of anger at the loss of wholeness, completeness, living fully alive in his own beat of the soul. How might this hardening of the heart affect the rest of one's functioning? To what end does the freezing of the core of one's self have its limits?

What can be explored in this moment is the effect of this hardened heart on the functioning of the mind. When shame appears to steal the rhythm and lay to rest what was once the trustworthy source of life within the body, it may have the ability to infect our thoughts, bringing them to a halt in not knowing what to say or do, but may also lead

one to overthinking. With the weight of shame felt fully in the body and the heart beginning to harden, shame seems to take control of the thoughts that constantly run through the brain and begin to use them against the understanding of the self. This power is described as shame trying to tell you that things are worse than what they really are, or "how everyone else would treat me, I would treat myself worse, you know, I would beat myself down." As if the weight of the initial flood of shame in the body was not enough, it can now be seen how shame may influence one's thoughts, each one being another weight that keeps the individual sunken to the earth.

If this control is not enough, the result of this thinking is described as feeling like "you're not good enough for . . . anything." As shame may continue to poison the cognitions, it might also reinforce such thoughts one can have on the self, circumambulating and deepening the belief, or lack thereof, in the individual. With the function of the heart now compromised, what weapon is there to defend against the downward spiralling of negative thoughts one has about who he or she is? One participant elucidates this process with a description of how he deals with shameful thoughts today: "there's still thoughts of shame in my head now . . . but they're just not validated."

For this individual, the heart may now have the capacity to protect against the poisonous thinking that results from shame's hijacking. How clever an enemy shame may be, when in the height of a shame experience it may work simultaneously to harden the heart and infect one's thoughts, preventing an individual to connect with the rhythm of another. Instead, the rhythm of the constant negative thoughts of oneself is the new

beat, pounding away at the individual until he or she has no choice but to believe in the lies shame hopes to spread.

What is more, it is also described that shame inhibits us from communicating, perhaps a result of shame preventing us from thinking or reasoning, calling to life the words that so desperately need to be said. Along with the heart being hardened, shame may also turn to stone the body, anaesthetizing the ability to act, yet continuing to flood the body with the pain and weight first introduced by its initial shock. "You feel helpless . . . you're sitting there and you're getting ridiculed and you have to take it because you don't know what else to say". Subject to torture from others, this participant's shackles of shame appear to prevent her from escaping the space in which shame has imprisoned her. Not only may shame work to harden what her heart can feel, but in this moment there might also be little relief from the arrows of words that strike her from others. Frozen in body yet functioning in the mind, each sting from the arrow is heard, moulded by shame into the very thought that may sink its way past not only the once alive and pumping heart, but also the soul once relied on to be a successful defender of the self, now turned to stone, and believed by the self to be true. "[Shame] defined a lot of what I did, who I was" provides insight into this process of shame potentially having the power to tell the self not truth about who he or she is, but lies about what shame thinks he or she deserves, a message undoubtedly about the scum and dirt to which shame *thinks* he or she amounts. "Shame tries to definitely get in there and twist the truth . . . and it continues to chase you around." Frozen in body, a prisoner to shame. Even if one can run, in the height of the experience it appears that shame runs faster.

**Emotion and feeling.** An entire host of emotions are felt through the course of a shame experience, understandable now as the effects of shame on the felt experience of the body are described. It has already been explored how shame results in feeling "helpless," reflecting the imprisonment of the self by shame. Along with feeling emotionally helpless, it can be seen how this experience can lead to feelings of "depression," not only in the psychological understanding of the term, but also the depression into the earth related to the death and burial to which shame may attempt to lead one. The "doubt" used to describe shame may be related to the lack of belief in oneself from the methods shame uses to hijack the heart and mind of the body; where one was once able to believe in his or her abilities, now all is called into question. One participant reflects on his experience of doubt related to shame as "[having] no foundation underneath me . . . moving every step with her . . . I knew completely that it was not right, so then when things got more out of hand, that's when . . . my character was weakening." Shame may have the ability to infect one with doubt, calling into question the firm ground upon which one previously stood.

In the midst of the experience of shame, it may still be true that the individual has some understanding of what is occurring, at least to some degree, despite all that is being felt in the body. A hint towards this conclusion can be found in the experience of frustration:

> "Out of that frustration seeded in your heart somewhere is the fact that you know you were destined for greatness, but hidden amongst all the crap in your life is . . . that weight . . . is that confusion . . . is that hardening of hearts almost, cause you're not sure if that seed is real or not."

The emotion of frustration may come from the awareness that what is occurring is, somehow, not homeostatic for the individual. There is a belief of what is *supposed* to be happening, to which the current experience does not align. Although this awareness can occur in one's daily life and experiences, shame's potential demand for control of the entire self, and the helplessness that results, is a frustrating experience when the individual is aware of it. If ignorance is bliss, awareness of shame infects the body as frustration. On the surface it would seem that the resulting frustration from shame is just another weight to add to the pile; however, the frustration associated to the awareness of shame in the body might be the one speck of hope one can cling to in order to climb the self out from the grave shame digs, which will be discussed in greater detail later.

Often associated with frustration is the experience of anger, which does not seem to be a stranger to the experience of shame; however, anger may not be at the core of the experience. "That anger is actually a reflection of fear which is coming from a place of doubt and shame," describes one participant. Considering this concept, although anger exists a plenty in the experience of shame, it shows itself in the world being born from a place that is created by shame. As shame may infect the body and filters one's incoming thoughts into hurtful lies about whom the individual is, a sense of helplessness, doubt, fear, and sadness might be felt. Shame may be the fire iron, stirring the coals of these emotions. Prodding and poking, it may give them each room to breathe until a deep redness begins to glow. The heat from these embers increases and spreads from one emotion to the next, and the pressure begins to build until it can't be contained, and anger is the prime result. The only thing left to question is the direction it might choose to flow.

Although it is described as an anger that has the potential to be directed towards others, "at the end of the day . . . it's not usually because they're upset, it's cause they're upset at themselves." anger experienced from shame may be projected from the self onto others, but the root of this experience is found in the glowing embers of anger within the self, out of the awareness of the current condition of the self being prodded by shame. One participant who identifies as a sexual minority describes, "[I became] angry . . . you know, why was I like this? I don't want to be like this," admitting that when someone else shames her, she feels unhappy and emotional, and afterwards experiences anger that she directs towards others. In other experiences of shame where she feels ashamed of her own actions, or lack thereof, this anger is solely directed towards her own self.

The experience of shame in the body reminds me of the biblical story of Job, who "was the greatest man among all the people of the East" (Job 1:3, New Century Version). After Satan attacked Job's farm, destroying all of his livestock and collapsing his home onto his ten children, killing them all, he inflicted Job with sores on every inch of his body. "Job took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, and he sat in ashes in misery" (Job 2:8, New Century Version). Job was described as an honest and innocent man, yet the foundation he had built his life upon was no match for a swift attack from Satan. Such may be the case with shame. It might attack instantly, causing its victim to call into question everything he or she thought to be true. Shame may reduce the individual to nothing, leaving one to sit in the ashes of misery, scraping away at the countless wounds that have been inflicted on the individual's understanding of the self. All that he knew and all that he had built was now gone. There he sat in the pile of smoking rubble that was once his home, now the grave of his children. Scraping his

sores with the broken pottery was a pain that could not have been felt in Job's body, because it was nothing compared to the ache of his soul. This particular chapter of the story of Job ends when his three best friends sit with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and "no one said a word to him because they saw how much he was suffering" (Job 2:13, New Century Version).

My glance meets the tree in my neighbour's backyard. Its trunk, the soul, is now fully exposed. Several leaves cling to branches, yet I am aware that within there is little life. I experience the tree as dying; certainly it looks no different now than a dead tree would, and yet I am still aware that new life is possible, that it may come after the darkness of winter passes. This tree will remain upright; might survive as time dredges on, despite the inevitable winter freeze.

I feel my heart beat. Warmth flows through my body.

**The Lived Relation of Shame**

**Loss of self to shame.** Out of the experience of shame working to move the body into the ground towards death and burial, it can be seen how the poison of shame may turn one in on oneself, preventing outward relating with the world. Shame's potential ability to render aspects of the self frozen, unsure how to speak or act, directly affects how an individual experiencing shame might fail to interact with others. The felt sense of shame in the body and the host of emotions it calls one to experience illustrates how the twisted truths shame may darkly whisper into the ear of its victims opens space for the individual to believe he or she is alone, afraid, and unworthy. One participant explains, relating to his shame experience, "If you don't believe that you're lovable, how can

someone love you, you know?" He goes on to say "[shame] kept me away from everything – intimate relationships; it kept me away from my faith."

If one's goal in this world is to create and nurture healthy relationships with other people, shame may be the antithesis to living a life fully alive. One describes it as such:

> "Definitely wasn't wanting to talk about it to people, you know. I didn't want to talk about it with myself and think about it, so it definitely made me hate who I was because I was sad because you know, hiding for so long and not being comfortable with who you are takes a lot out of you."

When this individual describes her loss of self to shame, shame prevents her from not only talking about it with others, but also processing and working through what she is feeling and struggling with herself. The resulting hatred and sadness directed towards her by shame illustrates how one can lose the understanding of his or her self, as shame may force into hiding the true self, who one truly is. The weight is felt as she explains the foreignness of the Who she is now experiencing within her own skin.

As the individual's understanding of who they are is buried and covered with emotions such as sadness and hatred, what replaces the self is the wishes of what is perceived to be an Other, which can be identified as other groups or individuals from the person's life. For example, one participant describes how the sex she had was an experience of "not only am I doing this thing that I don't want to do for you, it's not good enough for you," leaving her feeling that she "tried to be this person to this other person for so long and so it wasn't working." Through the actions of shame, there may begin to occur a sacrifice of the individual, and in this example, there is a sacrifice of one's own morality for the wishes and desires of the very romantic partner to which the individual is

involved. And all the while there is some frustrating awareness of what the individual is doing, despite the buried aspect of the self: “I think I was mainly afraid of probably what was happening to me if I knew that I could step into something that meant so much to me.” The buried individual, bound and gagged, a prisoner to shame, may still be able to witness how the body is living in the world, yet has lost the ability to speak and influence its past desires. Instead, the individual may feel incapacitated while shame allows the morality, the desires and wishes of the Other, to enter the body and influence the decisions now being made while held captive by shame.

In this example the Other is the beloved partner with whom the individual was involved with during the shame experience; however, the Other can take on many forms, and there can be multiple Others for the individual being shamed. For example, the same participant remarks “I just felt like if I walked into a church someone would see the scarlet letter and know where I had come from” and “I felt like I had screwed up for so long that no one was going to let me into the church.” Shame may transform the very institution responsible for instilling the moral beliefs upon which the individual is judged into the institution responsible for holding the victim of shame in silence. Another participant makes an important distinction in his shame experience that brings to the forefront the importance of relationships in the experience of shame. He explains that shame wasn’t caused by the sexual behaviour itself, but “I felt like I was looking at the Lord and telling him ‘I’m not going to listen to you’ and just did it anyways.” For this individual, shame was experienced in acting in disconnection with the wishes of his God, a relationship similar to the previous example of the faith community that was responsible for influencing the moral beliefs of the individual. Shame may hijack the

relationships in the individual's life and attempt to use them against the victim, holding the individual in pain and silence.

For another participant, the Other took the place of the friendships and those within her faith community. She describes her experience of shame occurring when others reject all of who she is as a person for her sexuality:

> "When people deny you over something small . . . it just makes you feel shameful and embarrassed . . . you don't want to say that you believe in anything or that you are different sexually and so it just brings that shame back and just wants you to keep it quiet and you don't want to tell anybody that you believe in anything like that."

Shame may not be interested in the small aspects of an individual; perhaps it does not discriminate between one's religion, sexuality, or any small piece of what makes them a person. Shame seems to desire the whole individual, and may be experienced as a denial of the whole individual from one aspect of who that person is. Shame appears to act upon the Gestalt principle of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts (Brownell, 2010), and shame may be always focused on the whole.

**Shame's connection to sexuality.** If shame is focused on the wholeness of the individual and tries to disconnect the individual from his or her relationships, continuously twisting the messages the individual hears from the Other, it may operate to a greater extent when the experience of shame surrounds one's sexuality or sexual behaviour. One participant describes the power of sexual shame and how it can overflow into other areas of life:

> "In my sexual life with him I wasn't successful and then I turned that inward as to why is it not successful? And then it sprouted into other areas like my looks and what have you . . . but I also think that there's not a lot of open conversations about sexuality and . . . I think there's just a level of shame cause in general sex is a taboo topic . . . so not only am I breaking into the taboo rules, I'm doing it earlier than I should be and I'm not good at it, so there's a trifold of like I'm not successful at this thing I shouldn't be doing anyway."

To some degree, the act of sexual behaviour may reflect the nature of shame. For most, sex is done in private, outside of the realm of the public world. One removes the clothes of the other, leaving the naked body on display for the other to take in, to fully experience. Exposed and vulnerable, one presents all of the physical self to the other, the opportunity to give and to take all of the other, to have for oneself in the moments of sex. There is a baring of all from each individual for the other, a mutual exposure and desire, longing to connect in deep and intimate relationship with another. It is "the ultimate intimacy of two beings in the fullest and richest encounter possible" (May, 1975). It is often believed that the deep, spiritual components of sexual relationships are founded upon loving trust and meaning with another person, but above this, does the description not follow along a similar line of shame? Shame may have the capability of disarming one's defenses, breaking its way past the clothing one uses to protect oneself from the vulnerabilities of the world, and leaves one involuntarily exposed and naked for the Other to rape and have their bidding.

As in May's (1975) words, shame seems to expose one, leaving him or her feeling vulnerable and naked to the Other, and can spill over and infect other areas of

functioning. With the potential for shame to reach its way to the soul, it may pull all of the things that make an individual human with it. The aspects of the individual that make him or her uniquely human are now thrown into the same fire with the dark core of the self. There may no longer be an ability to distinguish one's capacities in one area of functioning over the other – all are seen as wrong, and thus the individual is wrong.

And what can one make of the shame experienced in the realm of sexuality? "Men don't like used girls" is a message one participant accepted from "a woman of a church" when she was between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. The effects of such a message peel away the layers and burn into the core of an individual. Despite the possibility of being able to apply bandages to the covering of such a scar, when anything inside the realm of sexuality is experienced for the individual, the same layers are peeled back and the message is exposed and relived. "I carried [that message] with me knowing when this first relationship ended that men don't like used girls and I was like 'I'm never going to find someone who is OK with what I've done'."

The experience of being "used" as an individual in relation to sexuality, and the construction of the label "virgin", may offer an easy target for shame to attack. Because sexuality is intimately related to the very core of the individual that shame is focused on, the gap is bridged when shame might assault the core in the realm of sexuality, influencing the experiencer to believe that he or she is "used" after sacrificing his or her virginity and the various adjectives that might accompany such a label.

**Relationships central to overcoming shame.** Although shame may use relationships to attack individuals and tell us who we are in comparison to the Other, it may also be the case that relationships are key to overcoming experiences of shame. One

participant lost her virginity to someone who was not a virgin himself, and she now finds herself in a new relationship where "if I was a virgin entering into this relationship it would be something to be celebrated with my fiancé as opposed to him looking at me being like 'Seriously? Like, really?'" which resulted in an experience of shame in her first relationship. This experience deepens the connection between shame and sexuality, as the shame for the individual resulted from how her sexuality was held by her partner. In this example, if sexual experience in relation to the partner is lacking and not respected, it may open the door for shame to be experienced because of the belief that "I could never catch up to where he was in his sexual life."

The aspect of sexuality, deeply involved in one's self, may be projected outward onto the relationships in the individual's world. This projection may be the act of vulnerability, and for sexuality, perhaps the realm where the greatest vulnerability exists. Once it is projected from deep within the individual, he or she waits and analyzes just how the Other will respond to the aching message of desire and connection. If this message is held by the Other with the understanding of the vulnerability and courage it took in order to project the message, it may bring about closeness and connection for the two individuals in relationship – they move deeper into meaningful intimacy and further vulnerability. However, perhaps the slyness of shame finds traction to attack when the message of desire is dropped, fumbled with, not understood for the vulnerability and risk it took in order to send it. When the latter takes course, the connection between the two individuals may be built upon shaky ground and the risking individual opens his or herself up for shame to be the filter through which all messages are now heard. What the individual might believe to be true is twisted, and the lies move downward in the body

until they are met and understood from the same depth, the same core, the same self from which one's sexuality originates. The shame is described by one participant as "a false truth that I believe about myself." "That shame turned also from a sexual point of view inward of 'you're not good enough, you're not pretty enough'" is a message from another participant illustrating this process.

It has already been described how once shame may find its way to the depths of an individual it can hold him or her in silence. This quiet appears to prevent the individual from relating to others, and deepens the experience of silence:

> "The shame made me feel like I wasn't good enough to be connecting to people that I thought I normally would've because I didn't feel good enough to be with them . . . I didn't reach out to try and make myself better because I already felt like 'If I was wrong then why bother?'"

With the lies shame may tell the individual who now see the messages to be true, shame may prevent the individual from moving forward, connecting with others, and relating to those that play a central role in overcoming shame. Not only is it necessary to have the relationships in the individual's life accept who he or she is despite the lies the individual now believes about him or herself, it is also important that the individual begins to understand the healthy messages from others he or she is receiving. In some way, this new recognition may remove the filter through which shame twists the truths the individual believes in the midst of his or her shame experience. Perhaps, in order to begin to heal from shame, it is key to admit to others one's experience of shame, or perhaps it is necessary to tell and accept one's own healthy messages about oneself first. It might also be the case that there is a healthy balance of these two processes that can

allow for an individual to crawl from the depths of shame back into the light of living in healthy connection with others.

One participant provides clues to both of these processes occurring when she begins discussing her experience of shame with her youth pastor. She states "[there were] things that I knew but things that I needed someone to tell me because then that way I could start to let it go in my heart." She continues by suggesting "it was more so working through that shame of my self of knowing that I am good enough to be [in church] and that you are worth forgiveness." Although these two processes, a need to express to others one's shame, and working through shame for oneself, appear quite different, it is important to note that both involve relationship – the former being the relationship one has with other humans, the latter being the relationship one has with one's self. Both of these are significant and important relationships that not only reinforce and influence the other, but that are key to overcoming an experience of shame.

Another participant richly described the critical importance of his relationship with his God in overcoming the experience of his shame:

> "As hard as it is and how horrible I felt out of it, not long after it, it was like the Lord was just telling me 'I have you. You've figured this out, you made the mistake but now we can work on this together' sort of thing. It was a huge contrast from feeling like dirt to feeling such acceptance."

For this participant, the Other that is his God could have been the one to hold him in the silence of his shame; however, there exists a relationship between him and his God that allows space for a sense of healing and acceptance to begin not long after the individual experienced his shame. He describes that the moment he admitted his shame to his God

"was the tipping point of being a dark scenario to saying 'this is, this is character building now'."

Despite these two examples of communicating shame bringing about a sense of acceptance and a beginning of a healing process for individuals, there are also experiences when one admits their shame to another and results in more damage being done. One participant describes how she felt shame and rejection from an individual who, after identifying herself as a sexual minority, was questioned "How can you fully be with Jesus if you live that lifestyle?" This comment resulted in the participant experiencing the chain reaction of shame, and a feeling of being "very unsettled, like wanting to get up and walk around, and change the topic or look the other way." She understands that her shame results from people not understanding and accepting who she is as a person because of "something like sexuality," and the result of this rejection is being "always unhappy because I couldn't accept that in me, you know, that I was different." This example illustrates the damaging effects harmful relationships can have on the experience of shame, as it can be seen how the messages from the Other, the rejection of the whole self over an aspect of the self, becomes the same message the individual begins to tell oneself over time. And if one experiences greater pain from attempting and failing to communicate their shame to another, what is the point in communicating their shame to anyone? Would it not be better off to just suffer in silence and avoid feeling rejected once more by another? Torture may ensue when one believes in these messages of silence, as one describes, "I started to really just not want to be around people anymore, not wanting to do anything. I didn't want to talk to people anymore."

The difference between these two poles, the acceptance from the Other bringing one to a place of healing from his or her shame, and the rejection from the Other resulting in further pain, questions what the catalyst is that can begin to bring an individual up from their pit of shame. "I think the antidote of shame is love" one participant admits. He describes the people that encourage healing from shame being "uplifting and encouraging . . . congruent with your core values in life" and goes on to say that those same people "always want to talk about going forward [and] not the past." Because shame may pull individuals backwards, focusing on the self as wrong from a behaviour done in the past, it is clear how future-focused friends can make for a strong tool that combats the potential past-centered characteristics of shame.

Another participant discusses the characteristics of her current fiancé as an example of love being the antidote of shame: "the relationship I'm in now and knowing that my fiancé knows that about me, and is still willing to marry me and love me unconditionally, that takes the black mark off of me from before." The concept of unconditional acceptance grounded in love appears to be key in relationships that have the ability to overcome shame. Another participant echoes this message when he describes his marriage: "It really helped our relationship because she kept showing me over and over that like, that sucks, but I still know you and I still know your character and I'm not judging off your action." Shame may pull an individual into silence, attempting to paint him or her with a permanent tattoo of their indiscretion for all to see, forcing the individual to believe that he or she as a human is wrong for a single behaviour. Relationships built upon this foundation of loving unconditional acceptance expose this lie for what it is. These healthy connections show that the act does not define the

individual, and there can be some hope, some light for the individual to move towards; and finally, that they have a companion alongside them to journey towards the hope together. One participant had this to say when I asked what coming out did to her experience of shame:

> "It demolished it a lot, I can say that. At times it feels like I shouldn't have come out because it worries me about what people are going to say or do, but at the same time the shame that I felt has been minimized because I can be happy with me."

Shame may attempt to prevent one's true self from being known to the world. In place of this shame tries to have the individual believe the twisted truths it filters through the world. When an individual can fight against this belief, show the world who he or she is despite the messages shame screams, there is a sense of peace, clarity, and purity. The purity might not be born from having everything figured out, or be experienced without anxiety and fear, but in showing the world who one is, he or she is taking a step toward living in a more full and integrated way. Despite the tools shame may use to pull an individual away from such freedom, overcoming this experience was not "having to hide who I was, and people who loved me for me understood and they weren't judgmental about it, so it definitely brought a big weight off my shoulders." It is no wonder shame might attempt to pull individuals away from their relationships, into themselves, into a never-ending inner punishment about who they are in the world. It is out of the understanding of the power that relationships can have in healing an individual's experience of shame; acting as a hand, reaching down into the pit of torment to offer some relief to one suffering in silence.

It is a clear, calm, and crisp morning. There is abounding beauty in the death out my window. The skeleton of a tree is a statue, and beneath are the brittle tears, its leaves that once were. The air bites. I am the grave keeper, tending to the cold earth, collecting and disposing of these tears, each a memory, now only capable of releasing one final crunch. Beyond what is understood by the freezing ground, I connect to a sense of hope in me; a flicker from the wick slowly descending into its own earth.

**The Lived Space of Shame**

**A removal of self from space.** In the beginning of this chapter the story was told of the participant who left the space where she was shamed and retreated to the bathroom to cry "for hours." Another participant describes how, during the initial shock of shame, she felt "like wanting to get up and walk around." The comment "I didn't know where to go from there" suggests there is a collapse of space or loss of bearings in the midst of a shame experience, almost as though the darkness of shame is a veil pulled over one's eyes. And despite this collapse, there is a feeling of being pulled from the space shame explodes into. Shame may occupy the bedroom of the girlfriend who believes there is something wrong with her for not being able to sexually satisfy her man; take up residence in the church of the individual who is challenged by another for how she can be a sexual minority and still love Jesus; replace the woman who was the one night stand an individual crawled into bed with the previous evening. Shame may cast a shadow on these spaces and leave its residue and its presence in the room.

The experience of removal of self from the space in which shame is experienced is also related to the relationships that exist in the space as well. The shamed may feel the need to create distance from the shamer – a 'fight or flight' response with the stark

realization that one's hands are tied behind the back. The removing of self from shamed space in the physical world might not be shame forcing the victim to leave, but a method of defence by the individual to retreat into isolation. Just as shame in the body may collapse the physical self in on its core commanding silence of its captor, it might also use this defence mechanism to its advantage, as a shamed individual retreats from the space and relationship of shame into hiding, isolation, and painful solitude. One participant describes his experience as being "put in a corner" when he was driving back home from his experience of shame, which was "when all the weight of shame and everything really started to hit me."

The initial shock of shame may call one to retreat into isolation, an immediate attempt to remove the self from the shameful space; however, shame appears to take advantage of this response of flight. When the individual is alone with only his or her thoughts and the painful experience of shame to focus upon, shame seems to sink its claws into the individual after successfully calling the individual into silence. Here may be the moment in the experience of shame when the weight begins to be added. As the roots of shame quickly course downward through the body searching out the core of the self, it may pull the body into itself. This pull might be experienced as a physical weight, and as shame seems to take up more space in the body, the physical space of the self shrinks in size, finding itself in a corner suitable for collapse.

**A return to shamed spaces.** In some instances, shame appears to have a lasting effect on physical spaces associated with the initial shame experience, and can result in a re-experiencing of shame. Upon purchasing a house with her fiancé, one participant was flooded with shame when she stepped into the space. Having had a similar experience in

her past relationship, she experienced shame now because “that’s not fair to him. That’s not fair to my now fiancé.” The ghost of shame seems to linger in the space associated with what once was. No matter how hard one can work to repair, heal, and grow from the experience of shame, there may always be space in the physical world where shame can reside. Shame may haunt space and time, leaving residue and clues amongst an individual’s surroundings and in the minutes of the day or month or year. It can be a trap waiting in the shadows, and as one moves about in their world, functioning freely from their shame, there are moments and places, times and spaces, where a twinge of shame may flood the body. A surprised thought might come to mind: “I thought I had dealt with this.” Unfortunately, this re-experiencing may pull the individual back to where he or she was, back into the space where it initially climbed into the soul.

The faith community is not exempt from being a space where shame may continue to reside. One participant found it challenging to return to her faith community because of the thought that she would continue to be shamed. Another believed, “I didn’t have the right to be there. I felt like I had screwed up for so long that no one was going to let me into the church” and “I felt like everyone would just look at me and know that I already screwed up.” Despite the faith community being a space where people engage as a form of growth and healing, the residue of shame that may exist anywhere in the world may also be found within these spaces.

Although shame might reside in a deep place within the self for awhile, which will be explored in greater detail at a later time, a working through the experience of shame may allow for the development of healthy tools in order to protect oneself from re-experiencing shame. One participant describes, on the topic of growing from her

experience of shame, that "I'm never going to do anything to make me feel this bad again. I never want to feel like this, so we're not going to do this anymore," which resulted in her discussing and setting up personal and relational boundaries with her partner in their new home. She goes on to explain that she has grown from her experience of shame in a way that she has become aware of certain places where shame lurks, and knows not to enter these spaces. In doing so she has learned from her dark experiences, that she can protect herself from re-experiencing shame.

Another individual describes that her experience of shame lessened upon changing faith communities and getting involved in one that was not as strict as her previous one. In another instance, one participant describes that his shame experience in his first faith community was "a harder process. I couldn't heal from whatever shameful situation as quickly," mentioning that this faith community was more focused on rules, while his current faith community was more focused on relationships, and specifically one's relationship with "the Lord." This relationship-centered faith community "helped me process shame with myself . . . That was a huge thing for me, finding out myself, and different things that made me tick . . . It was a real growing point for me personally, spiritually." Although an exploration into the characteristics of faith communities which help facilitate growth from shame is beyond the scope of this research, there are many inferences one can make on the importance of relationships over rules and structure in faith communities when related to helping individuals recover from their shame experiences and affect positive growth and change.

I can only guess where the fingers of the tree point in the sky; light is sparse from the fall of night, yet the voice of the rain speaking to the earth brings eerie life to the

darkness. A new candle is born after the life of the former vanished in a wisp of smoke, stealing my gaze. This young life dances with vigour, calling me onward into the dark night.

**The Lived Time of Shame**

**A pulling into the past.** All participants describe shame as an experience that has the power to prevent one from looking into the future or delay positive growth, or that it is always focused on the past. One participant named it as "the number one thing that holds us back" and "has the ability to put that lid on you which stops you from looking into the future." The methods shame may use to have one sink into oneself, prevent one from relating to others, and cycle one's thoughts in their own mind, clearly have an effect on an individual's perception of time, and when one is tortured in such a space within themselves, it is understandable how the future seems bleak.

Shame may have the ability, when operating inside the mind and body of its victim, to focus the individual solely on the action causing the shame, twisting the truth into a fact about how worthless the person is. With this thought cycling in the mind of the individual, other possibilities or unique outcomes may become buried underneath the constant weight of the thought about how awful the whole of the individual is from their action. Because of this experience, the future fades away and the victim may become frozen in time, losing hope in what could be out of the belief that everything that now makes up the individual is the result of the shameful act.

One participant describes what it is like to re-experience her shame today:

> "I just know what I was wearing that day and where that happened too in my bedroom, but when I feel like this I'm back in my bathroom and it's two o'clock

> in the morning and I'm still that really sad girl. That's mentally where I take the picture from . . . I feel shameful for huge moments in my life…that's where I feel really ashamed or guilty and I just pop back there because I just don't remember a time before that that I felt that way, so I have nothing else to associate to it."

Shame operating in the mind seems to hold an individual in the experience of his or her shame. "When you have to sit there and experience it, it just gets the better of you, and you just don't know how to deal with it; how to move on from it very fast," explains another participant. Shame may turn an individual around, forcing them to look onto what they had done, and focuses his or her gaze solely on the action and who the individual is because of it.

**A slowing down of time.** If shame attacks an individual and holds them in the past, there may be a noticeable effect on the passing of time. As with most any uncomfortable experience, one of shame may turn the seconds into minutes and hours. "Everything that was happening…everything that was bad that was going on seemed to just take forever to stop being bad." As waves of shame move through the body and drown the individual, not even the passing of time seems safe and predictable. Along with everything experienced in the body; the turning in of oneself, the feeling of being poisoned at the core of one's humanness, the thoughts of wrongness attacking the self, what becomes even worse is that the foundation of one's experience of moving forward in time has now come to a crawl. When an individual places hope in the future, they project themselves forward in time – there is a removal of self from present and a wondering of what one can be in the coming hours and days. Shame seems to hijack one's ability to hope for the light that might come tomorrow, and may turn one's gaze

onto the darkness of the past that mirrors the filth and disgust that is experienced within the body.

If one is no longer able to imagine a better tomorrow, what purpose is there today? No doubt this question is a message shame attempts to ask an individual in the midst of his or her experience. With the collapse of time, the belief of the wrongness of self is only increased, and as this understanding of a faulty self is reinforced, the belief of there being a better future continues to decrease. Shame may snuff the candle of hope; the sun sets on one's tomorrow, and as it does, the shadow of one's past ever increases. With the increasing darkness, one is forced to turn and gaze at his or her growing shadow. Shame may be the experience of the sun sinking beneath the horizon, losing the warmth of its soul, and recognizing that one's shadow can no longer be distinguished from the rest of the surrounding darkness. This loss may be the experience of shame convincing its victim that all of him or her is wrong. One's shadow can no longer be separated from any light, because all light is absent. The shadow is now everything; objects blend with their neighbours and contrast is lost. Darkness suffocates and sends a cool chill along the surface of naked flesh. The indistinguishable line between light and dark, good and evil, is beyond blurred. Whatever once was light has now been stolen.

And as the sun sinks, one descends into darkness. There is no longer shadow or light to gauge the passing of time. There is no future; it was extinguished along with the sun. Darkness is inescapable; a murky silence where vision becomes difficult. And with the struggle to see, one naturally shrinks, imploding from contact with the physical world into the thoughts and feelings experienced within the body. Because shame has snuffed out the light, the whispering voice it had during the day is a growing voice in the night.

One is haunted by thoughts because of the collapsing world around. Shame may sneer from the darkness, but one cannot distinguish its face from the envelopment of darkness on the individual. It is here where shame may have accomplished its goals – through laying a firm foundation within the self, its roots may have taken hold of the core of the being. If it applies weight onto the self, shame may sink one into the ground. Shame may have hijacked the thoughts of the individual, filtering the messages heard from others into twisted truths it forces the individual to believe about oneself. With each message being cycled and reinforced within the self, the concept of future, forward thinking, and hope is pulled from the individual, as if it runs off into the distance. One might even be able to see it escape from view as it meets the line of the horizon along with the setting of the sun. As the victim meets darkness, a shudder is felt with the realization that it is here to stay.

**Shame across time.** How long is it that an individual experiences the darkness of shame? The answer to this question seems to vary by the individual, and it seems to involve both active and passive processes. One participant states that "it's a constant reminder and a constant battle" and "shame is always chasing you." The same individual admitted that "it was definitely difficult and it's still something that I think about now, but it doesn't have any affect on me; it's something of the past" saying that his experience of shame stayed with him for "at least a year." He described his process as being "intentional" and "gradual." He further states that over time "I started to not see it as emotionally; I started to see it as logically, and know what it was there doing to my life."

Another participant provides further insight into the experience of shame over time:

> "I can access it even right now, like talking to you about it I feel it…but I had to recognize that just because I can feel it, doesn't mean that I haven't dealt with it…just because I can access it and it's not 100% gone, doesn't mean that I haven't moved on from it and that I'm not still a good person over it, it's just that, it's just something I've never felt and now that I know how it feels, it's very easy to get back there."

The claws of shame seem to sink deep into an individual; their barbs hold tight and release is gradual. If and when one is let free of the grasp, the scars can remain for some time. The residue of shame, like tar in the lungs, can still hold an individual down, preventing him or her from taking a full breath of life. Yes, one may have overcome some aspects of a shame experience, but the memories and thoughts of such experiences can still bite today. And perhaps these scars are what make shame as harmful of an experience as it is – that as much as an individual can heal and overcome shame, there will always be knowledge of the darkness. One participant states "I'm over this as an event; I'm not over this as a feeling," contrasting the previous participant's experience of shame transforming from emotion to logic over time. This participant describes that she carries around her shame for "weeks." Although the process of overcoming shame can be explored in great depth, it will be mentioned at a later time, and I am hesitant to stray too far from a focus on the rich description of shame, the greatest aim of this work.

Related to the scars of shame over time, there is great concern when considering the experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour. As explored previously, seeing

the physical act of sex as "the fullest and richest encounter possible" (May, 1975) means that shame surrounding such an encounter may take away from the experience across time. Further, because of the importance of relationships in causing, maintaining, *and* overcoming shame, shame in the sexual realm may be quite damaging. One participant describes that after her initial experience of shame, "every time we would attempt to do anything sexual, [shame] would raise back up to being like [the initial experience]." Because both shame and sex may be focused on the deepest and most sacred aspects of an individual, the scars may run just as deep as the wounds one is trying to heal through full and rich connection with another. This participant is now in a new relationship, and she admits, "part of me in this new relationship still has a tiny bit of fear . . . because that's where I've come from."

One participant who describes feeling the initial experience of shame for "probably a couple days" and who found solace from his shame primarily from his relationship to his God, admits that "when I talk to my wife or if the past story comes up, I still feel the shame . . . now I have to look at her in the face and be like 'Yup, I did that.'" He goes on to say that "I feel pretty scummy about it, but . . . she doesn't hold it against me. I think I hold it against me" suggesting that even though others might not hold individuals in their experiences of shame, the shamed individual can hold what they have done against himself or herself. Despite this experience, this participant states that an important aspect in shame fading is the passing of time, but also believes that admitting his shame was the first step in overcoming shame: "That was the starting point of the shame subsiding and the next process happening . . . I think it helped the shame leave me."

The fourth participant described her experience of shame as "lingering" for "a couple months." She also admits that for her shame does get re-experienced today:

> "Knowing that you're kind of, you're still not a normal person . . . and you still have to hide it from certain people. That still brings a lot of shame in knowing 'Well I can never really be real to everyone in my faith community,' because if some people don't accept that . . . it still makes you feel kind of shameful."

Positive steps can be taken in order begin to work on and overcome an individual's experience of shame, such as admitting the experience to another and having the experience held and respected from someone the individual is with in relation. Despite this connection, the scars of shame might never heal, and the experience can bubble to the surface of one's consciousness and be re-experienced in the present, despite the experience being not as intense as the initial shock. Fortunately, there are also positive outcomes that can occur for the self through the process of working through shame.

**Growth of self through shame.** The four participants in this research were individuals who have dealt with an experience of shame in the past, and who I experienced as having at least partially healed from their shame. Because of this level of growth, conversation during interviews naturally shifted towards who the individual considered himself or herself to be now that they have worked through their shame experience. "It caused me . . . to start to ask myself some serious questions," one participant stated. "I don't believe it came from a place of health, but it turned into a place of health." The experience of shame is one of being forced into darkness. Once there, shame uses its tactics as an attempt to continue to dig a grave for the individual. However, the narrative does not end if the individual fosters his or her resilience, admits

their shame, has it held by another, and begins to climb out from the pit of shame. When describing shame as darkness, one participant followed with the comment "the darkness of the world will be eliminated by a single candle." Shame, through its various methods, seems to twist the truth, and in doing so attempts to create a reality for the individual that might not necessarily be the only truth. Hope that was once available might not be able to be perceived in the midst of shame; however, this is not to say that hope has actually abandoned the individual. Perhaps the previously mentioned emotion of frustration is not only out of the awareness of shame in the body, but could also play a role in an awareness of hope that is presently just out of reach. If shame were successful in keeping the veil over the eyes of its victim, as one participant suggests, "it would have controlled the rest of my life."

Through processing and growing from an experience of shame, the awareness of the potential to re-experience shame allows for an individual to implement plans and boundaries to avoid the experience. "I don't want to get back there ever again" one participant says about her experience of shame. "I never want to feel that way, and so I'm taking actions that I feel are the appropriate actions to never be back in that place." In one participant's relationship, she describes how she openly discusses her vulnerabilities and her past in order to successfully set up safeguards in her relationship. "I never want to feel like this, so we're not going to do this anymore. This is a boundary," she describes as the conversation she has with her current partner. "I don't put myself in any kind of situation where I could experience any kind of guilt or shame in relation to my sexuality of how my partner views my sexuality." The knowledge of the potential to re-experience shame can equip individuals to alter their behaviour in order to

avoid a re-experiencing of such darkness, and, as the above example illustrates, a past experience of shame can help strengthen relationships with others.

Despite the scars shame may leave on aspects of an individual, it is clear that the soul is not sacrificed forever through the experience of shame. It is not only possible to reclaim and uncover one's depths, but also to learn from and integrate one's darkness into his or her new found light. Through journeying into and through the darkness of shame, it is possible to foster resilience and gain strength of character. Through such a journey, one can even attempt to strengthen the resilience of others, as one participant who works with the youth of her faith community explains:

> "I'm an advocate for whatever feels important . . . I will talk about survivors, and I will talk about porn, and I will talk about what that does to people, because I feel like those are things that I didn't know because people keep them quiet . . . My mentality now is, even with the youth group, if I say one thing and if affects one of those kids, then maybe my experience was worth it for something, because I need to prove to myself that I didn't go through that for nothing."

What greater enemy of shame could there be than one who grows from the experience and is able to integrate their darkness into their light? The stories told from the scars of shame can unite others and bring individuals closer, a sharing of tools used to combat and defend against assaults of shame for others. One participant states, "I grew from [shame]" as opposed to using the term 'overcoming', and admits, "I know I wouldn't be who I am or where I am without it." Through the devastating effects shame can have on an individual and his or her relationships, the possibility exists for he or she to

incorporate their experiences of shame into their present understanding of who they are as individuals and how they desire to relate to others in their lives.

Three extinguished candles lay cold on my desk with no fuel left to burn. A fourth has taken up residence and keeps the ceremony alive. Outside stands firm the tree in cold thought. I have not noticed a movement in days, and for days, weeks, and months it will stand frozen; in the earth and in time. The experience drags on; each day is a void. No growth will be felt, and hour-by-hour the world ices its way deeper into the soul of the trunk. If there is a feeling in that tree, a felt sense of the world around it, it must not be rooted in hope. The dark months silence this life, and the memory of its leaves and the fresh scent of spring and summer fade more and more each day. With each passing 'tick' of my watch, its purpose shrinks into silence ever the more.

And I sit here knowing that spring will come. There will come a time when, perhaps writing my next project, I will experience the first bud of a leaf on the tree I watched descend into darkness. A new ring will appear, although invisible to me, in the core of its life; a scar marks the dark abyss of the season of death. And yet the scar strengthens the foundation of the life, giving it all the more power to stand firm in whatever might come the next cold season. Each year the roots sink deeper into the earth from which it came, connecting it more richly into its origins. Through struggle there can be growth; through pain there can be strength; through darkness there can be light.

## Chapter Five: Revisiting the Literature Through Participants' Experiences

From the description of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community described in the previous chapter, it is important to revisit the literature explored earlier in this work. The experiencing of the nature of shame provided in the description has personally brought about several important reflections. Such reflections are important to discuss, as such discussion may allow for further questions to be asked surrounding the nature of shame, its relationship to sexuality, the understanding of emerging adulthood, and the nature of the relationship among these important components of the human experience.

The following chapter provides a discussion of such reflections and is aimed at providing further areas of research on the abovementioned topics, questioning historical beliefs about the nature of shame and its relationship to the human experience, and exploring potential new understandings of the experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour. These understandings, along with the description of shame provided, will suggest implications for the practice of psychotherapy. Such implications might inform counsellors or other helping professionals, such as those involved in leading faith communities, in how they might choose to work with those they serve.

### Shame and Guilt

Approaching the interview process, I made a conscious effort not to include a question related to the participant's distinction between shame and guilt, as I felt such a question would detract from the aim of the research. However, three of the four participants organically included the term guilt in conversation, which spurred me to ask how these two experiences might differ for them. Tangney and Dearing (2002) described

how college undergraduates, of similar age to the four participants in my research, "couldn't articulate any consistent clear differences between shame and guilt" (p. 11). Indeed, two of the four participants involved in the present study mentioned they had either researched shame or looked up the definition of shame, suggesting that the experience of shame involves many difficult layers to navigate, and that bringing these experiences to words can be quite challenging.

One participant described the experiences of shame and guilt synonymously, stating that there is no difference between the two and the terms are interchangeable. The other two participants who explored the distinction between their guilt and shame found it to be a bit more complicated. One explained that shame is an experience that is more difficult than guilt, lasts longer than guilt, but also that guilt and shame can overlap, and can even reinforce each other. He describes, "I think research has shown that shame is character based, shame is who you are, guilt is what you've done." It is important to note his comment about research, suggesting perhaps that this conclusion was not drawn solely from his lived experience, but also from some literature or information he experienced externally. Another participant described shame being connected to more serious incidents in life, and that shame is felt more in the body, whereas guilt is experienced more cognitively.

Despite the similarities and differences between shame and guilt explored by the participants, it is apparent just how significant of an experience shame can be. At the outset of the interview process, I struggled with tracking individual's descriptions of the emotions he or she experienced in the midst of their shame – was his emotion of sadness caused by shame, or vice versa? Was it her anxiety that kept her away from relating to

other people, or was it her shame, or did her shame cause the anxiety that brought her to silence? The difficulty I faced attempting to sort through all of these emotions while trying to understand what led to or came as a response from what, left me overwhelmed.

Insight came when I began to question the understanding of shame as an emotion. Surely, as described in the previous chapter, shame is no simple or standalone experience, easy to understand, make sense of, or fully comprehend. Although much of the research regards shame as an emotion (Brown, 2012; Lewis, 1971; Lewis, 2003; Lynd, 1958; Scheff, 2000; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; among others) it seems completely reasonable to challenge this assumption of shame as an emotion, and instead begin to study and observe shame as an *experience*. In this way, I opted to place shame above all of the emotions described by the participants, and indeed found that shame underscored all that existed underneath: anger, doubt, fear, frustration, sadness, etc.

Consider the term 'heartbreak.' A heartbroken individual has experienced a great loss and might feel an extreme sense of sadness. This sadness might be the primary emotion felt in a heartbroken individual, but the term 'heartbreak' also conjures up a sense of pain, longing, helplessness, and perhaps betrayal, broken trust, and anger. In the same way that heartbreak can be viewed as an experience with a breadth of emotions and feelings existing within it, so too shame can be viewed as the experience, allowing for a broader range of emotions and feelings to exist within the experience.

Viewing shame in such a way might also change how individuals research and observe the differentiation between shame and guilt. For example, in van Vliet's (2009) research on overcoming shame, her results suggested that "internal causal attributions and self-blame . . . shifted towards shared and external attributions of causality" (p. 144).

Because the most recent consensus has agreed that shame involves a focus on the self whereas guilt is more concerned with behaviour and reparation of relationship with another, this understanding illustrates a shift over time from the 'emotion' of shame into the emotion of guilt – the emotion itself transforms. However, if one views shame as an *experience*, with guilt an emotion occurring as a by-product of it, this view opens the door for many more questions to be asked: Which emotions might be a by-product of shame, and how might they affect an individual? Does an experience of shame always involve feelings of guilt, and if it does, how might this involvement change one's understanding of shame?

Although much study and debate has occurred in order to differentiate between shame and guilt (for a concise overview see Tangney & Dearing, 2002, pp. 10-25), it has often resulted in a relationship between these two terms as emotions. Might it instead be that guilt is a prime *emotion* felt during an *experience* of shame? How might viewing shame as an experience rather than an emotion change an individual's orientation to the way they research and discuss shame and guilt? Could such a view contribute insight and further development of a person in a way that viewing shame as an emotion could not? It is clear that throughout history, and even still today, researchers struggle to set in stone exactly what shame is and is not, and its limits on how it relates to the human condition. Perhaps greater insight into its influence and role within individuals, but also in society, will come from loosening it from the term 'emotion', and orienting oneself to it in another way – as an experience.

**Transported to a Simpler Time**

Oftentimes I could notice the struggle participants had sharing their experiences of shame in the interview process. Tears were shed, long silences shared, and fleeting glances cast about the room. In some moments I could feel my face curl and eyes grow narrow as I watched a fellow being wrestle with their words in order to capture their experience as accurately and fully as possible. At times participants would engage their body, showing me where they felt their shame, how the weight of it sat on their shoulders. Certainly the questions posed to the participants were ones not often asked of them before, but I could see how the exploration of their shame brought both of us to a deeper level of understanding and closer connection to the experience.

At times I would notice an individual's body language and speech become more relaxed, as if he or she were ascending from time spent in a deep and dark description of their shame. Of course it can be painful to recount all that occurred within the self in the midst of a dark time, and so it was understandable that individuals might come up for air, so to speak. What struck me upon reviewing transcripts were the many occasions individuals used an anecdote of a childhood story in order to thicken their description of their shame. Three of the four participants included such stories, and some on multiple occasions throughout the interview process. My curiosity arose and I began to reflect on why this happening might have occurred.

I can relate to the re-experiencing of pain in reflecting on past dark times. It brings the felt sense back into the body, and within there can be waves of painful past that begin to rock. A potential escape for this experience could be to move oneself to another place, a simpler time. Perhaps the pain of shame is so great that it dares one to

experience it in the present. As a means of submission, one then transports oneself to a moment of lesser consciousness. May (1953) explains the challenge in confronting the present:

> To confront the reality of the present moment often produces anxiety. On the most basic level, this anxiety is a kind of vague experience of being "naked;" it is the feeling of being face to face with some important reality before which one cannot flinch and from which one cannot retreat or hide. (p. 202)

The experience of shame appears to be hard enough, but struggling to be presently fully aware of the experience of it can be too much to handle. Potentially as a means of protecting oneself from it, it becomes reduced to a simpler form – an anecdote of the child getting caught with his hand in the cookie jar, as one participant described.

At no point was an individual able to describe the midst of their shame and simultaneously imagine a brighter future. A more familiar message was that "my world was ending." Although one might be too scared to accept the feeling of the self in the present, in the realm of shame it seems to also be the case that the option of transporting to the future is not possible. Perhaps shame is the experience of bringing one nearer to death, and in facing death one must run in the opposing direction. In the description of shame from the previous chapter, it can be seen how an individual might be unable to live fully in the present where one "cannot retreat or hide" (May, 1953, p. 202). With an inability to bring one's mind into the future as a means of protection, the past remains the only option.

In the midst of this consideration I connect to the concept of regression, a movement not necessarily into the past, but to a former and less developed state. The

journey into the depths of shame as the aim of this research was by no means a simple task to process for any of the participants. Shame experienced as an emerging adult might be more challenging solely because of the level of development of the individual. The movement towards a less developed individual in order to enrich the experience of shame through description protects the present individual from fully feeling the painful emotions, but it also provides a simpler, more one dimensional yet still concrete conceptualization of shame. It is easy to connect to the childhood experience of reaching above the top shelf, perhaps with a knee or both feet on the counter, and burying an arm elbow deep as quick as possible into the cookie jar. As the child hears the presence of the gatekeeper immediately behind, the child might become awash in shame. In this instance the awareness of death is also present; 'Mom is going to kill me.'

I should not proceed without commenting on how closely the experience of depersonalization and regression might be. Although not to say these terms can be used synonymously, as each one is unique and thus deserves its separate place in this work, I cannot help but notice similarities between these two terms. Both bring up a sense of reversal, movement away from where one hopes to travel. Certainly in one's lived experience the quantitative aspect of time will always move one forward, and with forward movement there can be a sense of growth, not only physically but also with an evolving of the self. What is important to consider and further develop are understandings of how shame could prevent forward growth and individuation for individuals, and the effects these might have on how individuals relate to themselves, others, and systems to which they belong.

**Shame, Sex, and Love**

There was a moment during the months I spent reading and reviewing the literature on shame when I met with a considerably uncomfortable experience of frustration. I had recognized that throughout the many articles and books written on shame, many highlighted the intimate connection between shame and sexuality, although most of the writing I experienced as brief and superficial. Certainly sexuality can be closely linked to shame, but is not love the power underscoring the need for individuals to relate to and experience sexual intimacy with another? If shame occurs in the realm of sex and sexuality, should it not be the case that shame occurs to a greater extent within the realm of love?

I have kept these questions in my mind during the course of writing and I am careful not to overextend this portion of the work to the point of losing focus on the aim; however, I believe the nature of this study deserves a discussion about the connection among shame, sex, and love, and it would be a 'shame' to close out this research without one final consideration. Of course love is not the simplest of topics; the great philosophers and poets have longed to touch the beauty of it while still it is known that love deserves an aspect of sacredness. Yalom (1989) writes, "romantic love is sustained by mystery and crumbles upon inspection" (p. 1), and as such I attempt to hold it in a place of profound respect.

The description of shame in this study suggests that the experience of shame can pull individuals away from their relationships – whether the relationships in question are with their romantic partners, their peers, their faith community, or even their selves. It is understandable what the effects of this isolation might play on an individual, and one can

speculate how this might affect an individual's capacity to receive and give love to another or to the self. Although shame might cut an individual's connection off from being able to love oneself or another, does this also suppress one's need for love and relation? I would not believe this suppression would be the case, and certainly many would hold that individuals have a fundamental need to receive and give love. What effect does shame have on the capacity for one to love, and how might this effect influence how individuals relate to their worlds?

May (1953) understands that "our capacity to love depends, in turn, upon our prior capacity to be persons in our own right" (p.184). Thus, it would appear a close relationship exists between how an individual loves and how much an individual knows, understands, and loves his or her own self. Stated another way, "we receive love . . . not in proportion to our demands of sacrifices or needs, but roughly in proportion to our own capacity to love" (May, 1953, p. 184). Not only does it appear that shame has the potential to destroy one's perceived ability to receive and give love, it can also result in one questioning his or her self, and so, according to May (1953), this questioning can also be connected to the difficulty in further exploring and uncovering aspects of one's self in order to give and receive love to the highest degree possible. Such illustration of a concept describes how possible it might be for shame to inhibit a person's entire development, holding them back from knowing self, relating to others, and fully experiencing the wonderful aspects of life through love.

Stated in a previous chapter, Riezler (1943) understood that "shame decreases with increasing love, increases with decreasing love. It takes its leave when love reaches its peak and reappears when love takes its leave. Shame protects love in sex against sex

without love" (p. 462). He understood, in a way that views shame in a light different from the connection I just explored with the work of May (1953), that shame is almost a warning flag, appearing to show how an individual might be losing love in his or her relationship. Needless to say, this oil-and-water view of the relationship between shame and love provides insight into how intimate these three experiences might be connected. The words of one participant who spoke "the antidote of shame is love" resonate here, suggesting that in order to effectively fight against shame, it is necessary that one cultivates and nurtures a healthy understanding of him or herself. From this state, one exudes love towards oneself and others, not only as a means of harbouring intimate connection with others, but also as a means of protecting the self and others from the pain and suffering of shame.

One participant captures what appears to be a natural challenge for emerging adults when it comes to young love and sexual intimacy:

> I wasn't old enough to realize that I could be a person outside of being a couple, so I coupled hard . . . . I felt more shameful that I had changed who I was in that relationship to be with him when he wasn't trying on his end.

If the experience of emerging adulthood is a coming of age, a maturing and growing and learning of who one is and who one wants to become, it seems natural that such a journey of discovery can be extra challenging when one is learning how to romantically love another. May's (1953) understanding of the capacity for one's ability to love equalling the capacity to be one's own person opens the door to understand this challenge in greater detail. Emerging adulthood is marked by an exploration of "a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews" (Arnett, 2000, p. 469), and is a stage of life

that has shown an increase in uncommitted sexual behaviours (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). When overlapping such an important developmental stage in life and the frequency of sexual exploration with the powerful potential to experience shame and the suggested imperative in knowing oneself in order to love oneself and another, there is urgency and uneasiness that develops with the realization of how sensitive and important this life stage is. The sacrifice of self for another in love, as illustrated by the previous participant's quotation, illustrates this challenging stage in life and underscores all that might be at stake in such an exploratory period.

Speculating further on the effects of shame and how it might relate to sex and love, I re-introduce the statistic of the 37% of pastors who identified that watching pornography was a "current struggle" for them (Leadership Journal, 2000, as cited in Covenant Eyes, 2013). As sex is considered the most intimate experience between two individuals (May, 1975), the experience of viewing pornography is the act of sex without intimate relationship. It is seen in the experiences of the participants in this study how shame has the ability to pull an individual away from close relationships with others and the self. As the question was posed before, if it holds veracity that an individual is still in need of an experience of love despite the inability to relate to another because of the effects of shame, it is understandable how an individual might view pornography as an attempt to experience love through sex. The concern here is the absence of relationship to another in the experience of viewing pornography. For an industry that generated $13.3 billion dollars in 2006, which is more than the MLB, NBA, and NFL combined (Treasures, 2013), pornography appears to be widespread, and considering the above inferences of the relationship among shame, sex, and love, it is understandable that shame

might play a role in fuelling and maintaining such an industry. It is important to reiterate that an increase in the viewing of pornography has been correlated with loneliness and major depression (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), arguably similar experiences to the depression, loneliness, and isolation experienced by participants of this research in their shame experiences. Even when considering the increase in uncommitted sexual practices among emerging adults (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012), it appears that such practices involve an absence of romantic love that is considered to be present in long-term committed relationships, which calls into question how great of a role shame might play in such circumstances.

This exploration leads to more questions, especially when the taken-for-granted assumptions regarding shame are teased apart. What might the relationship to loving sex look like after relating to sex without love? If the emerging adulthood demographic is rife with uncommitted sexual encounters and exposure to the enormous industry of pornography, in what ways do such practices affect the way one learns and grows to intimately love oneself and another, and how great of an influence can shame have on this process? Although May (1969) explores in greater depth how society might have come to separate sex from love, it is beyond the scope of this work to enter any deeper into such a conversation. What I will conclude this discussion with is a revisiting of the role of spirituality in the understanding of sexuality.

Despite the noted increase in uncommitted sexual behaviour, the extent of the pornography industry, and the characteristics of the emerging adulthood demographic, according to Helminiak (1998), one's sexuality can be an intimate aspect of the self, and inextricably linked to one's spirituality. When the spiritual component of one's self

exists in harmony with the individual's sexuality, integration occurs, and "integration of the sexual and the spiritual is nothing other than the harmonious functioning of the integrated human being – organism, psyche, and spirit" (Helminiak, 1998, p. 123). This discussion alerts one to the importance of growing towards integration on these fronts, as it would seem that in order to live a life fully alive, one must seek integration of all of these parts. From the description of shame presented in this study, it seems imperative that overcoming one's shame surrounding their sexuality is necessary in order to achieve full, harmonious functioning.

**Changing Self**

Throughout this study I have profusely included the term 'self' in the description of shame. As well, the scholarship of many theorists integrated herein have used the term 'self' in their theories of shame and its relationship to individual lived experience. Such a term used in the literature is no doubt also related to their understandings of terms such as 'self-esteem,' 'self-worth,' and 'self-blame.' It has been noted in the previous chapter that my experience of each of the participants is that growth had occurred for each of them as a result of their experiences of shame. Furthermore, terms such as 'healing' and 'overcoming' shame has been used throughout this work, not only by myself, but also from other theorists concerned with a greater understanding of the experience of shame. Does one seek to understand the nature of shame as a means of learning how to avoid the experience? If maturation can come from individual experiences of shame, is the experience one that we should avoid at all costs? If it is not, what role might it play in one's experience of being human, and how might the experience itself be one that is spiritual? It has been described what has assisted the participants in finding their way

through their experiences of shame, but if shame is experienced as such a devastating experience for participants, what is the process at play that has brought them into, through, and with their experience into a deeper understanding of who they are?

I am aware that I have yet to explicitly acknowledge or rely on any Jungian understandings of the human experience in this work; however, it has become clear at this point that such understandings are necessary to further explore the description of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community. The following inclusion of the distinction between 'ego' and 'Self,' as well as the discussion that follows, aims to further elucidate the overarching aim of this work – the rich description of shame among the participants of this research and what a Jungian perspective might bring to it.

**The role of ego in the experience of shame.** Reflecting on the description of shame provided in the previous chapter, I am called to question the nature of the term 'self' used. Perhaps it has been the result of overexposure to the term by theorists in the literature who have lent themselves to this work, my own preconceived understanding of the term, or the experience of my own self that has caused it to be used so abundantly. My reflection has led me to bring into discussion the role of consciousness and the unconscious in one's experience of shame. Although participants have described shame as "all-encompassing," might it be that the participants' experience of shame encompasses only those aspects within the individuals' awareness? What role then does any unconscious aspect of one's psyche play in the experience of shame, and the movement of an individual into and through his or her experience of shame towards greater integration and wholeness?

Although I am able to retract and modify definitions used in this work, I will refrain, as the process of hermeneutic phenomenology calls one to exist within the lifeworld of the time in which it is experienced. Instead, I acknowledge the importance of considering the term 'ego' being used in replacement of the term 'self' in this work. Ego will be defined as the conscious aspect of one's psyche (von Franz, 1964, p. 162), and is differentiated from 'self,' which is understood as "the totality of the whole psyche" (p. 162). Self, beginning with a capital letter herein after as a means to differentiate from 'self' used up until now in this work, by definition includes both the conscious *and* unconscious aspects of an individual's totality of being. Therefore, through the experiences of shame described by the participants in this research, operating solely from their present awareness, it can be seen that shame cannot encompass, harm, injure, or otherwise affect Self. Instead, Self includes but also exists beyond one's conscious awareness, his or her ego. It can now be seen that shame might be "all-encompassing" of one's ego, experienced as feeling "helpless" or "depressed," wherein there exists a power beyond what is understood and experienced consciously: Self. Self cannot ever be lost, despite what has been suggested by a Chapter Four heading and description, not so far as it can be *experienced* as lost from the ego's standpoint, which is the aspect of each individual involved in this research I was able to experience.

While I introduce a Jungian concept and understanding of Self into this work, before proceeding further in such a direction I acknowledge that many readers may be more familiar with the word 'soul.' There exist parallels between a mainstream use of 'soul,' as understood as the eternal and unchanging part of oneself, and the Jungian concept and understanding of Self. However, limitations of the word 'soul,' in

mainstream lexicon, signal that the transpersonal or archetypal components might be lost as well as the unconscious layers. The concept 'Self' includes both of these layers as well as the personal.

In what ways might this understanding of the human psyche affect how the literature is read through this work? Certainly one can replace the term 'ego' with 'self' in the understanding of 'self-esteem,' 'self-worth,' and 'self-blame,' as the experience of shame might cause one to blame oneself, but only insofar as he or she is aware that he or she is doing so. Consider Lewis' (1971) use of self when she writes, "Shame brings into focal awareness both the self and the "other," with the imagery that the "other" rejects the self" (p. 25). An understanding of the self as one's ego and not one's Self might illustrate how the Other views what one is consciously aware of, his or her ego. This understanding might also lead to a deeper level of clarity, the point Lewis attempts to make with her exploration into the relationship between the Other and the ego. Considering the above situation with an inclusion of the role of Self involved, it would appear the self-consciousness of shame has the capacity to move an individual away from the calling of Self (to be explored later). The influence of shame on the ego might be that it prevents an individual from attempting to focus outside of his or her ego. Movement in the form of growth or maturity is restricted because one might no longer be able to imagine existence beyond conscious ego functioning. This discussion raises several important and novel questions about the nature of shame, as well as provides a calling to understand the relationship between Self and the experience of shame. What meaning might unfold if shame restricts one to his or her ego functioning, and what role does Self play in this process?

**Shame, Conformity, and Self.**

It was Helen Lynd (1958) who first named depersonalization as an effect shame might have on an individual. She argues that such depersonalization takes place as a means of protecting against isolation, where one might think "If I cannot communicate with others, then I will at least not risk openness; I will deny the possibility of openness; I will protect myself against it" (p. 70). This "protection by depersonalization" (p. 118) can take the form of adopting a socially approved role, but she admits "each of these forms of externalization offers protection from exposure, but, for some persons at least, at the cost of diminished personal identity" (p. 185).

Scheff (1988) also suggested that shame might play a role in conformity, as an individual might act according to group standards as a means of avoiding a shame experience. Along with these two theorists, several others have alluded to or directly commented on shame's role in conformity, and have been described previously in this work (Heller, 1982; Gilber, 1998; Greenwald & Harder, 1998; Lewis, 2003; van Vliet, 2008). At several moments during the course of interviews, certain participants made comments reflecting this view taken by Scheff (1988). "I never want to feel that way, and so I'm taking actions that I feel are the appropriate actions to never be back in that place," stated one participant when she spoke of changing behaviours to prevent re-experiencing shame. Another participant alluding to shame commented, "It helps me to make decisions today when shame comes up." For these participants it can be seen how, after experiencing the pain of shame, actions might be changed or approached differently in future situations as a means of avoiding a similar experience of their past shame. My experience of all four of the participants in this research was that they each had the

courage to continue their relationship to a faith community despite their shame experiences, but does this suggest conformity? Although one cannot say for certain, and since none of the interview questions were directly related to the role of conformity, one can only infer the process each of the individuals experienced as they maintained their relationship with their faith community after experiencing shame.

What is of importance to consider in relation to this present research is the role of the faith community, a group one might conform to in relation to this study. Although drawing closer to the values or sanctions put forth by a faith community might suggest that individuals are sacrificing aspects of their own beliefs in order to conform, for all participants it appeared that their faith community was able to offer support and acceptance of what each of the participants considered to be their shameful experience. Furthermore, an overcoming of one's shame experience might help to educate and inform others so that others might avoid similar experiences, as hoped by one participant when she described trying to help others in her faith community: "If I say one thing and it affects one of those kids, then maybe my experience was worth it for something."

My experience of each of the participants was that through the helpful aspects of the relationship to their faith community, they were able to be accepted in a way that was honouring who each of the individuals were, while also allowing each to strengthen his or her faith or relationship to his or her God. One participant explored the difference between his past and present faith communities, noting that his previous community was more focused on rules and rule following, whereas his present community put more of an emphasis on quality relationships. He also commented that because his previous faith community was focused on rules, "I couldn't heal from whatever same shameful situation

. . . as quickly." This indicator might point to faith communities of a conservative nature as being potential contributors to the experience of shame, and might also limit the capacity to heal members experiencing shame.

This participant's understanding of the qualities of his faith communities and how they might relate to his experiencing of shame emphasizes the importance of relationships in overcoming experiences of shame, and as well lays the groundwork for importance questions to be asked and studied in the future. What effects do imposing rules and sanctions on individuals within a community have in how one experiences shame? Similarly, what effect does a focus on relationships within a community have on how individuals experience shame? How can a community navigate between having a focus on both upholding and honouring rules as well as cultivating and nurturing healing relationships?

Considering the literature explored and the experiences of the participants in this research, it would seem that relationships are central in overcoming experiences of shame, and yet it is also possible for individuals to exhibit conforming behaviour as a means of avoiding experiences of shame. A topic of further interest is the influence helpful relationships can have on assisting an individual to heal from their experience of shame, while continuing to nurture and cultivate the individual's understanding of who he or she is in the process. Perhaps it is the case that depersonalization occurs through a shame experience in order to protect the individual, and thus the individual is more susceptible to adopt external codes of conduct, resulting in an even greater loss of identity. However, through a focus on unconditional acceptance from positive relationships, it could also be that the individual remains intact and allows for healing

from shame to occur. Of course these are merely speculations, and additional research in the area of shame and conformity is required in order to begin to explore these ideas in greater depth. Regardless, the stories shared by each participant in this research offer a new layer in which to question and challenge the understandings of shame, depersonalization, and conformity.

Although limited to inference, what role might the ego play in conformity in the midst of shame? When one experiences shame, suffering is experienced in the form of all that comes with shame. What reaction does the ego play as a means of escaping the pain felt by shame? For an individual belonging to a faith community experiencing shame surrounding sexual behaviour, could it be that one more closely identifies to the sanctions put in place by the Other, in this case a faith community, as a response to the experienced failing of the ego?

I have previously discussed the role depersonalization, as understood by Lynd (1958), might relate to conformity; however, a new layer of exploration becomes apparent when we introduce Self. When considering the term depersonalization, it can be seen as a process whereby one loses an aspect of what it is that makes one human. This understanding suggests that a component of the psyche is sacrificed in the process of conformity. Might this depersonalization represent a movement away from Self? If so, what might Self be calling one into, and for what purpose?

**The Self and Spirituality**

What capacity might Self play in one's shame experience? In this work I have used Helminiak's (1998) term of spirituality, understood as "that dimension of the human mind that makes us self-aware, self-transcending, open-ended, always one step beyond

our explicit articulations" (p. 121). Considering the understanding of Self used in this work, that of both the conscious and unconscious aspects of one's psyche, can it not be understood that Self includes the spiritual component of being? It would certainly appear that Self and spirituality share common ground.

If one considers Self to include the spiritual component of being, it is important to explore what role Self might play in one's experience of shame, and how this role might be considered spiritual. It can be seen how each of the participants underwent hardships, harmful emotions, and difficulty in the midst of their experiences, and emerged having uncovered a sense of maturity from their experience. However, if an experience of shame causes one's ego to turn in on itself, the question remains what role Self plays at such a time. Might it be possible for Self to be calling one *into* their experience of shame? What might the experience be for an individual who ignores his or her ego that is calling him or her towards conformity through adapting to external sanctions and codes of conduct, and instead chooses to allow for shame to run its course; to fully experience all that shame is? The previous chapter suggests that one can grow and mature from his or her experience of shame, suggesting perhaps that a greater, more full and complete experience of shame might allow for even deeper growth towards integration and wholeness. An understanding of this allows for one to view shame from a different perspective, and indeed helps one to understand the role of ego and Self in the experience of shame. For if conformity is the opposite of courage as opposed to cowardice (May, 1953), it might be important for us to challenge the role of one's ego in experience of shame and the nature of spirituality as a calling of Self towards a deeper growth of the individual experiencing shame. Might it be true that underneath the conformity

potentially resulting from a shame experience is avoidance by the ego to fully experience shame, and simultaneously a calling from Self for the individual to move down *into* their shame, as a means of bringing about depth in the individual?

**'Healing' and 'overcoming' shame.** Helminiak (1998) further understood that "the integration of the sexual and the spiritual is nothing other than the harmonious functioning of the integrated human being – organism, psyche, and spirit" (p. 123). If one is exposed to shame surrounding sexual behaviour, such as was the case for the individuals in this present research, it is important to consider the process by which one might respond. In the context of shame surrounding sexual behaviour, one's ego is turned towards itself, and the sexual aspect of the individual is called into question. As was suggested previously, in such instance it would appear that, if the individual functions solely from his or her ego, shame sheds a light onto his or her sexuality, and in seeing it as wrong, one might avoid the calling from Self into his or her shame, and instead avoids as a means of escaping the pain of shame. Such avoidance takes the form of conformity to the external sanctions put forth by a system in the individual's world, in such a case surrounding sexuality, the norms and rules put in place by faith communities outlining appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Does this process reflect the position Helminiak (1998) takes relating to what might constitute an integrated human being? One's ego functioning to avoid the full pain of shame surrounding sexual behaviour and conforming to external codes of conduct does not appear to be the process by which one becomes integrated. Once again, what might occur if an individual uncovers the means by which they can engage the spiritual aspect of themselves, answer the calling of Self to move deeper into the full weight and burden

of their shame, and from such an experience find new growth within themselves? Is a process such as the one described above more intimately linked to that of Helminiak's (1998) understanding of integration? Perhaps it is not the movement towards the sanctioned Other as a means of finding peace, growth, and understanding of being, but instead the full experiencing of the phenomenon within oneself.

Such an exploration calls into question the nature of 'healing' and 'overcoming' an experience of shame, two terms that have been used throughout this study, by not only the cited theorists but also myself. If one considers someone to have 'healed' or 'overcome' their experience of shame – by becoming more involved in his or her faith community after experiencing shame surrounding sexual behaviour, for example – one might question whether or not this is true 'healing,' or instead a successful avoidance of their shame through ego functioning in the face of one's shame. Perhaps verbs such as 'healing' and 'overcoming' have no place in the realm of experiencing shame, as they might not be relevant in such experiences. Instead, the possibility exists that the integration of a human being's sexuality might only occur through moving further *into* the depths of one's shame surrounding his or her sexuality, fully experiencing the suffering that it brings, and emerging on the other side of the experience having uncovered a more holistic sense of being.

**Surrender to Self.** Considering the above discussion, what might be the importance of shame in relation to the human experience? If one is able to fully move into and experience the weight of his or her shame, face one's own ego as it is shown just as it is, with its cracks and flaws, what might exist on the other side of such an experience? Could it possibly be that shame exists as a helpful human experience? What

might one experience should there occur a surrender of the ego, resulting in greater opportunity for Self to play a role in one's experience? If one were to surrender all they are consciously aware of to what lies beneath and beyond, where might Self be able lead the individual? If one is to consider this experience to be the nature of shame, what might its role be?

It would appear that shame might cause one to focus on his or her ego as a means of questioning the nature and quality of the ego, not to impede the journey of the traveller, but as a suggestion to the explorer not to rely solely on the means by which he or she took to arrive at this place. To propose that perhaps this journey one takes cannot be ventured with only what exists within the mind's reach, but that surrender is necessary to that which lives beneath and beyond, the uncertain and spiritual calling of Self. And where might the answering of such a calling lead? Perhaps to an expansion of ego towards living in closer relation to Self, and extension of one's consciousness towards a deeper, more integrated experience of one's being.

**Implications for the Practice of Psychotherapy**

The phenomenological description of shame provided in this work as well as the above considerations, implications, and questions aimed at challenging the historical understanding of shame in the literature, requires one to also consider how such considerations might influence the practice of psychotherapy. Certainly after challenging the language of 'healing' and 'overcoming' shame, it is understandable that psychotherapists might feel challenged in working with such experiences of shame, as often counsellors are believed to engage in such 'healing' techniques for their clients.

To address these implications, it is important to revisit the aims of hermeneutic phenomenology and how such goals might align with the practice of psychotherapy, especially when working with experiences of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community. Van Manen (1990) describes one of the ultimate goals of hermeneutic phenomenology to "become more fully who we are" (p. 12), which reflects the journey of the expansion of one's consciousness and journeying in closer relationship to Self, as described in the previous section. For psychotherapy it would then appear that adopting a stance closer in relationship to the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology might prove beneficial for the well-being of clients. As well, a focus away from encouraging 'healing' treatment for clients experiencing shame and toward taking up a role as a "fellow traveller" (Yalom, 2002, p. 8) might further assist in individuals exploring the complex and subtle nuances of their shame. This stance might allow for more hospitable space for individuals to more freely journey into the weight of their shame experience; alongside a supportive and respectful relationship towards a trained psychotherapist to journey alongside them.

This stance is reflected in May's (1967) work, especially in his chapter aptly titled *A Phenomenological Approach to Psychotherapy*. In relation to the practice of psychotherapy he writes, "We tend to assume that if we have a causal explanation or if we describe how things develop, then we have described the thing itself. This is an error" (p. 88). He goes on to say, "This is not to rule out causation and genetic development, but rather to say that the question of *why* one is what one is does not have meaning until we know *what* one is" (p. 88). The aim of phenomenology as it has been described in this research overlaps with the approach May takes in his approach to psychotherapy, as

both primarily hold a focus on an understanding of what the client's (or participant's) experience is *as they are living it*.

Consider the psychotherapist who abandons his or her focus on causality as a catalyst towards healing and instead adopts a 'not knowing' stance towards his or her clients, similar to the stance taken when approaching hermeneutic phenomenology (Chang, 2010). Such a counsellor might prevent encouraging the clients to avoid their experience of shame, potential resulting conformity, and even 'healing' of the clients, and instead encourage clients to venture further into their shame with a competent psychotherapist in intimate relationship with them at their side. The nature of shame as described in this work is an especially suitable experience when considering how one approaches psychotherapy.

Because of the described isolating effects of shame, it can be understood how the relationship between client and therapist is of paramount importance. The witnessing of the client's deep and rich description of his or her shame, and the ability for the psychotherapist to journey alongside the client to such depths without leaning on notions of healing and causality, might open the door for the client to experience empowerment and agency in order to develop psychologically and spiritually.

If the psychotherapist orients him or herself to journey towards a phenomenological description of shame by his or her client, while also not abandoning his or her understood psychotherapeutic orientations, with the aim of the client becoming more fully who her or she is (van Manen, 1990), the therapist also has the opportunity to touch on the same experience as his or her client. This experience of empathy, perhaps the most humane tool one can use in the course of therapy, allows for the therapist to

come into more intimate relationship with his or her client, and upon empathizing with the client who is uncovering more about him or herself, so too the therapist uncovers the same within him or herself and experiences change as well (May, 1967).

Integrating the understanding of one's ego moving into his or her shame and towards the calling of Self as a spiritual act, it can be seen how the role of the psychotherapist shifts from assisting an individual to 'heal' from his or her shame. A practice instead of journeying alongside a client into the depths of his or her shame might also result in empowering the client. With agency remaining to a greater degree within in the client, as opposed to relying on the counsellor to administer 'healing' practices, an encouragement towards taking personal responsibility for one's own journey might result. This empowerment might also reduce one developing a dependent relationship upon his or her counsellor, as it very well could be the case that such orientation to one's client helps reduce any power dynamic perceived by the client, as might be the case when one seeks to be 'healed' by his or her psychotherapist.

**Conflicting Paradigms**

Over the course of my life I have spent many years involved in one faith community or another. Many of these communities I believe resembled each of the participant's faith communities, and certainly at times during the process of interviews I reconnected to emotions and experiences I once felt when I had been involved in such communities. I was able to relate to a past version of myself at times, one who would tirelessly venture to pray enough to feel holy, attend church enough to consider myself a part of the congregation, and take up the sanctions surrounding sexual behaviour in order to remain pure.

I believe this past self offered the research an interesting perspective, as I now stand outside of a faith community, and therefore see myself as one who 'looks in' upon this paradigm from which I have ventured. As explored earlier, this work is located in post-modernity, and therefore acknowledges that realities are multiple, constructed, and able to be altered by the knower (Laverty, 2003). I experienced each of the participants of this research as existing within communities that contrasted this post-modern view, either drastically or in certain ways. I admit that a sense of tension emerged from these conflicting paradigms. Some participants appeared to have openly been in the process of challenging the beliefs of their community at the time of our interview, and upon doing so I experienced myself silently encouraging them to question what view it was to which they were being exposed. At other times I experienced participants appearing to cling strongly to the sanctions of their faith community when they recalled times of personal struggle, wherein I struggled to bracket out my own opinions and biases towards the consequences of such actions.

Upon leaving the faith communities of my past, I experienced my world as one that became vastly open. I was able to explore and experience in my own way, feeling governed not by an institution, but led instead by a power to draw deeper into my being. I learned to let go of pursuing answers to questions, and instead to journey into the experience of asking them. I see this process as a spiritual journey, as I have learned to listen to the call of Self in regards to my life, moving me in a direction not yet determined, yet one that I am comfortable moving towards. When I consider this new and unfolding understanding of Self as this research draws to a close, I wonder to what or to where each of the participants are called.

**Final Reflection**

Over the course of this entire research project there have been long stretches of time where my fingers have sat motionless on these keys while my mind attempts to grasp, touch, or catch any glimpse of the phenomenon surrounding this work. If I compare those experiences to the time they have spent furiously moving along the keyboard, I am sure the stillness would win. I am beginning to discover, as this study draws to an end, the pain felt in the understanding that these words will soon become permanent – I will not be able to adjust or alter them anymore. In recognizing this, I am also hopeful that the words will be taken in and experienced differently by each person who chooses to read this work. I believe the words will speak to each in ways that are deeply personal and intimate, and that in their own way they will move the reader in a direction that is uniquely helpful to him or her.

The underlying understanding is that the experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults belonging to a faith community described in this work will never be able to tell the whole story. The experience will always lie on the other side of language (van Manen, 2002), and one will never be the same person through which they relate to the phenomenon, as the phenomenon is always changing through the eyes with which one uses to view it. As well, the phenomenon acts upon the one viewing, changing the individual in the process. The pain in each word produced is simultaneously an attempt and a failure towards the aim. "Writers of phenomenological texts, may turn themselves unwittingly into butchers – killers of life" (van Manen, 2002, pp. 239-240). It is sobering to accept that no matter what phenomenon one attempts to describe and connect with in human experience, it will be impossible to fully capture.

There is no final arrival, no resting place; only a continuous journey into the depths of one's experience. It is really a bundle of paradox – I journey never really finding, yet I expand my understanding and evolve outwardly, and at the same time more into Self. The more I come to 'know,' the less sure I am of speaking it, of writing it. I am silenced by this work that calls me to write, despite the awareness I can never write enough to really know any thing.

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# Appendix A

Interview Questions

Preliminary Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your faith community?
2. How long have you identified as a member of your faith community?
3. How did you become involved in this faith community?
4. What is your faith community's view surrounding sexual behaviour?

Main Interview Questions

1. How long have you considered yourself to be sexual?
2. Will you please describe an experience of shame you have had surrounding sexual behaviour?
    a. Probing questions based on lived body (corporeality)
        i. What did the experience of shame feel like in your body?
        ii. What associations can you make with that feeling?
        iii. Where in your body did you feel the shame?
        iv. How would you describe that feeling?
        v. Might you give it a temperature, a texture, a colour?
        vi. Was there anywhere else in your body you felt shame? If so, will you describe it?
    b. Probing questions based on lived time (temporality)
        i. Is that feeling (of shame) still in your body? (Is it accessible or recurring?) In other words, do you still feel it? Can you still feel it?

ii. If not (still there), do you remember how long you felt that experience of shame in your body?

iii. Did/has that feeling of shame change(d) over time? Subside? Increase? Diminish? Lead to another/other feeling(s)?

iv. Does or did the memory/feelings associated with the experience of the experience itself return at any time? If so, when?

c. Probing questions based on lived space (spatiality)

i. Has your experience of shame influenced the way you feel about places associated with sexual acts/behaviour? Will you describe those feelings?

ii. Has your experience of shame influenced the ways you relate to any of your surroundings/physical environment (home, church, outdoors, etc.)? In what ways?

d. Probing questions based on lived relations (relationality)

i. Did this experience of shame affect your relationship with the other(s) involved in that experience? In what ways?

ii. Has your experience of shame affected the way you related to other people? In what ways?

iii. Has this experience of shame affected the way you relate to yourself? In what ways?

iv. Have any relationships affected/changed this experience of shame or your feelings associated with it

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**Appendix B**

Letter of Initial Contact

Study Title

*Sex, Shame, and Spirituality: A Study of Lived Experience*

Principal Investigator

Nick Jacobs, BA, MPS Candidate
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxx

Background

This study is an exploration into the lived experience of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults (age 18-25) who belong to a faith community. As an individual belonging to this demographic, you have been offered this letter so that you might consider participating in the study. The aim of the research is to capture the phenomenon of shame surrounding sexual experiences and to describe and better understand the essence of shame which can better assist one to infer the influences of shame on the self, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual well-being.

Purpose

This study seeks to better understand the lived experience of shame. As a participant, you will be involved in up to four in-depth, individual interviews with me, each approximately one hour in duration, which will be audio recorded. The study is interested to explore through such interviews the deep lived experience of shame, and seeks to contribute by extension or inference to scholarship related to shame, spirituality, and the field of psychotherapy. If you are interested to participate, you will need to return a signed consent form for July 24th, 2015. The study will involve four to six participants.

Study Procedures

- The interviews will commence at St. Stephen's College (University of Alberta Campus) in July, 2015 and will conclude prior to the end of September. There will be up to four interviews in total.
- The initial interview will involve several open-ended questions asking of your experience of shame regarding sexual behaviour. The interviews will be audio recorded. I will take field notes during the interviews.
- Following the initial interview, the recording will be transcribed and I will identify themes in the transcript relating to your experience of shame. After this process (approximately 2 weeks), you will be given a copy of the transcript and identified themes to correct and/or approve of.

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- The following interviews will take place with the aim of collaboratively reflecting on themes that were presented during the first interview and interpreting the significance of the preliminary themes. The goal of obtaining more data related to the research question might also be a goal of the second and third interviews. Further open-ended questions will be asked with the aim of gaining depth into the lived experience of shame and the interview will once again be recorded.
- A similar transcription process will take place after the second and third interviews, and will again be forwarded to you for correction or approval. A fourth interview will take place only if we both feel there are themes that need to be reflected upon and interpreted to a greater degree.

In addition to the benefits highlighted at the onset, the hope is that participants' experiences will contribute to the growing body of information related to emerging adulthood, sexuality, spirituality, and shame. Foreseeable risks that might arise from your participation in the study could be related to a sense of discomfort or dis-ease in sharing the way you feel about your experience. If you experience anything beyond minimal discomfort from participating in this study, contact has been made with a counselling agency if you wish to process such feelings with a professional counsellor.

Voluntary Participation

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary. You can opt out of the study at any time during the interview and analysis phase of the research, up until the end of the third interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any collected data can also be withdrawn and will not be used in the completed study.

Support

Although this study poses minimal threat to you as a participant, if you experience anything beyond minimal discomfort from participating in this study, contact has been made with the following counselling agencies if you wish to process such feelings with a professional counsellor:

Community Counselling Centre
#202, 10534-124 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
780-482-3711
www.communitycounsellingcentre.ca

Evolution Psychology
#136, 160 Broadway Blvd.
Sherwood Park, AB
780-570-5709
www.evolutionpsychology.ca

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Several professionally trained counsellors and/or psychologists work at these locations, and a decision can be made based on therapist availability and needs of the client to determine which therapist might fit best for the potential client. The cost remains the responsibility of the user and is not part of the study.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

If you participate in the study, you will not be personally identified in any way in the scholarly material that will arise out of the research (conference presentations, publications, related future grant applications), and will instead be referenced by a pseudonym. Your name will be kept confidential in encrypted computer files where only I will have access. Any data that is collected will be stored for a minimum of five years in a secure location with hardcopies in a locked filing cabinet and electronic data password protected or encrypted. If I choose to have the interviews professionally transcribed, he or she will be required to sign a letter of confidentiality, agreeing to keep all research information confidential and secure, and destroying any information regarding this research not returned to myself. When appropriate, the data will be destroyed in a way that ensures your privacy and confidentiality. I might use the data generated from this study in future research; however, if I do, it will have to be approved by a Research Ethics Board at that time.

If you have any further questions regarding this study or are interested in participating, please contact me at xxx@ualberta.ca or by phone at 780-xxx-xxxx.

Regards,

Nick Jacobs, BA, MPS Candidate
St. Stephen's College

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**Appendix C**

Consent Form

Study Title
*Sex, Shame, and Spirituality: A Study of Lived Experience*

Principal Investigator
Nick Jacobs, BA, MPS Candidate
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxx

Purpose
This study seeks to capture the essence of shame surrounding sexual behaviour among emerging adults who belong to a faith community. As a participant, you will be asked to share your experience of shame surrounding such subject matter in the form of up to four individual in-depth interviews with the principal investigator. The aim of the research is to describe and better understand the phenomenon of shame regarding sexual experiences and further, to reflect upon what influences the experience of shame might have on the self, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual well-being. If you are interested to participate, please return a signed consent form by _____(Date). The study will involve four to six participants.

I, _____(Name), have read and understand the "Letter of Initial Contact" and consent to participate in this study.

_____ _____
Participant Signature Participant Name (printed)

_____
Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Committee at St. Stephen's College. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct or research, please contact St. Stephen's College at 780-439-7311.