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**JOURNEY TO SELF: THE EXPERIENCE OF INNER LIFE  
OF HELPING PROFESSIONALS**

by

**Candace W. Ross**

**A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Counselor Education  
and Counseling Psychology**

**Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
December 2000**

## **JOURNEY TO SELF: THE EXPERIENCE OF INNER LIFE OF HELPING PROFESSIONALS**

**Candace W. Ross, Ph.D.**

**Western Michigan University, 2000**

Based on the assumptions that self-awareness is an important factor in healthy and effective functioning of helping professionals (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998) and that the self of the therapist is an important tool in effective therapy (Baldwin, 2000), this phenomenological study was conducted to explore the experience of inner life of helping professionals. Three women and two men, either licensed counselors or psychologists who were working in therapeutic settings, agreed to participate in a two-part interview. In the first interview, the participants described their experience of inner life, including what facilitated or hindered their experience, how inner life informed their therapeutic work, and what part their professional training played in the development, maintenance, and use of their inner life. In the second interview, the participants had the opportunity to correct or elaborate on the content of the first interview.

Although the experience of inner life was described differently by the five participants, four common themes emerged. First, the experience of inner life was described as a spiritual experience. Second, nature was an important component of the experience of inner life. Third, the interplay of solitude and community was a common aspect of the experience of inner life. Fourth, inner life played an important part in the participants' professional work in the outer world; however, none of the

participants could say their professional training played a part in the awareness, development, or maintenance of inner life.

The experience of inner life is an important part of both the personal and professional lives of the helping professionals interviewed for this study. It is hoped the findings of this study will add to knowledge regarding the subjective experience of inner life and how helping professionals develop and maintain a healthy inner life which, in turn, contributes to healthy and effective professional functioning. Helping professionals need to learn not only how to care for the inner lives of their clients, but how to care for and use their own.

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### Acknowledgments—Continued

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Candace W. Ross

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

Know thyself. Nowhere is that ancient Socratic wisdom more applicable than in the fields of counseling and psychotherapy. The importance of self-awareness and self-understanding of professional helpers has been frequently supported in the literature (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Ferrari & Sternberg, 1998; Jacobs, David, & Meyer, 1995; Kondrat, 1999; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Moore & Slife, 1987; Renick, 1976; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998; West, 1982). Self-awareness is one of the few factors espoused by nearly all theoretical orientations (Assagioli, 1965; Freud, 1928; Greenburg & Mitchell, 1983; Jung, 1958; Kegan, 1982; Kernberg, 1965; May, 1989; Meichenbaum, 1977; Rogers, 1957; Sullivan, 1953; Yalom, 1980). In fact, the value of self-awareness may be taken as axiomatic (West, 1982).

For the purposes of this paper, self-awareness is defined as reflective self-awareness (Kondrat, 1999). The therapist has a focus on experience and on the self who has the experience. In other words, there is a differentiation between the subject self who reflects and an object self who is the focus of reflection, and a consideration of both the subjective and objective self. It is the consciousness of this process that constitutes reflective self-awareness.

Therapist self-awareness, or lack thereof, is at the heart of important psychotherapeutic concepts such as countertransference which is defined as those responses that are outside of awareness and represent distortions that derive from the therapist's own unconscious conflicts and attitudes (Kernberg, 1965; Sussman, 1992). Countertransference reactions can be critically destructive to the therapeutic relationship if the therapist has no self-awareness of his or her reactions (Robertiello & Schoenewolf, 1987). Self-awareness plays a part in other psychotherapeutic processes such as empathy (Crouch, 1997; Jordan, 1984), defense mechanisms (Hamachek, 1987), and impairment (Maeder, 1989; Sedgwick, 1994; Sussman, 1992).

Studies have shown that neither technique nor theoretical orientation are the most critical variables in successful therapy outcome (Berman & Norton, 1985; Durlak, 1979; Herman, 1993; Luborsky, McLellan, Woody, O'Brien, & Auerbach, 1985; Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975; Moore & Slife, 1987). Moore and Slife state, "It is where theory and technique meet and come alive, in the personality of the therapist, that frontline psychotherapy researchers point to as a definitive factor in effective psychotherapy" (p. 1). It is the therapist's personal characteristics that determine his or her ability to form the therapeutic bond that has been determined to be an important determinant of therapy outcome (Baldwin, 2000; Corey et al., 1998; Herman, 1993; Luborsky et al., 1985). These personal characteristics include the inner world of the therapist, the subjective realm of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, emotions, style, and opinions that affect the outward behavior of the therapist (Baldwin, 2000).

The oft-heard adage in training programs is that "technique is what one uses until the therapist arrives." But, who is the therapist? More importantly, who is the

self of the therapist? How does one know this self? Palmer (1998) has authored a program entitled “The Courage to Teach” that attempts to address these questions with respect to teachers. This program is built on several premises: (a) there is a “teacher within” that is the source of knowing about self; (b) this inner source needs to be recognized and nurtured if it is to be available; (c) this inner knowing is the source of identity, integrity and authenticity, which is important because; (d) you teach who you are; and (e) it is through inner work that you know yourself, both light and dark, good and bad, strengths as well as weaknesses. “Good teaching,” Palmer states, “cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). Palmer relates these ideas to therapy and counseling by saying, “Good methods may help the therapist to find a way into the client’s dilemma, but good therapy does not begin until the real-life therapist joins with the real life of the client” (p. 5). In order for that to happen, the therapist must be aware of self and it is through inner work that one knows one’s self.

In the theoretical literature in the fields of counseling and psychology there is a movement toward the exploration and acceptance of the inner subjective experience as legitimate scientific inquiry (Cornett, 1998; Elkins, 1995; Hillman, 1975, 1996; Kochunas, 1997). These authors call for attention to the soul of psychology. The reader is reminded that the word *psychology* derives from the Greek words *psyche* and *logos*, which translates into “the story of the soul.” Hillman (1996) says, “The core subject of psychology, psyche or soul, doesn’t get into the books supposedly dedicated to its study and care” (p. 10). Psychology is literally “the story of the soul,” but soul is not typically addressed in the textbooks or training of therapists.

One reason research on the inner subjective experience of counselors and therapists does not appear in a review of the literature may be at least partly due to



the fact that accepted methodologies, traditional quantitative methods, are not designed to examine subjective experience. In her review of alternate research paradigms, Hoshmand (1989) indicates that the predominant research methodology taught in graduate counseling and psychology programs has been “on the positivistic tradition of reductive experimentation” (p. 3). However, there is a call for acceptance of qualitative methods, a call for methodology for psychology that would “reflect or better illuminate the richness and complexities of human minds and lives” (Bevan & Kessel, 1994, p. 507). “The changing methodological climate presents an opportunity for researchers to explore areas of human experience that used to be inaccessible due to methodological constraints” (Osborne, 1994, p. 169).

An example of this movement away from objectivity can be seen in the use of chaos theory, from the field of physics, applied to the study of human behavior (Barton, 1994; Butz, 1995; Capra, 1982; Wheatley, 1999; Wilbur, Kulikowich, Roberts-Wilbur, & Rivera, 1995). Chaos theory represents a system of identifying patterns in physical phenomenon that were previously thought to be chaotic, that is, unpatterned. Chaos theory holds that there are forces that have an effect without being able to be seen or measured. Social scientists are realizing the potential of chaos theory to explain human behaviors, cognitions and emotions; there are forces affecting behavior that cannot be seen or measured that may be the focus of legitimate scientific inquiry. Psychologists, especially those with a psychodynamic theoretical orientation, have long practiced with this underlying premise.

Another area of exploration in the field of physics that is being applied to the study of human behavior is quantum theory. Briefly, quantum theory states that subatomic particles have no meaning when studied in isolation, but only in relation to other particles or in interaction with other systems. Wilbur et al. (1995) make

connections between the concepts and constructs of chaos theory and quantum physics and the study of the behaviors of therapists. They suggest that counselors and therapists need to be knowledgeable in their understanding of the complexity of interactions and relationships. They also suggest that “the acquisition of content knowledge and experience in the practice of their skills, in isolation from their personal development, is not sufficient in the preparation of effective counselors” (p. 141).

Movement toward examining the subjective inner experience and how it affects the outer life is being made in the business world, long a bastion of objectivity. Organizational consultants are using chaos theory, and “soul in the workplace” (Bolman & Deal, 1995; Hawley, 1993; Wheatley, 1999; Whyte, 1994) to tap the subjective experience of the lives of workers as the route to better outcomes. Whyte (1994) addresses the increasing complexity of the modern workplace and the workers and managers who have chosen to work there. The stress of the workplace causes a split between the inner and outer experience which must be addressed, and it cannot be addressed “by a simple increase in the thickness of the company manual” (p. 10). What is called for is “purpose, meaning and character in life and in business life” (Hawley, 1993, p. 3), the bringing together of the inner experience of the employee and his or her experience in the outer world of work.

While the subjective experience is beginning to appear in the theoretical literature in the field of counseling and therapy, the emphasis in training programs is on the acquisition of objective knowledge and skills (American Psychological Association [APA], 1996; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 1998), with little emphasis on a third realm, the self of the therapist. Therapist personal characteristics are mentioned only in terms of

negative effects (American Counseling Association [ACA], 1997; APA, 1992), as in impairment or ethical violations related to professional behavior. Neither the CACREP nor the APA standards refer to the importance of using the attributes of the therapist to promote change in the therapy setting, and afford only minimal attention to the importance of developing self-awareness. Corey et al., (1998) state that the issue of self-understanding in the field of counseling should not be underestimated. Since counselors ask clients to examine their behavior and lives in order to understand themselves more fully, it is incumbent on them to be equally committed to awareness of their own lives.

Moreover, without a high level of self-awareness, counselors will obstruct the progress of their clients. The focus of the therapy will shift from meeting the clients' needs to meeting the needs of the therapist. Consequently, counselors and therapists should be aware of their own needs, areas of "unfinished business," personal conflicts, defenses and vulnerabilities and how these may intrude on their work with clients. (Corey et al., 1998, p. 34)

Further, Moore and Slife (1987) state, "Since psychotherapists spend most of their time attempting to promote self-awareness in their patients, it is a surprise that so little formal promotion of self-awareness in therapists takes place" (p. 9).

### Statement of Problem

With the support of the growing acceptance of qualitative research designs that facilitate the study of subjective experiences, along with the wealth of support for the importance of self-awareness of counselors and therapists, this researcher conducted this study to examine the subjective experience of inner life of helping professionals. Much of the current language surrounding the inner life experience is religious or spiritual, limiting its exposure and application in the professional literature. The reluctance to pay attention to the study of spiritual issues in

psychology “may be rooted in the profession’s historical precedents to dissociate itself from the nonempirical philosophical disciplines” (Mack, 1994, p. 15). In order to address the inner life experience of helping professionals, the therapeutic professions must overcome the reluctance to address the subjective inner experience. We need to listen to how professionals address this aspect of their lives and begin to build a vocabulary and language to address how therapists experience their inner lives, what promotes an awareness of the inner experience, and what hinders it. It is hoped that by talking with helping professionals, directly, about their experience of their inner life this research will add to the body of literature regarding the subjective inner experience that could, in turn, have an impact on the professional development of counselors and therapists.

#### **Research Question**

**What is the lived experience of inner life of helping professionals?**

#### **Research Design**

This researcher conducted a qualitative study of phenomenological design as a way to investigate the lived experience of inner life. Five helping professionals who self-identified as experiencing inner life and were willing to share that experience participated in two interviews. The first interview began with an open-ended prompt, “Please share with me your experience of your inner life.” When necessary, this prompt was followed by questions addressing what facilitates and hinders the experience, how the experiences informs professional work and what part the participants’ own professional training played in their awareness and use of inner life. The second interview provided an opportunity for the participant to check content

and meaning of the first interview as a way of validating the information. Interview data were transcribed, then examined through a process of qualitative analysis for themes that emerged. It is hoped that this information will contribute to the professional understanding of the experience of inner life that can, in turn, be applied to the education and professional development of counselors and therapists.

### Definition of Terms

*Inner Life:* Inner life refers to the reflective self-awareness of the privately held beliefs, feelings, and values that give meaning to life and the practices that support and sustain those private experiences.

*Helping Professionals:* A helping professional is defined for this study as a person who has a degree and licensure in the field of counseling or psychology and is currently working in a therapeutic setting.

### Overview

Chapter II presents the review of the literature to give the reader a context in which to read and understand this study. Chapter III reviews the qualitative methodology that has guided this study so the reader can be aware of the process that was used to gather and analyze the data. Chapter IV presents the findings of this study. Chapter V includes additional literature review as it relates to the emergent themes, a discussion of the findings, followed by conclusions and suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### SELECTED REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In a traditional quantitative research design, the literature review is usually used to establish the context for prediction or generalization. In qualitative methodology, and phenomenology in particular, the literature review is used to alert the researcher to the possibility of issues (Walker, 1996). The literature review in the present study will also provide a rationale for this research.

#### Introduction

The issues that have generated interest in the experience of the inner life of counselors and therapists include the importance of self-awareness and the part that self-awareness plays in important theories of counseling and psychotherapy. Other issues that have generated interest in the experience of the inner life include the therapeutic concepts and constructs of empathy, countertransference, projective identification, defense mechanisms, and impairment and related ethical issues. Interest in the lay literature and diverse academic disciplines of the exploration of the inner life, soul, spirituality or other expressions of the subjective experience of self and how these affect functioning in the outer world has also stimulated interest in exploring the experience of the inner life of helping professionals and contributed important and helpful perspectives.

In the professional literature, there has been growing interest in the person of the therapist (Baldwin, 2000), and growing acknowledgment of the importance of the

therapist's subjective experience (Sussman, 1995). It is the person of the therapist that constitutes the primary tool of psychotherapy; therefore, the psychological makeup of the individual therapist to a significant degree determines the effectiveness of treatment. "To the extent that the therapist is regarded as a participant in a communicative field and as engaged in an affective relationship with the patient—to this extent, the therapist's traits and strivings must be considered crucial" (Sussman, 1995, p. 10). This is, in reality, a harkening back to the foundations of counseling. Arbuckle (1967) wrote, "There is general agreement that the counselor in his [sic] relationship with a client is sharing of his self in a personal and human confrontation with a fellow human being" (p. 1). To that end, in the education of the therapist, understanding of self is more important than therapist understanding of client (Arbuckle, 1967).

Each of these areas that has generated interest in the experience of inner life will be explored through a review of the relevant literature as it applies to counselors and therapists. In addition, support for qualitative research methodology and exploration of the subjective experience in the research and training programs of the profession will be provided.

### Theoretical Orientations and Self-Awareness

Self-awareness has been examined by several authors (Kondrat, 1999; Moore & Slife, 1987; Renick, 1976; West, 1982; Wicklund, 1979). Moore and Slife make the point that although self-awareness of therapists has not been explored in psychotherapy research, recognition that therapists differ greatly in their self-awareness and that self-awareness is important to therapy is widely acknowledged. In

fact, self-awareness is a trait that is espoused by nearly all major theoretical orientations.

Freud based his theory of psychoanalysis on his own self-awareness. He struggled to learn to analyze his own dreams and other manifestations of his unconscious to inform his work (Bettelheim, 1982). Freud also noted that the essential quality of a good therapist is “inherent insight into the human soul—first of all into the layers of his own soul” (Freud, 1928, p. 69). Classical psychoanalysis has always promoted “unconscious motivations” as a major content area for self exploration (West, 1982, p. 155).

Self-awareness and the ability to be introspective are basic to Jungian theory (Johnson, 1986; Jung, 1958; Singer, 1994). The answers to difficult questions are gained through rigorous self-examination. Jung understood introspection not only as a way to solve or avoid problems, but also as a path to growth and wholeness. Specifically, one task of the individual on the path to individuation is to make the unconscious available to consciousness:

What our age thinks of as the “shadow” and inferior part of the psyche contains more than something merely negative. The very fact that through self-knowledge, i.e., by exploring our own souls, we come upon the instincts, and their world of imagery should throw some light on the powers slumbering in the psyche, of which we are seldom aware so long as all goes well. (Jung, 1958, p. 107)

When the contents of the personal shadow are not known and owned, there is a tendency, unconscious though it may be, to project those undesirable aspects of one’s self onto others. The process of individuation includes developing an awareness of one’s projections and withdrawing them. In Jungian practice, the necessity for examination applies to the therapist as well as the client. Analysts in training are required to undergo analysis themselves as part of their professional preparation. In



addressing the preparation of analysts, Wolff-Salin (1986) states, “The first requirement is the depth, seriousness and perseverance of one’s own journey” (p. 137).

The ability to be aware of one’s self is also a primary tenet of existential theory. It is crucial to be able to transcend oneself and become aware of one’s existence. This ability is central to the practice of existential psychotherapy (May, 1989; Yalom, 1980). The therapist must be aware of his or her own internal, self-questioning struggles and process in order to be able to help clients face and work through their own concerns.

Humanists value the subjective experience. A basic tenet of humanist therapy is that the therapist must develop an awareness of the internal subjective experience of the client. “The best vantage point for understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself [sic]” (Rogers, 1951, p. 503). The therapist must also accept and share his or her own sense of self in the therapeutic encounter. In order to do so, the therapist must have an awareness of self. Another important humanist concept is that of congruence, the fit between self-concept and the experience of self. In fact, maladjustment is defined as when an incongruence or rift exists between a person’s image of self and his or her inner experiencing (Rogers, 1951).

The primary focus of psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965) is on the inner experience, beginning with the experience of self. The direct experience of self is pure self-awareness, an inner reality. Another underlying premise is that each individual is constantly confronted with choices and decisions along with the responsibility they entail. Concomitantly, there is a need to achieve a clear awareness of the motivations which determine the choices and decisions.

Cognitive-behavioral theorists are concerned with overt behavior, but also pay attention to the interaction of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and other internal and cognitive mechanisms and how these affect behavior (Gelso & Fretz, 1992). The Rational-Emotive theory of Ellis (1962) is focused on the need to develop insights into how a person's own beliefs and assumptions are the root causes of problems. Treatment is based on developing an awareness of faulty cognitions and replacing them with more adaptive ones.

According to Kepner and Brien (1970), the aim of Gestalt therapy is to develop more intelligent behavior, that is to enable the individual to act on the basis of all possible information and to "apprehend not only the relevant factors in the external field, but also relevant information from within" (p. 43). Self-awareness is a necessary component of informed or "intelligent" behavior (West, 1982).

### Self Awareness and Therapeutic Concepts

#### Empathy

Empathy is identified as one of the most important facilitative conditions in the counseling relationship (Rogers, 1957) and has received empirical support in terms of being associated with positive therapeutic outcomes (Orlinsky & Howard, 1986). Empathy is understood to be the ability to subjectively experience and understand the other's feelings and be able to communicate that understanding to the other (Rogers, 1957). Rogers stressed that empathy is an attitude and a subjective experience within the therapist, not merely the technique of "reflecting feeling." Reflection of feeling may help the counselor in expressing empathy, but the two are not synonymous, i.e., one can reflect feeling and not be empathic, that is, not have the

“subjective experience of sensing the client’s world as if it were one’s own, consistently maintaining the ‘as if’ quality” (Rogers, 1975, p. 99).

The focus of this section is not to establish the importance of or review support for the concept of empathy, but rather on the role of self-awareness in the development of empathy. Jordan (1984) states that in order to empathize one must have a well-differentiated sense of self, in addition to appreciating and being sensitive to the sameness and differentness of the other. The experience of empathy involves a desire to relate to an other with a surrender to affective arousal in oneself. It involves an awareness that the source of the affect one feels is from the other. Self-boundaries must be flexible enough to be able to place oneself in the other’s shoes or attempt to see from the other’s perspective. Each counselor has self-boundaries that are more or less flexible around certain affects or experiences. As Jordan states,

The broader the range of affective arousal and tolerance of feelings in oneself, the more potential empathic responsiveness may occur to the other. As there is a narrowing of affects which are appropriate for the self, there may also be curtailment of empathic responsiveness, a loss of the immediate pressing reactivity to another’s state. (p. 5)

If one’s self-boundaries are too rigid, one experiences emotional isolation or fear of intrusion on the part of the other. This is experienced by the other as coldness, aloofness or detachment. If the self-boundaries are too fluid, one can be too sensitive to the feelings of others, or overly stimulated. This can, in turn, lead to a “shrinking sense of self” (Jordan, 1984, p. 8) or enmeshment (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). Both of these extremes lead to what Jordan refers to as empathic failures, related to impaired sense of self and boundaries.

In healthy empathic connection, the counselor never loses sight of him or herself as a separate and distinct being while at the same time being emotionally connected to the other (Kaplan, 1990). It is the capacity to maintain a sense of self

which permits the counselor to make complex clinical judgments while being deeply affectively connected. While in empathic connection, the counselor might ask, “What is the source of the client’s reactions?,” “How do they fit into other dynamics of therapy?,” “Should I intervene? And if so, how?” This kind of self integrity in conjunction with the affective experience, permits the counselor to also make important assessments about whether the feelings he or she seems to be sharing truly reflect an empathic response or are defensive or countertransferential reactions on his or her own part to what the client is sharing, for not all feelings evoked by clients are empathic feelings. This is a vital distinction for the counselor to be able to make, and is dependent on his or her awareness of self.

### Countertransference and Projective Identification

Countertransference has historically been considered a psychoanalytic concept but has been supported more recently as being applicable across theoretical orientations and in the counseling setting (Corey et al., 1998; Gelso & Carter, 1985; Robertiello & Schoenewolf, 1987; Watkins, 1985). For the purposes of discussion, countertransference will be defined as those responses to the client which, while prompted by some event within the therapeutic situation or the therapist’s real life, are primarily based on his or her past significant relationships; basically these responses gratify the therapist’s needs rather than the client’s therapeutic endeavors (Langs, 1974). Classical psychoanalytic thinking holds countertransference as unhelpful and something to be eradicated through proper treatment. Current thinking stresses its inevitability and even its usefulness in helping the counselor to understand the client (Corey et al., 1998; Gelso & Carter, 1995; Robertiello & Schoenewolf, 1987; Watkins, 1985). Instead of doing away with countertransference feelings and

reactions, the counselor needs to be aware of his or her emotional reactions to the client, attempt to understand them and then take care to use them appropriately, to help the client rather than to gratify his or her own needs.

In understanding the concept of countertransference the value of self-awareness becomes apparent. Countertransference involves the unconscious reactions of the therapist toward the client. If the therapist remains unconscious or unaware of these reactions, he or she can interfere with the therapeutic relationship and thereby the course of therapy (Kernberg, 1965). It is through self-awareness that the therapist avoids the negative consequences of countertransference, and it is also through self-awareness that the therapist can learn from the countertransference valuable information regarding the functioning of both the client and of him- or herself. Robertiello and Schoenewolf (1987) expand, "To help a patient be authentic again, the therapist must be authentic. The therapist must ultimately spend as much time analyzing his [sic] own transference as he does the patient's" (p. 10). The problem is that patients seek therapy in order to get help in resolving their transference and resistance behavior and "when we respond with our own unresolved transference and resistance behavior, our ability to treat them is greatly diminished" (p. 3).

Countertransference reactions that remain outside of awareness may be critically destructive to the therapeutic relationship (Corey et al., 1998; Gelso & Carter, 1985; Robertiello & Schoenewolf, 1987; Watkins, 1985). Issues are attributed to the client that in actuality originate in the person of the counselor; counselors may have emotional reactions that involve their own projections. "Destructive countertransference occurs when a counselor's own needs or unresolved personal conflicts become entangled in the therapeutic relationship, obstructing or destroying a sense of objectivity" (Corey et al., 1998, p. 48). In fact,

lack of counselor self-awareness of personal traits can lead to countertransference reactions (Corey et al., 1998; Kernberg, 1965; Sussman, 1992).

On the other hand, countertransference reactions can provide valid and useful information about a client's reactions and/or significant others' reactions to the client (Corey et al., 1998; Gelso & Carter, 1985). In order to be useful in this way, the counselor must be aware of which of his or her reactions are countertransferential, which includes an awareness of one's own issues, needs and strivings that may be triggered by clients' material.

In some situations, the client may be provoking a reaction in the counselor, a projective identification, resulting from the client's transference or style of relating (Tansey & Burke, 1989; Trembley, 1996). As in countertransference reactions, the counselor's self-awareness can inform a constructive response to the projective identification in that it can give the counselor valuable information regarding the patterns of relating on the part of the client.

Whether the counselor response is a countertransference response or a reaction to a projective identification on the part of the client, the key to whether the response is beneficial rests on the counselor's self-awareness. Facing and confronting countertransference based feelings is one of the most difficult tasks of the counselor. "It requires considerable courage and a willingness to confront one's own painful feelings and issues for the sake of the therapeutic work" (Gelso & Carter, 1985, p. 182). Counselor awareness of countertransference reactions is viewed as essential for successful therapy outcomes (Singer & Luborsky, 1977; Watkins, 1985).

### Defense Mechanisms

As self-awareness, or the ability to self-reflect, is beneficial in understanding countertransference reactions, it is likewise helpful in understanding the function and use of defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are by definition unconscious and their primary purpose is to protect against or reduce feelings of anxiety (Hamachek, 1987). The goal of therapy or personal work is to increase awareness so that maladaptive defensive behaviors can be changed. Defense mechanisms are considered in this discussion because of the part they play in interfering with the process of self-awareness; that is, their very psychological purpose is to protect one from self-awareness.

### Impairment

Counselors who lack awareness of their own stressors or healthy boundaries may become impaired. According to Stadler, Willing, Eberhage and Ward (1988), impaired counselors have lost the ability to resolve stressful events and are less able to function professionally. The impairment may take many forms including, but not limited to, physical problems, emotional problems, alcohol and chemical dependencies, inappropriate sexual behavior, depression or burnout. Characteristics associated with impaired functioning include lack of empathy, loneliness, poor social skills, social isolation, discounting the possibility of harm to others, preoccupation with personal needs, or conversely, ignoring personal needs, rationalization of behavior and denial of responsibility for self or to others (Skorupa & Agresti, 1993). A counselor who is impaired through burnout is less likely to be alert to the subtlety of a client's communication and so fail to perceive them or pursue them in therapy

(Hellman, 1986). The sexually exploitive behavior of counselors is considered a manifestation of impairment (Emerson & Markos, 1996). Impaired counselors may have inner conflicts that are consistently activated by client material and may react by trying to stabilize themselves rather than facilitating client growth (Corey et al., 1998). Impaired counselors, then, contribute to the suffering of their clients rather than alleviating it (Corey et al., 1998; Hellman, 1986; Skorupa & Agresti, 1993; Stadler et al., 1988).

Impairment is most likely to be harmful to the client when the counselor remains unaware of his or her condition and its effect on his or her work. However, the fact that one is impaired may prevent awareness of one's own situation (Emerson & Markos, 1996). In a study by Guy, Poelstra and Stark (1989), when respondents were asked how they would determine whether they were no longer competent to practice due to physical or emotional disability, 57% reported their own self-assessment would be the primary source of that data. Perhaps the most significant problems related to impairment are the lack of awareness of the impairment itself, the reluctance to admit that a problem exists and recognizing the harm to clients that can result (Emerson & Markos, 1996). One finding in surveys by both Wood, Klein, Cross, Lammers, and Elliot (1985) and Skorupa and Agresti (1993) was that the psychologists surveyed equated admitting personal difficulties with incompetence, which resulted in reluctance to admit personal difficulties or impairment. Denial also plays a role in personal recognition of impairment and its effect on clients (Guy et al, 1989; Herlihy, 1996).

Self-awareness is a key to dealing with impairment. "Counselors who learn to embrace and explore their own wounds will be in a more informed position to understand when they will be able to provide compassion and when they may be



harmful to others” (Miller, Wagner, Britton, & Gridley, 1998, p. 125). Some counselors’ self-awareness is impaired precisely due to their impairment, i.e., as in denial. These counselors will need the help of those professionals associated with them to become aware. In fact, professional counselors and therapists have an ethical responsibility to help impaired colleagues. That responsibility is explicit in the ethics codes of both the APA (1992) and the ACA (1997).

Burnout (as one category of impairment), according to Sussman (1995), is reaching epidemic proportions in the helping professions. Sussman defines burnout as the “physical and emotional depletion, lowered job performance and indifferent attitude that can result from excessive job-related demands” (p. 244). He credits an overwhelming demand for services that has made long hours necessary and, in many instances, expected. Burnout is an insidious and complex problem, but is related to self-awareness (or lack of it) in several ways. A number of defense mechanisms (e.g., denial, repression, sublimation) can be utilized to avoid confronting issues of self that may be contributing to the problem. Overwork itself can be a form of avoidance of self issues that are waiting to be addressed, or overwork can also be a symptom of emptiness (Sussman, 1995). Preventive measures include paying attention to the person of the therapist, his or her awareness of his or her own issues and being able to attend to those issues so they do not interfere with professional functioning.

A related professional issue in the field of counseling and psychology is that of the “wounded healer” (Jung, 1963; Maeder, 1989). This archetype has a long and venerable history in which it was understood that to become a healer an individual must undergo a period of intense distress or suffering. By weathering such an experience the prospective healer gains the power to heal others. Relating this to current issues in professional psychology, Sussman (1995) notes, “Regardless of

primary discipline, a major determinant for becoming a therapist involves the conscious and/or unconscious wish to resolve one's own emotional conflicts" (p. 34). This is not inherently bad, for if the individual has awareness of personal issues and makes the effort to understand and master them that process can, as the ancients believed, enhance their ability to help others.

### Self-Awareness in Training Programs

In a survey of graduate students' training priorities, self-understanding was the highest ranked item in the personal/professional domain (Sisson & Bullis, 1992). This reflects interest on the part of graduate students in addressing self in training programs. Most program guidelines emphasize knowledge and skills, and espouse the value of "personal growth" as a component of therapist training. According to a survey of APA counseling psychology programs (Visokey, 1987), 50% of the responding institutions (81% response rate to the questionnaire) require a personal growth experience as part of training, although results were unclear as to the nature and extent of programmatic involvement of the programs responding. The current CACREP standards require 10 hours of a personal growth group experience (CACREP, 1998). No study has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of this experience in the context of increasing self-understanding. Privacy and confidentiality were the most common reasons for not requiring personal growth experience in training programs (Visokey, 1987). Visokey concluded that the issue of personal growth experience in training programs has not been adequately addressed.

Palmer (1998) has designed a program to address the inner life of the teacher. The premise of the program is that there is a "teacher within" which is the source of identity, integrity and authenticity. The emphasis of the program is to help teachers

recognize and nurture this source of inner knowing because “teaching, like any human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness for better or worse” (p. 2). He says training programs frequently ask “What?” (knowledge) or “How?” (technique), but seldom focus on “Who?” This “self-protective” split of personhood from practice is encouraged “by an academic culture that distrusts personal truth” (p. 17).

“Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). Relating his ideas to therapy Palmer states, “Good methods may help the therapist to find a way into the client’s dilemma, but good therapy does not begin until the real-life therapist joins with the real life of the client” (p. 5). Recognizing the “proper and powerful role” of technique, Palmer says, “As we learn more about who we are, we can learn techniques that reveal rather than conceal the personhood” of the therapist (p. 24). The parallels between the needs of teachers and the needs of therapists are worth noting. Both need to address the question of how the quality of selfhood “forms or de-forms” the way one works with students or clients.

Skovholdt and Ronnestad (1992), in a study in which they examined themes in counselor development, found continuous professional reflection was an important factor in facilitating counselor development. Continuous professional reflection is a central developmental process consisting of three essential aspects: ongoing professional and personal experiences (on which to reflect), a searching process with others in an open and supportive environment and active reflections about one’s experiences.

Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) outlined conditions necessary to facilitate reflective thinking. For reflection to occur there must be a problem, something about which the counselor feels confusion or dissonance and intends to search for a

solution. The problem should revolve around an issue of consequence that is important to good practice. In order to facilitate reflection, the counselor must be able to tolerate ambiguity and be in an environment where he or she has the space to struggle with ideas as well as the safety to experience not knowing. He or she is encouraged to focus on the problem as well as his or her own emotional and cognitive experiences as a means of understanding. His or her personal biases need to be recognized and understood as to how they might influence the process. Thus, “educating reflective practitioners involves providing the space to reflect, the permission and encouragement to reflect, the knowledge of how to inform one’s reflective process and a safe relational environment in which to consider one’s personal and interpersonal experience” (p. 82).

O’Reilly (1998) states that what the counselor needs to develop reflective thinking is attention and deep listening. She points out that in academic cultures most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention to what is being said only long enough to develop a counterargument; we critique the student’s or colleague’s ideas; we mentally grade and pigeonhole each other. Seldom is there deep, open-minded receptivity and listening. One can, she thinks, “listen someone into existence,” (p. 21) encouraging a stronger self to emerge.

Another way to promote reflective thinking is for educators and supervisors to model this way of being (Jacobs et al., 1995). For instance, in supervision, the supervisor can promote self reflection by asking questions such as, “What were you feeling when the client did such and such?,” “What was the experience like for you?,” or, “What did you really want to say to the client at that moment?”

Although not typically a required component of professional training programs (one notable exception being analytical training), personal counseling has

been shown to enhance or facilitate self-awareness or self-reflection in developing counselors (Arbuckle, 1967; Corey et al., 1998; Felder, 1967; Gelso & Fretz, 1992; Holzman, Searight & Huges, 1996; MacDevitt, 1987; Mackey & Mackey, 1994; Pope & Tabachnick, 1994). Felder, in early writings in the field of counseling, supported personal therapy for those who were training as counselors. There are times in counseling when the going gets rough, so much so that the “untreated” therapist might have the tendency to steer the client away from increasing anxiety. Having been through the experience of personal therapy, the counselor is in a better position to tolerate the intensity of anxiety necessary to the therapeutic process. He or she knows the process of “deteriorizing requires the full development of the terror” (Felder, 1967, p. 101). And he or she can know this for sure only if it has been experienced. Felder is convinced that the growth of the therapist directs the therapy.

Arbuckle (1967) also supported personal therapy for counselors in training. The understanding of self is more important than understanding the client. The professional counselor should at least “be at the level of professional and personal development so that in the majority of human interactions, he [sic] need neither abort the process nor refer the client” (p. 110).

Pope and Tabachnick (1994) conducted a study in which they found increased self-awareness as one of the three most common outcomes of personal therapy. This finding supported results from a study conducted by MacDevitt (1987) in which he found 82% of the therapists surveyed who had had any therapy found it very valuable and that it led to greater professional self-awareness and better professional functioning.

Mackey and Mackey (1994) conducted a study in which they interviewed 15 experienced clinicians to explore the relationship between personal therapy and the development of a professional self. Five themes emerged, one of which was the development of self-awareness, which included responses that made reference to discovering something about one's self that had previously not been consciously recognized. In fact, of these respondents, an important motivation for seeking therapy was to become more aware of self.

Holzman, Searight, and Hughes (1996) conducted a survey of psychology graduate students and found that 75% of the respondents (50% return rate) reported engaging in their own personal therapy. The respondents reported entering therapy to learn more about themselves, and reported the added benefits of increased empathy for the client role and the opportunity to observe a skilled practitioner at work.

Aponte (1994) describes his Family Training Program of Philadelphia where training "on the person of the therapist calls for trainees to deal with their personal issues in relation to the therapy they do" (p. 3). The basic premise of the program is that therapy is a personal encounter within a personal frame. Therapy challenges the therapist in training to use his or her personal self effectively within the professional relationship. Goals in the program include that the therapists develop the capacity to assess their own personal emotions and reactions within the therapeutic transaction and they learn how, in light of their own life experience, to interpret what these reactions tell them about themselves and their clients.

Regardless of the benefits, personal therapy as a requirement in training programs has fallen out of favor due to concerns about personal freedom, privacy, confidentiality and dual relationships, in which trainers and supervisors become involved in personal or group therapy experiences. Crouch (1997) noted that

requiring personal therapy as part of a training program isn't necessarily the right thing; being told to do your own work is not the right motivation for such an important and intimate undertaking.

### Literature in Diverse Disciplines

Neilsen (1990) takes the position that "the scientific method is inherently less distinguishable from other ways (of research) than previously thought" (p. 4).

Nielsen's position has been informed by work done in quantum physics where subatomic particles have been found to display different characteristics depending on the measuring apparatus and the experimenter's decision about spin. It has been concluded that subatomic particles have no meaning when studied in isolation, but only in relation to other things or interaction with other systems. Given the advances in quantum physics, Neilsen postulates that perhaps the social and physical sciences are not so different after all, but it is because the physical sciences with the interpretive dimension and relational understanding are more like the social sciences "than because the social sciences have successfully emulated the methods of the physical sciences" (p. 15).

Wilbur et al. (1995) have applied particular constructs and concepts from chaos theory that may have relevance for the training of effective counselors. Chaos theory is about complexity, not disorder or randomness. It is this complexity that relates to the understanding of human behavior, including that of the therapist in training. The focus of training programs should be on the trainee's "ability to understand and form flexible relationships with others, to interact flexibly with complex systems and contexts and attain an interindividual balance in self-development" (p. 137). The traditional training model places more emphasis on

counselors' "linear and discrete skill development" (p. 137), and misses the opportunities afforded by more complex perspectives.

### Subjective Inner Experience

The subjective inner experience of counselors was addressed in the early literature on counselor development (Arbuckle, 1967). Among the foundations of counselor education as advocated by Arbuckle at that time included (a) the goal for the education of counselors is growth (as differentiated from learning), (b) growth is creative, (c) counseling effectiveness is not a matter of technique, (d) a necessary condition for growth is the subjective involvement of the student, and (e) the highest educational goal is the counselor's search for meaning, search for self. Arbuckle added that any true learning is an "inside out process" (p. 159).

Another theoretical thread in the relationship between counseling and psychology and the subjective experience was the rise of constructionism (Cornett, 1998). A tenet of this theory is that it is what the subject, influenced by the cultural environment, makes of an event that is crucial in giving it meaning, not the event itself. In other words, if there is no word for a particular concept in a culture, there is no identification of the concept or phenomenon itself. Something exists or fails to exist depending on whether it can be articulated through the culture's language. For the purposes of our discussion, what is critical is that the subjective experience is of primary importance.

Constructionism achieved influence in psychology with the development of four clinical models (Cornett, 1998). The first is the interpersonal theory of Sullivan (1953). Sullivan contended that the therapist can never be an objective interpreter of an individual's experience. The therapist is inseparably intertwined in the therapeutic



relationship and the therapist's subjective responses influence both the relationship and the process. The subjective experience of all the participants in the encounter must be considered.

The second clinical model was that of Rogers' (1951) person centered approach, which was a departure from the standard psychoanalytic dogma of the day. Two main underlying principles are that (1) people have within themselves an innate tendency toward psychological growth or self-actualization; and (2) by focusing on the client's subjective experience through empathic connection to his or her world, this tendency toward self-actualization can be stimulated. The humanist movement, of which Rogers is part, emphasized human development and potential. The field of counseling was also oriented toward growth and development (as opposed to pathology) and strongly reinforced the humanist movement (Bergin, 1988).

The third model was the existentialist movement which focuses on the individual's subjective creation of meaning in life. This striving to find meaning in life is the primary motivational force in humans (Frankl, 1984; Yalom, 1980).

The fourth model to be influenced by constructionism was the self psychology of Kohut (1977), which postulates that humans have an innate need to transcend themselves through merger with something larger than themselves—an idealizing self-object. This theory offers a developmental perspective on the crucial role spirituality plays in life, although this aspect of the theory was downplayed, perhaps to avoid controversy and due to the desire to be accepted as part of traditional psychoanalysis.

Hillman (1975, 1996), Elkins (1995), Cornett (1998), Kochunas (1997), Moore (1992), and Fukuyama and Sevig (1997) are part of a contemporary professional and cultural movement toward a psychology of the soul. While the

origins of the word psychology suggest the study of the soul, Kochunas (1997) states that the field of psychology has responded to two cultural movements that have made it difficult to study soul. One of them is the “tyranny of objectivity” (p. 3) that is part of the rational perspective that is adhered to by researchers in the field, if psychological research is to be taken seriously in the scientific community. “Science, with its ability to isolate, dissect, and analyze the world, ends up creating a reality of living that only knows people as subjects that inhabit an impersonal, unconscious dead clockwork universe in which human consciousness is a fluke and an anomaly” (p. 3). Hillman (1996) states, “When the (re)searchers failed to find the soul in the places where they were looking, scientists gave up also on the idea of soul” (p. 92).

The other cultural movement Kochunas (1997) refers to is the advent of managed care. In a managed care arrangement, the client is no longer the purchaser of services, but “simply the object of treatment located between the purchasing organization and the provider” (p. 2). Pressed with artificial time constraints, psychological work in the managed care era has become more active, targeted, and time limited, with concrete goals and measurable outcomes. As counseling substitutes “soothing the surface of everyday concerns for deep and ruminating self exploration, it increasingly removes a sense of depth from everyday living” (p. 1). Moore (1992) refers to this lack of depth when he claims that America is becoming soulless. He says a soulless existence is one without depth, imagination and meaning. Counseling that only skims the surface can in no way satisfy the thirst for meaningful living (Kochunas, 1997).

The practice of psychology involves more than targeting symptoms and time-limited treatment. Elkins (1995) states that psychology is both an art and a science. A psychology based on soul “would give ‘artistic’ and phenomenological approaches to

knowledge equal standing with the scientific approaches that now dominate our epistemology” (p. 81).

Professional psychology, while not referring to soul, has formally recognized spiritual issues in the 4th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Aside from this reference in the *DSM-IV*, spirituality has been a largely subjective concept that has had little attention in the field of psychology perhaps due to “the profession’s historical precedents to dissociate itself from non-empirical philosophical” issues (Mack, 1994, p. 15).

### Qualitative Methodology

The soul or the “inner forces” that Palmer (1998) and Hillman (1996) refer to are invisible. This invisibility “perplexes American common sense and American psychology which hold as a major governing principle that whatever exists, exists in some quantity and therefore can be measured” (Hillman, 1996, p. 92). However, for the past 25 years, the scientific community has moved into the “post-empirical period” (Neilsen, 1990). This means that the scientific method is not considered “the ultimate test of knowledge or basis for claims of truth” (Neilsen, 1990, p. 5) it was once thought to be. Supplementing the positivistic, reductionist methods of the quantitative research models are qualitative models, interest in which has gained momentum over the past decade (Bevan & Kessel, 1994; Frank & Frank, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Neilsen, 1990; Osborne, 1994; Walker, 1996). Bevan and Kessel ask for recognition that “psychology’s methods and methodology must be far less rigid and our discipline’s view of what is scientifically acceptable must be far more pragmatic than has been the case for decades” (p. 507). “If psychology is to be

existentially relevant it needs to address human experience in its fullness rather than that part of the experience which is compatible with prevailing methodological biases” (Osborne, 1994, p. 168). The emphasis of qualitative methods is on discovery and description. With qualitative methodologies, such as phenomenology, the research community has the means to explore and begin to describe the subjective experience, such as the experience of inner life.

### Conclusion

The review of the literature reveals a movement toward exploration of the subjective experience in scientific inquiry. In the fields of education and business attention is being paid to a person’s inner experience, and in physics to factors that affect behavior that can’t be seen or measured. The review of literature has also revealed the importance of self-awareness and the part it plays in psychological and counseling theories and important constructs such as empathy, countertransference and projective identification, defense mechanisms and impairment. The review also revealed the importance the subjective experience has played in early counseling theory and training.

Given the importance of self-awareness of therapists, helping professionals need language and vocabulary to discuss the inner experience. It is hoped this research will contribute to our professional understanding of what inner life means to therapists and to find, perhaps, some commonalities of experience and meaning that may guide their development.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The year 2000 can come and the 21st century can offer less terror and more joy, but only if psychologists have learned both how to look inside and how to look outside: how to recognize the reciprocities of inner and outer through methods that are as far ranging and as deeply human as is the human stuff that is being studied. (Murphy, 1989, p. 119)

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of inner life in a deeply human way. Because of the nature of the subject matter under study, a phenomenological study in the hermeneutic tradition was the chosen methodology. It was chosen because phenomenology provides a way of “exploring lived experience—the actuality of experience from the inside rather than from the natural science perspective of observation and measurement” (Osborne, 1994, p. 170). The hermeneutic or interpretive tradition is concerned with the meaning that individuals give to their experience (Nielsen, 1990). The guiding theme of phenomenology is, according to Husserl (cited in Giorgi, 1985), to go “back to the things themselves” (p. 8). Phenomenological researchers agree that the method is composed of three research processes: (1) investigation of the phenomena, (2) identification of the general themes or essences of the phenomena, and (3) the understanding of essential relationships among the themes (Creswell, 1998; Giorgi, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Osborne, 1994; Tesch, 1984).

This investigation of the phenomenon of the inner life involved the interviewing of five helping professionals interested in sharing their experiences of their inner lives. The persons interviewed are referred to as “research participants”

(Tesch, 1984) and were identified through the use of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). The purpose of purposeful sampling is to “select information rich cases whose study will illuminate the question under study” (p. 169). In this study, a type of purposeful sampling called snowball or chain sampling (Kuzel, 1992) was employed. Snowball or chain sampling refers to identifying “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (p. 38). The primary factor in selecting the research participants was that they self-identified as having the experience of an inner life. They also had to be a helping professional defined as a person who is working in a therapeutic setting and has a degree and is licensed in counseling or psychology. The sample was drawn without having to resort to solicitation through advertisement or canvassing local professional organizations.

A pilot study was conducted for the purpose of testing the interview format. The researcher asked a professional colleague to volunteer as a participant in the pilot study. The researcher was not gathering “data” per se, but was asking her colleague to reflect critically on the usability of the questions and the open-ended interview process. The pilot study was also an opportunity for the researcher to practice interview skills and to support the researcher’s claim of capability to do the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). As a result of the pilot study, the interview format was revised from a single open-ended question to a semi-structured interview. The researcher had in mind a series of points to be addressed and asked questions if a point was not addressed by the participant.

The research participants volunteered for two interviews. The first interview began with an open-ended prompt, “What does inner life mean to you?” followed by “Please share with me your experience of your inner life.” Having expressed interest in the research, each interviewee had some preconceived idea of what is meant by

“inner life” and this was the perspective that the researcher was interested in obtaining. Further questions, if they were needed, were, “What facilitates your experience of your inner life?,” “What interferes with your experience of your inner life?,” “How does your experience of inner life inform your practice as a therapist?,” and “What part did your professional training play in your experience of inner life?” The interviews were open-ended, and took the time that the participant needed to tell his or her story. They ranged in length from 1 to 2 hours.

Prior to the second interview, the participants were given a copy of the transcription of their own interview material as well as a copy of a narrative the researcher had composed to capture the experience of each participant using as much as possible the words and language of the participant. The narrative was a representation of the meaning the researcher had made of the interview data up to that point. These narratives are included in Chapter IV. Pseudonyms were used in the narratives to maintain the anonymity of the participants. The purpose of the second interview was to allow the participants to review and verify the content and meaning of the transcribed interview material from the first interview and the narrative, and to give them an opportunity to validate and/or elaborate on the material. This process helped to insure the credibility of the material, in essence, to use quantitative research terminology, validating the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

In planning this study, this researcher realized that not only were there questions of methodology that needed to be addressed to justify qualitative design, but also questions of epistemology. There is an essentially different way of thinking that is needed to engage in a phenomenological study and operate in an interpretive mode in dealing with the material gathered in the process of analysis. Walker’s

(1996) four epistemological assumptions guided this study: (1) there is no objective, independent reality governing explanations of human behavior; (2) understanding human behavior is subjective and dependent on the perspective of participants; (3) people act with meaning, and language is the vehicle for interpreting and understanding the meaning people give to these actions; and (4) there is no such thing as a totally disinterested or objective observer.

An important consideration in qualitative research is the role of the researcher. In a phenomenological study, the researcher is considered an instrument (McCracken, 1998), and therefore the assumptions and biases of the researcher are important and must be revealed. This researcher brought her own personal history and experiences to this study, and any selection or interpretation of the material was through the lens of these experiences. The relevant experiences include training and work as a teacher for 17 years, in addition to work as a counselor for 8 years, as a limited licensed psychologist for 2 years, and nearly 20 years of personal work in dream analysis, and other forms of contemplative practice, including journaling, meditation, and painting. A personal bias of this researcher is that narrative is a source of valid and useful information that can inform clinical practice and the training of clinicians. This researcher believes as Osborne (1994) does, that phenomenology provides “a method for investigating the human inner world as legitimate subject matter for a human psychology” (p. 168). Having stated these assumptions and biases, the researcher is bound to “bracket” them (Creswell, 1998), meaning set them aside, to “suspend all judgments about what is real—until they are founded on a more certain basis” (p. 52) in the material gathered.

The analysis of the material gathered through the interview process was processed through the researcher, and followed a series of steps that have been



presented and supported by other phenomenological researchers, most notably Giorgi (1985) and Patton (1990). First, all interviews were transcribed and the researcher read the transcriptions several times in order to get the sense of the complete interview. Second, once a sense of the whole was obtained, the researcher read through the material again to discern themes or units of meaning around the theme of the experience of the inner life. The third step in the analysis process involved attaching psychological meaning to the units of meaning discerned in step two. It must be understood that these “meaning units” or the psychological meaning attached to them did not exist in the text; rather they existed “only in relation to the attitude and set of the researcher” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 15). The fourth step in the analysis process is to synthesize the meanings gathered into themes that reflected a coherent picture of the phenomenon, which hopefully will add to the understanding of the experience of the inner life.

During the second interview, and any other time questions arose, the researcher checked back with the participants to have them verify content and the meanings attached to, again, provide credibility. It was this going back and forth between the researcher and the research participants that contributed to both dependability and confirmability of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Dependability, credibility and confirmability were the tests applied to defend the value and logic of this phenomenological work.

A research journal or “reflexive journal” (Patton, 1990, p. 109) was kept by the researcher to note any extra-interview information or observations. These entries included the researcher’s thinking, philosophical position, and bases of decision making about the inquiry process. This was an opportunity to gather data about the researcher as a person and the part she played in the research process.

All interviews were conducted by the researcher, tape-recorded and transcribed into a computer research file using coded identification. No information was stored on the computer with the participants' names or other identifying information.

Safeguards and protection of the research participants were guided through the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) policy (Western Michigan University, 2000). A copy of the HSIRB's permission to conduct this research is included in Appendix A. In addition, the informed consent document that each participant signed is included in Appendix B. One copy of the informed consent document was given to each participant; another signed copy is being kept on file by the researcher. The researcher is also bound to the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (APA, 1992) and the American Counseling Association (ACA, 1997).

### Limitations of This Study

The intention of this study was to examine via phenomenological method the descriptions of the experience of inner life obtained from helping professionals. One limitation may be the subjective and abstract nature of the experience of inner life as well as the subjective nature of the "data" collected. The purpose of the study, however, was to sample the experience of helping professionals, not to suggest a prevailing experience among helping professionals. In exploring a phenomenon such as inner life, the question format might be considered a limiting factor. Questions arose from the researcher's experience and understanding and it is possible the questions may have been confining or lacking in imagination thereby affecting the

scope of information received. Despite the limitations, this method was considered the best vehicle to deliver useful information about this experience.

### Summary

In summary, five helping professionals who self-identified as experiencing inner life were interviewed to explore the meaning “inner life” has for them. The transcribed interview data were analyzed for themes that helped this researcher begin to build a foundation of knowledge, including language and vocabulary, concerning the experience of inner life that may hopefully contribute in a meaningful way to the education and professional development of therapists.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

A description of the findings of this study will be presented in this chapter. This will be accomplished in four sections. First, a brief composite background of the participants will be offered to help put the findings in context. Second, the process that the researcher used to distill meaning from the interview text will be reviewed. Third, narratives are included which were composed by the researcher to reflect the experience of the participants using their own words and language as much as possible. Finally, the findings themselves will be presented in a format that follows the themes that emerged from the interviews as reflected in the narratives.

#### Participants

Five helping professionals agreed to participate in this study. A purposeful sampling method, chain sampling, was used to obtain the sample. The researcher asked professionals she knew in the field for names of people who met the criteria for participation in the study. Specifically the participants are all licensed psychologists or licensed counselors who are currently working in a therapeutic setting and agreed to talk about their experience of their inner life. The participants included two men and three women. They ranged in age from 31 to 44 with the average age being 40.4 years. The years in practice ranged from 4 to 17 with the average number of years in practice being 11.2. One of the participants is a Limited License Psychologist (LLP), another a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). Two participants are Licensed

Psychologists (LP) and one holds licensure as both a psychologist (LP) and a counselor (LPC).

The first set of interviews took place over a period of 5 weeks. All but one of the first interviews took place in the participants' consulting rooms. One interview took place in the participant's home. The second set of interviews followed a month later. Two of the second set of interviews took place in the participants' homes and the remaining three in the participants' consulting rooms.

From the researcher's point of view, rapport was established quite easily with each of the participants especially in light of the highly personal nature of the material each was asked to share. One factor which may have influenced rapport building was the fact that each participant was referred through a mutual contact (through the purposeful sampling process described above) and he or she could have a greater level of trust and willingness to share than would have been probable with a perfect stranger. A second aspect that may have influenced rapport building was that the researcher had phone contact with each participant and was able to share a description of the project along with its purpose before the individuals agreed to participate. The participants were able to spend some time reflecting on the interview theme before meeting with the researcher. A third possible factor may have been that three of participants had completed doctoral degrees including a dissertation project in the not too distant past and may have experienced a level of empathy for the researcher that allowed for connection and facilitated rapport.

### **Finding Meaning**

Each interview was tape recorded, then transcribed verbatim. From the interview text, units of meaning were derived and recorded individually. This

involved identifying key phrases or statements that spoke directly to the experience of inner life. Each unit of meaning was coded to participant, so the individual units of meaning could be moved around, grouped and regrouped. These units of meaning were inspected and reflected upon for what they revealed about essential recurring features of the phenomenon under investigation. An essential feature of phenomenological research is the assumption that there is an essence or essences to the shared experience (Patton, 1990). "These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (p. 70). In this process, the experiences of the individual participants are bracketed (Patton, 1990) or separated out, and each is treated as having equal value; in other words, the data are horizontalized (Patton, 1990). These individual units of meaning were analyzed and organized into clusters of meaning. As redundant or overlapping units were eliminated, the invariant themes emerged. These themes provide the outline for the description of the findings.

Another process was occurring concurrently. As units of meaning were derived for each participant, they were reassembled and composed by the researcher into a narrative description to capture the individual's experience using the participant's own words and language as much as possible. These narratives reflected the researcher's understanding of the participants' experience. Before the second interview, each participant received a copy of both the transcribed interview and the narrative. The participants were asked to review both documents for accuracy. They were asked whether the narratives had captured the essence of their experience, and were also asked to note if there were any points that needed further elaboration or clarification. After the second interview, any feedback was incorporated into revision

of the individual units of meaning and the narrative account. The narrative descriptions of the participants' experience of inner life follow in the next section.

## Narratives

### Participant A

Alan is a 40-year-old man, the father of three children. He is licensed as both a counselor and a psychologist and has practiced for 14 years. He describes himself as introspective and more introverted than extraverted. He understands inner life as made up of those things he thinks and feels privately but doesn't necessarily share. These could be thoughts about all aspects of his life including his personal life or professional life. He may think about any number of things he enjoys or he may think about struggles with his own issues or insecurities. It is an on-going process that he thinks of more in his private moments, times when he is by himself or engaged in a solo activity. When he is involved in doing another activity, his mind may wander to a particular client that he is working with, what's happening in therapy, his feelings about it or perhaps something that's happened to one of his children. At these times when Alan has an awareness of inner life at the same time he is engaged in another activity, he does not necessarily do anything with it, he just holds the awareness.

Another time he becomes aware of his inner life is when he is exercising which he tries to do regularly. That is a time when his mind goes to a lot of different places and he is aware not only of his thinking, but also aware of what he is feeling in his body. But his inner life also involves being aware of what is going on beyond his mind, in his soul, if you will.

Listening to what is going on in his soul is described as listening to what is underneath the “mind clutter.” It is difficult to define, but there is definitely more feeling involved, there is more of a “felt” something. There is a sense for Alan that it is not just thought that is at play, but that it has more to do with things like peacefulness and serenity, feeling like he is doing the right things. Listening to his soul is not totally devoid of thought, although he would like it to be at times.

Alan is less aware of his inner life when he is totally involved in an activity such as watching a movie. If he is reading (he does a lot of reading) he is not as aware of his inner process then. He offers that that may be one reason he reads.

Alan came from a very conservative Christian family and has what he describes as a love-hate relationship with organized religion. He attends church, but not regularly and can take it or leave it. He trained to be a teacher and a coach, but when he left school, he took a position in a church as an assistant pastor. In that position he had ideas about prayer and meditation and the inner life process and had time to devote to it, although at that time he did not think he was very connected to being able to hear what was really happening inside himself. He described himself as more in tune with how he thought he was supposed to be inside rather than how he really was inside. He can remember being alone in his office, searching for answers in a prayerful way, looking internally and externally and just not coming up with anything. That turned out to be a very frustrating time period in his life.

But, it was also a period of time that brought along growth for him in terms of his own individuation and development of autonomy. There came a time when he experienced moments of questioning his beliefs and these were moments when he became more aware of and more in tune with a deeper inner process. As he felt safer (greater distance from the family expectations and his own super ego restraints),



these questionings led him out of the religious environment and toward the one he is currently engaged in. He characterizes this period as one in which he had a growing awareness, a budding awareness of his inner life, an inner life that was trying to break through into his consciousness. For him it was a movement, not out of Christianity, but away from Christianity. He studied Taoism which had a lot of meaning for him. Now he would define himself as more of an eclectic in terms of religious beliefs.

As Alan has become less religious, he describes himself as becoming more spiritual. He makes a distinction between those two words. Spirituality, while difficult to precisely define, is understood by him as being connected to something good that is bigger than himself. He has seen himself as both very significant in terms of being part of that something bigger and somewhat insignificant in terms of how small he is in the big scheme of things. It is a dual experience. He perceives spirituality as being in relationship with the significance/insignificance that could be found in an experience in nature or in a meditative experience or in an interaction with another person(s), be that with friends, a client or most usually with family, especially his children. It is an experience in which he is just more in the moment and allowing himself to be and not trying to control it, not trying to overtly influence the experience. There is a sense of connectedness to the other. The experience of soul would be spiritual and he would say that his inner life is a big part of his experience of spirituality.

The thing Alan does most frequently to cultivate his awareness of his inner life is exercise. He sometimes experiences exercise as a meditative practice as it is a time when he can allow his mind to wander and he has time to think about things, reflect upon them. He used to listen to music or read as he exercised, but he now purposefully tries not to, in an attempt to be more present with what he is doing and

to be able to engage in reflection. He also enjoys kayaking down the river or going for an early morning jog. His children are an important part of his experience also. If he is doing things where he is feeling connected with them, there is a sense of peace surrounding him. As compared to his formal religious practice, he gets more value out of kayaking, jogging or spending some good quality time with his 4 year old. Those experiences are more spiritual than the religious experience he has had.

Alan does practice meditation, albeit irregularly, and wishes to do more. It is a useful way to quiet his mind. But he also experiences quiet times during the day that he does not meditate per se, but sits and focuses inwardly. At the office if he has a break, he may just shut the door and be quiet. He may think about things generally, or focus on a client that he is going to work with later that day. Or he may think about one that he saw earlier and try to evaluate what is going on. Alan also experiences being more centered when relationships are going well, when he is organized so he is not in a panic because he is running late, and when he is getting things done on time so he is not preoccupied with them while he is talking to clients. These quiet times help him to feel centered and when he is centered he does better work. He is in a place where he feels more serenity. He experiences growth and insight for himself personally out of these times of focusing inwardly as well.

The major hindrance to the experience of his inner life is busyness, when he is trying to cram everything in, and life is hurried. Maybe he has frittered away time doing something that may be a waste of time and then he feels pressed because there are things that he has to get done and things he would like to do. Having to make a living interferes; he may accept more clients than is comfortable. Sometimes he feels chaos in his life. One child needs to get to soccer practice, another has music lessons, no one has eaten dinner, there is homework to do and it is his night to be in charge.

But even amidst chaos, Alan is aware of moments in which there will be a breakthrough in which he will think, "This is where it is." He will be aware of being more mindful and of being in the moment. These moments of mindfulness that occur in the midst of chaos can be very moving and powerful experiences for him.

Alan wonders if busyness is not entirely to blame for drawing him away from his inner life. Perhaps it is something about himself, in terms of how he is coping with things, handling them, or approaching them that interferes more than anything else.

In terms of his work, Alan does consciously think about what he is feeling and thinking in sessions. For instance, if he is sitting with a client and feeling angry, angry with the client, he will be trying to figure out why he is feeling angry. Is it because of something the client is doing or has done or what he or she is expecting of him or not expecting of him? Or is it because the client is triggering something in him that is a part of his own set of issues? Alan also has very conservative Christian clients with attitudes and biases that can rile him up and he knows that is his own history playing out. Those are examples of the more powerful ways that access to his inner life informs his work. He thinks he provides for his clients some things that he wished he could have gotten, but did not get at certain times in his life and he thinks he provides for his clients things that he did get, that he appreciated and he is aware of that process going on. That knowing comes out of the process of paying attention to his inner life. Alan thinks his own journey helps him understand that people are on a journey themselves.

At times, Alan thinks his attention to his inner process gets misinterpreted by others. People close to him sometimes say he is distant or aloof or that he is self-absorbed. He may not be as tuned in to people around him and come across as

gruffer than he feels. Others tell him he looks so serious. He has the tendency to pull away and be by himself.

He does not feel his formal professional training ever directly addressed the inner process. His clinical supervision did to some extent. For instance, his supervisor would address transference and countertransference issues and there was a focus through his supervision on taking care of himself. He feels that as he has moved further along his career path he has become more in touch with himself, much more self-aware than he used to be.

### Participant B

Brad is a 44-year-old licensed psychologist and licensed professional counselor who has been in practice for 15 years. When asked what inner life means to him, what he thinks of is spirituality. It includes the kinds of introspective processes that people engage in that do not often get talked about or articulated, but still are happening at a conscious level. When he does talk about them, it is not just with anybody and not just in casual conversation. Inner life includes thoughts, beliefs, sensations and feelings as well as the things Brad does to stimulate that process. For Brad, this process is ongoing. He has always been someone who has been aware of this inner process at some level. He leans more toward introversion than extraversion.

Spirituality is closely connected to what Brad thinks about when he thinks of inner life. Spirituality is awareness of an inner life. It is paying attention to what is going on inside and how that connects to others and to everything in this world. Brad describes a physical sensation he experiences in which he feels a very powerful sense of heightened spiritual awareness. It feels like a flood of sensation. There is a tingling sensation and a sort of strange prickly feeling on the top of his head. From another

point of view, these experiences he has could be described as symptoms. But from Brad's perspective it fits with what the mystics have called an "ecstatic experience" or the Hindu's kundalini experience. Perhaps the psychotic process might be understood within a spiritual framework; it does not necessarily have to be psychopathological. The symptoms may be inner material that has overwhelmed a person, that is more of a disintegration of the ways one makes sense. And it is not just how one makes sense, something bigger is happening with that experience, too.

Brad becomes very emotionally connected with his inner experience when he is in dialogue with other people. When he is by himself he can be moved by something, but when he has to articulate it, it becomes much more powerful for him. The act of articulating it and having it witnessed by somebody else is something that makes the experience that much more powerful.

The practices that Brad engages in to facilitate his experience of his inner life include meditation, journaling, writing poetry, and exercise. His meditative experience includes walking meditation, which he has done as frequently as 4 or 5 days a week in preparation for more intensive retreats. There would be times when he would be on a walking meditation when he would have the sort of strange mystical experience he talked about earlier. He would experience a heightened sensitivity and a greater perceptual acuity, colors would be more vivid as well as the sensations he would experience on his skin from the coolness of the morning or the warmth of the sun. It affects his psychological being also; he would end the meditation and note that he felt bigger, taller, stronger, and he felt like he was walking straighter. Brad also has rituals associated with his meditation that help him connect and deepen the experience for him. These rituals are drawn from Native American traditions of acknowledging the earth with offerings.

Aside from the preparation for retreat, Brad uses walking as a time and space away to be and as a time to achieve clarity around his own issues. It is a time for personal dialogue with himself. Having time by himself in this way allows him to stay connected to others (family) and still pay attention to his own journey, in other words, to be detached in a healthy way.

Brad journals and writes poetry, again, most frequently in preparation for a retreat. He writes about many things that make him feel more connected with himself, with other people and with nature.

He also has been on annual, “quarterly,” and weekend retreats. In fact, it seems to Brad that he responds best when he has at least one powerful “jump start” a year, an opportunity to get away for a week or so and do something very different. This might be something that makes him feel like he is far away from his life as it normally functions, something that takes him to the “edge.” These occasions away and in nature are opportunities to “commune with creation.” He comes back refreshed and renewed, feeling like he is able to do more powerful work. These retreats used to seem like a luxury, but now they seem more necessary.

Brad has gone on shorter, weekend retreats with other men as well. During those times away, they may meditate together, walk in the woods, talk about philosophy, relationships or spirituality. Even smoking a cigar with a friend can be a significant experience of connection and Brad has referred to those times as “blowing holy smoke.” On retreat Brad has participated in drumming. The prolonged regular beat of the drum offers a release and is entrancing. While listening to drumming, Brad has had the psychological experience of being in awe of all he was looking at around him.

Brad has fasted and has felt like it is a powerful spiritual experience. The sense he has is the more empty he is, the more room there is for spiritual filling. After fasting, he ends up feeling clearer and more incisive about himself and what he is doing.

Brad has an awareness of his inner process when he is working with clients. His own inner work increases his awareness of clients working on deeper issues. He feels comfortable going there (deeper) instead of staying on symptom relief and management strategies. His own inner awareness sets him on a good path for following and paying close attention to what is important to them. He lights a candle in his work space as a ritual to remind himself that it is sacred space and the work that is done there is sacred work.

He also engages in reflective moments after sessions, opportunities to celebrate the moment, think about the work he has done. Sometimes he is aware of a person leaving in a state of real turmoil, but he knows the client is doing what is needed and he is helping in that process. That makes him feel connected, spiritually connected. Brad also uses this self-reflection to keep in the back of his mind that he does not always know what is going on for this other person and to guard against countertransference reactions.

During his work, there may be times when Brad will notice himself drifting. It happens more frequently when he is out of the consistency of an inner examination process. It also happens when he is not doing things to take care of and nurture his inner life. He knows that when he is depleted, when he is worn out or run down he does not feel as aware and able to help people. He cannot feel good about the work he does if he is not right there with it, and knows he is as susceptible to burnout as anyone. When he is in greater touch with his inner self, those are the times he feels

that he is incisive and right on target with his work. It feels to him that he is so much more clear on what needs to be happening in the therapy that he is doing. Brad feels that paying attention to his own spiritual path is an important part of feeling satisfied with the work he is doing. His own inner work and his work in the outer world are interconnected and feed each other.

It is important for Brad to make time to pay attention to his inner life. And even more than that, to be intentional about it. He cannot just hope it will happen, because the “important crowds out the necessary.”

Spending time with the right people facilitates his experience. These are people who invite or are open to discussing issues close to him. And if there is not a discussion per se, Brad knows they have an openness and receptivity. Regular exercise also facilitates his experience. Brad uses his exercise rituals to start his day, which include walking and the sauna or whirlpool.

Some things that hinder Brad’s experience include overeating and the “damn TV.” He stays up too late watching, and then does not want to get up at an early enough hour to walk. TV distracts him from his journey easily, due to both the junk that is on and the disturbing content.

Brad’s religious experience has been an important part of his life, but he has found the dogma too limiting in his experience of important issues in his life. His expanded awareness is characterized as spiritual, encompassing more than the religious dogma he has known. His professional training did not specifically address issues of inner life or spirituality and he has sought information and experience outside of formal training.



### Participant C

Cindy is a 31-year-old licensed psychologist and mother of one child. She has practiced for 4 years. When asked about inner life, the first thing that comes to her mind is connection with herself and connection with Spirit. It is what helps her tend to her emotions and tend to what is going on internally. It is anything that helps her feel more of a presence and connection to God or Spirit. She has an image that has come to her many times that represents inner life and that is the image of the cross. This is separate from the symbolism of the cross that was part of her Christian upbringing which did not have great meaning to her. She has come to appreciate that the vertical bar of the cross represents how she thinks of the divine or just being centered or grounded. The horizontal bar represents all the connections to the outer world, people and things. The vertical bar, when she is balanced, centered or grounded is approximately three times longer than the horizontal. An overextended horizontal bar means that she is extended in the world and doing things as opposed to being. The issue for Cindy in terms of her inner life is trying to keep the cross in those proportions. She becomes aware of the cross image when she has time to reflect and it serves as a reminder of needing to connect with her inner life, connect to Self.

Spirit means there is something that is bigger than just her own mind. She likes the word because it does have a God association for her, but she is struck by the mystery of not really knowing what this being or force or thing is. It has always felt very real to her. Her hope is of always holding the intention of wanting to feel connected to that level of awareness, that there is maybe an order to things or a purpose to things of a greater source. She has dabbled in other traditions or images,

but there is not one that feels like it encompasses whatever that whole realm is. Spirit is more inclusive.

It is hard for Cindy to find words to talk about spirit and inner life, but they have always been part of her curiosity. She has memories as a child being raised as a Presbyterian. But religion was never particularly compelling to her, in fact, it was boring. She never really understood the stories that were told and remembers going to church as more of a social thing. It was never really interesting to learn more about Christianity, although she appreciated the teachings of Christ. If there were other practices stuff like Buddhism or goddess religion or some kind of esoteric beliefs, that was really interesting to her. But at the same time she was always into God and spirituality.

So, as a child she read books that had magic in them or anything that talked about connection with nature and God. As a teenager she got into doing psychology reading and a lot of that tended to be spiritual. She felt like anything that was different from how her parents were raising her held a fascination for her. Her parents at first thought her beliefs were weird and in college it was a bit more of a challenge that she got more into those ideas and beliefs and had the opportunity to explore them a little more. Now they have come to appreciate them.

Cindy chose to study psychology because she saw that she was in that world. The university she studied at had a class called Psychology and Religion. The professor had people come and talk about their spiritual journeys. She also explored and practiced yoga and meditation. Otherwise, she studied in a traditional program.

One of the most important practices that Cindy has to support her inner life is journaling. Journaling has always been helpful, because she is able to immediately feel

connected to an inner voice. It is almost like as soon as she puts the question or concern down in writing, she can feel a clarity within responding to that.

Meditation feels important as a practice even though it is hard to practice. When Cindy would think about spiritual practice, she would imagine time for meditation or prayer but it has not been like that for her. She loses the flame for meditation if not doing other practices as well because she is drawn to something that feels a little more heartfelt to her. She feels more drawn to physical practices such as yoga or exercise. She has always been into the physical, but has to be so much in her head. She gets sluggish and a bit off if she is not doing the physical practice. She has found that if she does more physical practices, she is more balanced for the thinking that she feels naturally inclined to do during academic work periods.

Cindy definitely strives to experience things. She has experienced movement through dance, sweat lodges, and drumming. One of her most important experiences was the personal therapy she did with a woman who was open to spiritual language and thinking in a spiritual way. She became a mentor and role model and was very helpful to Cindy. Cindy worked with this woman during the four years she was doing her graduate work. So, as she was formally studying, she was able to frame things in a holistic, mind-body-spirit framework. It was another way she could balance the left-brained way she had to be in her program. Cindy connected to this therapist serendipitously. She had been open to have some kind of spiritual teacher, just wanting to deepen that part of her life. She feels now that when you are ready, the teacher will come.

At school, Cindy lived alone and had complete autonomy over her time. It was easy to have daily time for practice that could keep her connection to her inner life alive. She practiced yoga with a group that had class each week. It was a day-in,

day-out practice that became a part of her life. At one point, Cindy went on a month long yoga training retreat out East after which she felt deepened. During those years, her therapist also encouraged her to set aside one day a week for retreat time, saying it would be the greatest gift Cindy could offer in her life. During those day retreats, Cindy would go and walk in nature, spend time in prayer and just tend to that inner part of herself. She experienced a feeling of being connected emotionally and a subtle way of feeling that she describes as a sense of knowing peacefulness.

Cindy did other things to connect her to her inner life. She set up an altar in her room, did reading, and engaged in prayer. Because of the degree of the challenges in her program, she drew on these practices for strength. And these practices would push her back (to center) when she had challenges across the board with relationships, with work, or with health. She feels that the time period in which she was studying was a time when it was easier to keep this flame alive every day. Her practice was a coping resource. She had plenty of non-social time along with social time.

Since that time, Cindy has experienced the transition to marriage and motherhood. Now it is harder to carve out time and she must find more creative ways to practice. Sometimes, while she is in the shower she'll breathe energy into her body and feel connected, or she will just set an intention for the day. It is a daily thing, just remembering, remembering to take a breath and to check in, to say a prayer, of having an intention for the day. It is just remembering to take time to consciously connect to something, to be aware of it. It helps to have some routine to help herself remember. It might be putting a quote on the mirror that gets her into that space. Sometimes it is jewelry that reminds her. These things just remind her to take a

breath and come into the moment and connect. She sees that this practice is about relationship and she must remember to turn to that inner person.

Time is the most important facilitator of her experience of her inner life. When she has more time and space in her life she feels so much more connected to her inner experience. But she has to have time in a certain way; she needs time alone in an intentional space. That makes all the difference to her and is important for her in terms of spiritual connecting or connecting to inner peace. She has a deeper experience when she is on her own. However, in relationship it has been interesting to find a balance; there are things she and her husband do together and there are ways they are always supporting each other.

Both mindfulness and meditation are useful practices for Cindy but something even more powerful for her is taking one more step of invoking an intention, almost a prayer, such as “May I be of service today” or “May I be present with you today” which feels different than mindfulness or just being aware. It feels to her like she is bringing something into the moment; it feels like a more active thing.

Humor is of importance to Cindy’s experience as it helps her to connect back to inner life and her spirituality. She feels that one of the obstacles to her practice is when she gets stressed to the point of losing her sense of humor, then she knows she is in trouble. There is a major correlation between loss of sense of humor and not feeling connected to her inner life. When she does not feel joy and does not feel connected spiritually, she feels resentment because she is committed so much or just doing too much.

Another thing that Cindy is hugely affected by is community and who she spends time with. If she is in situations where inner life or spiritual life are not acknowledged as being real, then it is amazing to her how much of an effect that has.

Suddenly it does not seem like that whole world (spiritual) is around and when she is with people who have that as a part of their vocabulary it makes it feel more real. She had no idea how powerful that part was.

Cindy is teaching in an area where spirituality is integrated into the curriculum. She feels her life is so much more integrated, to be able to do work that is completely around talking about meditation, yoga and doing therapy with a spiritual frame. And, again, the fact that she is in a community of people who value that and talk about that, it is in the air and it is what is being taught. She feels like her teaching space is like being in a sacred space. There is something in that that facilitates the motivation for her to keep coming back to her inner life because she gets glimpses of it as she works. When she is perceived by students as someone who does the things she teaches about, it has her step up to that a little bit more. The worst thing to her is when she realizes she is talking about meditation and she has not meditated in some time; there is the discrepancy there between talking about it and doing it. She feels a humbleness and responsibility to continue her own work in that area. In fact she feels her connection to this work through her teaching is what carried her through this past year when she did not have as much time to devote to her inner life.

Cindy feels like her work is a gift, that she hears people's stories. One intention she holds around her therapy work is that of wanting to surrender in her work. The intention is one of wanting to be healing and helpful, of wanting to be effective but not really knowing what that means or what form it will take. She makes the effort to stay open to that intention. That is an important connection for her. The more she is able to stay connected to her own issues in her inner life, and the good stuff, the spiritual stuff, the better able she is to be helpful to people. When she is

more connected to her inner life, she then can hear more clearly and show up for opportunities to be compassionate and not have her own issues in the way.

The greatest hindrance to experiencing her inner life is time. Her biggest issue is she will commit to things and be flying around the world and just forget that she really wants to connect to what she is feeling, to feel that inner peace. It became clear to her that she could become physically ill if she maintained the busyness. At these times she comes back to her image of the cross. She feels she will never know her potential of how she can be helpful or healing or have this inner life if she is not coming back to the healthy cross proportions.

Although she is excited about being in relationship, she feels a pull at times that makes it easy to put all her energy and attention there as opposed to her inner life. Then there are other vices of life that hinder her experience, be they material things or mocha coffee. There are times when she notices she gets too much energy going into the worldly things, including watching TV. When she watches TV she is aware of being less conscious of spiritual matters.

Her professional training followed a science model and did not address the inner life or spirituality directly. However, compassionate faculty were available to her, knowing she had other interests and respecting her. Although faculty were not overtly supportive of her ideas and beliefs, being in the program taught her that she had to stand for what she believes in and she may not have cultivated that need to be fierce within herself otherwise. She also felt she needed to learn savvy ways of standing for these things she believed in and being able to talk about them so they seemed credible in circles they would not have otherwise. People can hear more if it is grounded in the other world also.

It is clear to Cindy in a humbling way that as much as she has been an achiever, all the most wonderful things have been grace. It is her desire to continue to want to be more in tune with her inner life, because that is much like the surrender of feminist thinking. Just letting go and being open and connecting to the inner because there is something so much bigger than her own mind. It is her motivation to want to continue to do this inner work. She has chosen to talk selectively about her inner work. Maybe it is more effective to not broadcast what is going on internally. On the other hand, it is a gift and even therapeutic to talk about it. It is good to articulate it. The not talking is not so much about being shy as much as considering the norms in our culture.

#### Participant D

Diane is a 44-year-old limited licensed psychologist who has been in practice for 17 years. She is also the mother of two children. Inner life includes all the thoughts, feelings, inner experience of the outer world, and spirituality. Spirituality is a connection to something larger than herself, that through that connection she feels a part of things that are beyond her individual self. She feels connected to a greater self. Spirituality includes some kind of meaning for life or life force. She thinks spirituality might be considered mystical in our time, but it will not be mystical years from now. Science will have understood such things and there will be other things that will be considered mystical because science has not given label to them.

Diane considers herself to be basically introverted. She was raised in a traditional Catholic background with a focus towards God and something bigger. The dogma did not make sense and she pulled away from that. In college, the study of psychology became the replacement for religion in looking for some kind of meaning



in her life. “Why am I here?” “Who am I?” Those questions were always big for her. She also asked, “What’s good about me?” bringing self-acceptance into her search for meaning. She needed something bigger than herself to help herself achieve self-acceptance. Her study of psychology was her way of trying to find the meaning in life and some healing for things in her self. This path was not necessarily purposeful, but perhaps unconsciously purposeful in finding her way to becoming a therapist. She has always been connected towards wanting to heal herself and find meaning.

Her study of psychology was more than just cognitive-behavioral. There was something larger she was looking at than just the scientific mode would allow. Her focus was not on spirituality, but there were hints of it there like her interest in Jungian psychology. The birth of her children brought her search into greater focus as well. What was she going to tell them? What were her beliefs?

As part of a search for meaning, Diane had been in therapy for many years. She first got into therapy when she was in graduate school because she thought it was important. It was not because there were symptoms in her life, but she felt it was important to look at her own issues in order to help people with theirs. It was that experience that was useful to her to take what she was learning in classes and what she was learning in practice and do a loop with her own issues. But, something else needed to be brought into the picture in order to help her make a shift in her self understanding, just the insight gained in personal therapy did not seem to be making the necessary shift. It was all these pieces, upbringing, formal training, personal therapy, children, that led her to look more directly at spirituality. Maybe that was another element that was needed to help her or others find meaning.

As part of her daily experience of her inner life, Diane practices meditation. In particular she practices a structured form of energy awareness. The purpose of her

meditation practice is to increase her own consciousness and then loop that back through her own individual issues in her life, be that goals or patterns she wants to shift. Diane becomes aware of something she wants to be different with her life and she can choose to make a shift. She will use meditation or other spiritual practices to call forth the shift. Perhaps blocks will show up at a deeper level or in her own belief system that are in her way or she will find she is stuck around some old pain. The issue may arise out of the meditation, but it may become conscious at another time. Regardless, her insight, her awareness of her self increases, becomes larger as she allows herself to work through the emotional aspects of the issue. It is the act of giving it intent and focus, inviting this element that feels greater than her individuated self through meditation, that is support for her.

This support is described as an inner knowing or sense of connection with her self. She can experience that feeling when she looks at beauty or in nature, emotionally and also kinesthetically. The meditation practice helps her to open to that even more, to feel more permeable to its effect. Then there is not a lot of separation between outside and inside, or this source of knowing.

When she has this feeling outside of a meditative practice, it is experienced as a slight shift in awareness to feeling a connection to everything. But a more typical pattern is to stay in a rut with her thinking that makes her feel separated. The meditation helps her out of that pattern of feeling separated and into a sense of connection. Then, when she is not actually engaged in meditative practice, that feeling of connection is there and available. So the belief is there that that feeling of connection is available to her at all times. Her practice follows from that belief.

Her awareness shift is often by conscious choice. For instance, talking about it can bring it forward. She is motivated to choose to shift her awareness because it is

a really loving experience. She likes how it feels, it is very fulfilling and it is what she seeks, to have that experience more and more. She has an inner drive to want to feel that connection. Her belief is that that drive is present in all of us, but some of us are more conscious of it than others. We are all playing out a similar desire for connection. This is just part of the human condition, that we are born feeling this separateness which causes great pain and we are trying to make connection. We may not all use the same language, but our quests are equally valid. As a culture, we do not have much language around this experience. And lately, even calling it spirituality has a certain connotation of religiousness. But for Diane this is not about religion.

While the sense of connection is most frequently by choice, sometimes it happens without her inviting it in. For instance, she may experience a shift when she sees something particularly beautiful, as in nature, or has a conversation that illuminates. On the other hand, sometimes she invites it in and cannot access it.

Diane tries to wake up early enough in the morning to give her practice some attention and have some quiet time. It may range from 30–60 minutes, but even before arising she will lie in bed and be with her dreams, which she believes are a connection to her inner life. If her children are not home, she may spend several hours in journaling, meditating or reading. She arranges other things in her life to have time alone.

When her children were small, she did not have time alone. It was at that time that she went on her first solo retreat. She realized how much she needed time alone and began to take that time more regularly. Then she did not label the experience as spiritual; it was “just being with me.”

She also engaged in personal therapy with a Jungian therapist. This therapist could speak to this seeking part of her self.

Other things Diane does to facilitate her experience of her inner life include making time for her self during the day. As a practical aspect, one needs to stop in order to get in touch. She also attends to her basic needs including eating well and exercise, making sure she is healthy. She journals regularly and has been since she was 18 years old. These habits support her to be able to have the focus on inner work.

Feelings of depression that arise from a sense of separation from self sometimes spiral her down into quieting enough. Depression has always served that function for her. She does experience resistance to follow the depression, because it does not feel good. However, once she lets go of the resistance and just accepts it, she feels relief and experiences being in a space where one can feel grief and joy simultaneously. Depression leads her down into a place, a deeper place, where she experiences acceptance of her self. And love also resides in that place. From there it is like going down into the well. When you get there, there is the letting go and then there's the acceptance and love. Something else starts to spring out of that. It is the cycle of life and it is probably not avoidable. The love is really important in all of this; that's what it all boils down to in many ways.

Diane has also participated for years with a group that practices Table Work. At first the group met in retreat with enough time to go into "practices of the heart." The members would have blocks of time available to explore issues. They would go into meditative spaces, allow images to emerge and be able to spend time working with these images. The belief is that they were asking a spiritual essence to also come forth and go into their deepest inner space. This is where all the conflicts and all the resolutions could be found. The work was really about themselves and their own process.

Busyness is the major deterrent to her practice and experience. She continually struggles with that. But there are some things one has to do to maintain the basics of life. So, this is another place where the looping happens, how she can bring her desired state of being into all the things she must do so she does not feel separate from them. That is the goal, to bring this connected state to the mundane.

Some interactions with her children can pull her out of being aware of her inner life. Again, this involves the busyness of family life; one has to go here, the other there. There also is not a lot of time for contemplation at night, or there is not a lot of energy for it.

At work, Diane has varying amounts of time available to be with her self. Sometimes if she has had that centering place in the morning then she tries to bring that with her so she can be in that space all day with her clients. Sometimes before they come, she will sit for a few minutes and feel her own space. Before she begins seeing people, she will run through the list of who is coming in and do the energy work that allows her to sense that space in her clients. When she is sitting with a client, she is trying to call her own awareness to that all the time. She can do that much better when she is rested. When she is not, it is everything she can do to just be present. The meditative practices she engages in allow her to answer the calling for deeper levels of being present with clients and with herself. She uses snatches of time between clients or when she has a no show or cancellation to go into herself so she can come back and be present again. Working at this level of awareness and being present is difficult to do when seeing clients back to back and she has not figured out how to balance those needs because she also does not want to spend more hours in the office. She knows clients would benefit from that balance, but they would not necessarily “see” it.

Sometimes, in the course of her work, she can get lost in the symptoms that her clients come in with, but connecting to the inner helps to bring her back. This process is going on in the background when she works with clients. When she has gone deeply into her own process, then she can be much more aware of that with her clients. If she has been too busy and “out there,” then she is not as present with that process in her clients. Her own feeling of depletion will show up as one way to inform her that she is not as present. She experiences that as not connecting with what is really the essence of what a client is bringing or the essence of her own life. In that lack, in that disconnection, she starts feeling tired, burned out and like she does not want to be doing this work, it’s too draining. This in turn draws her inside again and that is the cycle

Her professional training did not address inner life or spirituality. It did not facilitate her growth in that direction and she has always had to seek that separately. Her supervisor would voice acceptance of her Jungian interests, but took it more in the scientific aspect. She did have her experience with the Jungian therapist whom she came to rather serendipitously, and while she could speak to the inner life, that is probably the only place Diane accessed that.

She feels that is a great lack. As a therapist, she is dealing with people’s inner life and she was not trained to deal with her own. Some of her colleagues know of her interest in the inner life and spiritual issues, but do not talk with her about it. Years ago she was afraid to talk about her beliefs for fear of being considered unacceptable. Now she is less afraid to speak about them. She feels that some of her current beliefs and practices are things she could not have done when she was younger. She had not lived enough.

### Participant E

Ellen is a 43-year-old female and a licensed counselor who has practiced for 6 years in a school setting. In many ways, the reason she is in this line of work is because of her inner life. That is what brought her to want to pursue a counseling degree. Inner life for Ellen means the inner thoughts, what is going on inside, the stories she weaves around incidents, events or encounters. Dreams are a part of her inner life, both sleeping dreams and dreams of the future. She images her inner life as a cauldron that every once in a while just bubbles over and there will be an issue to deal with, sometimes in a crisis mode, sometimes not. Ellen experiences her inner life as an ongoing process, creating stories or playing out scenarios much like a videotape running. The wheels are churning all the time. Her inner life is the framework for the way she looks at the world. She considers it an integral part of her life.

Ellen was raised in a fundamentalist Christian family. She states that she probably started out as pretty quiet and contemplative. She took in all the images of her “hell fire and brimstone” formal religious experience and worried about them; she was frightened of those images for a long time. While she was taught that you had to be aware of inner images, she was also taught not to trust them.

Her sophomore year in college, Ellen divorced herself from her formal religious practice, although she struggled with that for a long, long time. As she was able to let go of a lot of the stringent rules, she began to trust her inner feeling more and came to value and trust the God within. Ellen does not have a formal religious practice at this point in her life and thinks not in terms of religion but of spirituality. For her, that is a huge distinction. Spirituality is being in tune with who you are, knowing who you are inside and having what is outside be a reflection of what is

inside. There is an element of faith in that the Ellen has not necessarily figured out. But, she does not consider spirituality a taboo topic. She feels we need to be talking about it.

In tracing the source of her beliefs about inner life, Ellen relates that through the recommendation of a friend, she was led to a therapist who was very into inner life, using dream work and interpretation. She “happened upon” this therapist but she has been significant in Ellen’s life. She feels she was very fortunate and that the therapist was the teacher she needed at the time. Through her personal therapy, Ellen has done a lot of inner work. Ellen considers her work with the therapist to be part of her inner journey in which the therapy helped define and articulate that journey.

Besides therapy and dream work, practices that support Ellen’s inner work include journaling, reading and conversing with others. Ellen sees dream work as mining that which was not necessarily conscious and bringing that inner life to consciousness. She seeks out reading material based on whatever seems to be bubbling to the surface of her awareness, in reference to the cauldron metaphor. Regarding personal therapy as a tool, Ellen feels that it is important for one to have that experience, that people should not do counseling work without having sat on the other side of the desk. Ellen has conversations about her inner life with others both to share and to make sense of it. There are certain friends she can have deeper conversations with, and sometimes she starts out sharing, but the ensuing conversation winds up making sense of things.

In terms of inner work, Ellen shares that another of her practices is to make concrete experience of some of her inner images, especially those that arise out of dream work and do not yield to interpretation. She shared the example of an image that reflected a fear of flying. While she did not believe that the source of the fear was



external, she took flying lessons to concretize the experience, a way of meeting her fear head-on.

Ellen feels that time is the biggest facilitator of her experience of her inner life. As a self-described introvert, Ellen needs quiet time to reflect, rest and recharge. In fact, that time spent is a necessity. Another thing that facilitates her experience is reading; she seeks out material she needs to feed her inner life. She went through a Jungian period and has also done reading in both feminist and identity issues, all of which she considers fodder for inner work.

Ellen may also go out for a bike ride, go for a run, a walk in the woods or take her dog for a walk as ways to facilitate her inner life experience. Music also plays a part, either listening to music or playing music on an instrument.

On the other hand the number one hindrance to her experience is busyness, not only professionally, but personally as well. When she has too many things on her calendar, she is drained and cannot pay attention to her inner life. These things include the mundane, practical everyday things resulting from all the roles she assumes. Relationships take time to be tended to also.

Ellen feels like her inner life is energizing, but tending to it can be really tiring, especially when there are issues that are serious and are painful. It can be hard to go there.

In terms of her work, Ellen finds that her inner life helps her to be more aware of and more in tune or perceptive of the underlying issues with the students she works with. She feels she can sometimes hear more of what they are *not* saying because of the work she has done herself and how she has gone inside. One of the goals in her work is to help the students listen to what is inside and learn to trust that inner knowing. It is her conviction that if she is asking the students to do this work,

she had better be willing to go that way before them. She considers it professionally irresponsible to do that kind of work with someone if she has not done that work herself. In fact, personal inner work should be required before professional practice.

Her professional training was very cognitively based and very stringent in terms of how she was required to do the work. Her program did not explore self or the inner life nor did it support the validity of that. She did have a course in which she did some dream work. And she did have a professor that encouraged the students to pursue personal therapy as part of their professional training.

Regarding her experience of exploring her inner life, Ellen feels the work is a pretty solitary experience. Her inner life is pretty private.

### Themes

Several themes emerged from these findings derived from five individual descriptions of the experience of inner life. First, all five participants described their experience of inner life as a spiritual experience. Second, the role of nature was important in each of the participant's experience of inner life. The third theme involved the role that solitude and community play in the experience of inner life. The fourth theme to emerge involved the part that the experience of inner life played in the participants' professional work and the lack of attention to inner life in any of their professional training programs. Each of these themes will be elaborated on in the following sections.

### Spirituality

Each of the participants characterized the experience of inner life as a spiritual experience. In fact, when asked to describe her experience of inner life, one

participant said, “The first thing that comes to me is connection with myself and connection with spirit.” For another, inner life includes “thoughts, feelings, my inner experience of the outer world and spirituality.” Another participant felt spirituality is an awareness of inner life.

A sense of connection was addressed by four of the five participants. The connection was characterized as “spiritually connected,” or more specifically, “connection with the inner self,” “to soul,” “a connection to something larger than myself,” “connection with nature,” with God, to the “God within.”

Another way the experience of inner life was characterized as spiritual was the sense of mystery, or intangibility around the experience. One participant said, “You are asking me to be tangible about something that is intangible.” Another remarked, “I am always struck by the mystery of not knowing what this is.”

Each of the participants was clear that the spiritual nature of the experience was different and distinct from a religious experience. All of them had Christian upbringings and religious experience on which to base this distinction. The participants shared the experience of becoming less religious as time passed, and more spiritual. Another common experience was the feeling that their own individual search for meaning was not satisfactorily met through their religious experience and ultimately led them to counseling or psychology as another path in their search.

### **The Role of Nature in the Experience of Inner Life**

Nature emerged as a theme in the stories of the participants. For instance, one participant, when asked what facilitates her experience of inner life responded that, “I can tell you what enhances it. Things like going out for a bike ride or running, or going for a walk in the woods.” Another remarked that “kayaking down the river or

going on an early morning jog” are valuable parts of his experience of his inner life. In nature he is also able to experience himself “as both very significant, in terms of being part of that and somewhat insignificant, in terms of how small I am in the big scheme of things.” It is a spiritual aspect of the experience of inner life for him. A sense of connection is evoked for another participant when she sees “something particularly beautiful in nature.”

In the consulting rooms of four of the participants, objects of nature were present. Those included rocks, leaves, flowers and fish. Objects of nature were also present in the two homes in which interviews took place.

Preferred retreat destinations were in nature. One participant experienced retreat as a time “to commune with nature.” He comes back refreshed and renewed, feeling like he is able to do more powerful work.

### Solitude and Community

Time, alone and with intention, was the most important facilitator of the experience of inner life of the participants. Contemplative practices were used to structure the time, specifically meditation. Other contemplative activities included yoga and journaling. Journaling was particularly important to three of the participants. One remarked, “Journaling has always been helpful to me, because it is amazing how I feel immediately connected to an inner voice. It’s almost as if as soon as I put the question or concern down in writing I can feel this clarity of something within me responding to that.”

All of the participants reported engaging in some form of exercise. It seemed to this researcher that the primary motivation wasn’t necessarily the health benefits of exercise, but more the opportunity to have time and space alone. The exercise took

the form of solitary activities such as walking, running, and kayaking. Even some of these forms of solitary exercise were characterized as meditative. One man said that he used to read or listen to music as he exercised, but now “I purposefully try not to, just to be more present with what I am doing” and to engage in self reflection.

While all the participants valued time alone, time spent with others was also important. The experiences that facilitated the experience of inner life included being with the “right” people or being in community with like-minded individuals. It was important for the participants to be able to share their experience if it was in a respectful and affirming environment. One participant shared:

I become very emotionally connected with my inner experience when I’m in dialogue with other people. When I’m by myself, I can be moved by something, but when I have to articulate it, it becomes much more powerful for me . . . the act of articulating it, having it witnessed by somebody else just makes it that much more powerful.

### The Role of Inner Life in Professional Work and in Training Programs

All of the participants reported an awareness of an inner process while they are working. Three of them shared that when they are connected to this inner process, they feel more connected to their clients. Some felt more incisive, more on-target, more clarity, and one expressed this as being able to “show up for more opportunities” presented to her by clients.

On the other hand, all reported an experience of depletion at work if their inner life was not being attended to adequately. One participant was clear she could become physically ill if she maintained a level of busyness in her life that kept her from tending her inner life. It is only through maintaining both her physical health and her spiritual health that she will know her potential for helping others.

Two of the specific ways that the inner life informs work is in the areas of countertransference and projective identification. Two participants addressed these concepts directly. One said, "When I am most connected to my inner life, I hear things more clearly . . . and not have my own issues in the way." Another reflected on being with a client, feeling angry at that client and trying to figure out why he is feeling angry. "Am I feeling anger because of what the client is doing, or is it because the client is triggering something in me that is a part of my own set of issues?" An awareness of one's own issues and sensitive areas serves to avoid the pitfalls of countertransference and projective identification. Another participant shared that the meditative practices she engages in allow her to "answer the calling for deeper levels of being present" with clients and with her self. She reports working with this level of awareness of both self and other is difficult to do when seeing clients back to back and not having the time to withdraw into her self and center. Her feelings of depletion at work serve to inform her that she's not as present and needs to take time for herself.

Another participant feels that being on his own journey helps him understand that others are on a journey themselves. Still another feels she can be more aware of and perceptive of underlying issues with the students she works with. She feels she can hear more of what they are *not* saying because of the work she has done herself and how she has gone inside. It is her conviction that she had better be willing to do the same work she is asking her clients to do. It is also her conviction that personal inner work should be required before one can engage in therapeutic work.

One participant feels that paying attention to his own spiritual path is an important part of his feeling satisfied with the work he is doing. His own inner work and his work in the outer world are interconnected and feed each other.

None of the participants feel that their professional training addressed the issues of inner life or spirituality directly. Three of the participants had personal therapy experiences that addressed inner work and that happened to be done concurrently with the professional training. As one of the women said, the personal therapy was a helpful adjunct to the academic training; she could take what she was learning in classes along with what she was learning in practice and together they made a clearer picture for her. These personal therapy experiences were arranged outside of the formal professional training experience. The participants were somewhat serendipitously led to therapists whose orientation was such that they valued the inner experience or used spiritual language. Two of them were specifically Jungian in theoretical orientation. In clarifying the serendipitous nature of the experience, the participants did not specifically seek out a therapist to do inner work, but the particular therapeutic experience they had, the relationship with that particular therapist, had an important impact on their development and use of their inner life experience.

Another respondent shared that her professional training followed a science model and did not address inner life or spirituality directly. However, compassionate faculty were available to her. While they were not overtly supportive of her beliefs they were respectful and being in the program taught her that she had to stand for what she believes in. She learned ways of talking about her beliefs so they seemed credible in circles they wouldn't have otherwise.

One participant allowed that although his course work did not address the inner process, his supervision did to some extent. Specifically, supervision addressed countertransference and also the necessity of caring for himself.

### Summary

A reading of the narratives reveals that the experience of inner life was rich and varied. And while there were many interesting aspects, four themes emerged and will provide the basis for the discussion to follow.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the major themes from the findings of this study. Before discussing the themes, however, literature relevant to the emergent themes will be briefly reviewed. The discussion of the themes will be followed by conclusions and suggestions for further research.

The experience of inner life is a complex phenomenon that does not lend itself to a simple distillation of important features. The experience of inner life does not “look” the same from individual to individual. Perhaps there is a common process underlying the experience and that the content of that process differs from individual to individual. In other words, the common goal of these participants may be an awareness and use of inner life, but they have unique and individual combinations of experiences and practices that characterize and facilitate that process. But even though the experience of inner life was described differently from participant to participant, common aspects did emerge. The common themes that emerged from the experiences of the five participants will be examined in further detail in this chapter. They include the spiritual nature of the experience of inner life, the role of nature in the experience of inner life, the interplay of community and solitude in the experience of inner life and the role that inner life plays in professional work along with the lack of attention to inner life in professional training programs. It is hoped this discussion

will further our understanding of the experience of inner life and its applicability, especially in the training of therapists.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the emergent themes, background information relevant to two issues is needed to facilitate the discussion. A review of relevant literature regarding spirituality and the role of nature in the human experience follows in the next section.

### Review of Relevant Literature

#### Spirituality

Spirituality is often vaguely defined or confused with the idea of religion. For example, one definition is that spirituality is a unique personally meaningful experience (Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984). Spirituality so broadly and nebulously defined makes it difficult to place in a context for discussion. Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) offer a more usable definition of spirituality. Spirituality “is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate” (p. 10). The identifiable values include, but are not limited to, confidence in the meaning and purpose of life, a sense of the sacredness of life, a balanced appreciation of material values, an altruistic attitude toward others, a vision for the betterment of the world and a serious awareness of the tragic side of life. Spirituality also means living out these values as they affect oneself, others and nature and one’s relationship with “whatever one considers to be the Ultimate” (Elkins et al., 1988). This conceptualization of spirituality involves the notion of an active process or search.

Kelly (1995) has gone on to identify the universal core of meaning common to virtually all definitions of spirituality. Spirituality is grounded in a dimension of reality beyond the boundaries of the strictly empirically perceived material world. It is, in other words, a meta-empirical belief. Included is an affirmation of transcendence or otherness beyond the boundaries of the ordinary and tangible. Spirituality is a personal affirmation of a transcendent connectedness (Kelly, 1995).

In addition to defining spirituality in a usable way, it is important to distinguish spirituality from religiousness. While religion involves an organized doctrine and practice, spirituality is all encompassing and not dependent on any given form of religion. Religion may be one way in which a person may express or experience spirituality, but spirituality can exist outside of organized religion. Religion is the practice of an institutionalized belief system, while spirituality is a way of being in the world, a way of life (Becvar, 1997). Spirituality is an integral part of every human being, just as the air one breathes (Benjamin & Looby, 1998).

Several authors offer excellent reviews of the history of spirituality in the therapeutic professions (Bergin, 1988; Cornett, 1998; Kelly, 1995; Mack, 1994). To begin with, psychological healing has its roots in spirituality and religion. For example, medicine men, shamans, witch doctors and other such figures carried the healing function in ancient cultures. They represented the spiritual and religious values of their cultures. These healers may have begun their journeys as troubled individuals who found their way through their own struggles and emerged into positions of helping others. This notion has been represented in the literature of more modern times as the path of the “wounded healer” (Jung, 1963). One of the identified motivations for individuals to enter into therapeutic professional training is to find answers for their own dilemmas or issues; “behind the wish to practice psychotherapy

lies the need to cure one's own inner wounds and conflicts" (Sussman, 1992, p. 19). In analytic training, one must undergo a training analysis for this very reason. The rationale is that if one does not fully understand one's own issues, those issues will be projected outward and interfere with the therapeutic process.

The theoretical strands of spirituality in psychotherapy can be traced back to Freud. Freud was perceived to be ambivalent about the role of spirituality in psychoanalysis (Cornett, 1998). He apparently considered spirituality a "soft" concept. Bettelheim (1982) argues the other side of Freud's ambivalence pointing out that he named his new method *psychoanalysis*, with the root derivation being *psyche*, the Greek word for soul. The term that Freud used that was translated into English as *ego*, could, according to some, be more faithfully translated as soul. Perhaps the translators or perhaps Freud's followers were eager for a wider acceptance and respect for the profession than would have been possible if the basis of the method was the soul, another "soft" concept, and hence psychoanalysis disavowed interest in spirituality. Freud was also dedicated to the rationalist position which decreased the possibility of consideration of anything that could be known "only" through intuition rather than scientific measurement and observation.

Jung was a voice of dissention regarding the need to ignore spirituality within the psychodynamic tradition. Post-Jungians (Hillman, 1996; Elkins, 1995) have been more vocal about viewing psychoanalytic theory nonrationally or nonpositivistically. Both Hillman and Elkins have argued that spirituality, or the soul, cannot be removed from therapy.

Jung's concept of individuation can be considered a template for spiritual growth. It is a process of achieving wholeness through the incorporation of both conscious and unconscious aspects of self. Jung labeled the process of individuation

as religious in nature (Mack, 1994), characterized by the capacity of the human to move from the ego as the center of personality to the genuine self as the center (Moore, 1992). The self is considered the God-image within the psyche of each individual. Hence, according to Jung, both psychological health and spiritual health depend on the open relationship between the conscious and the unconscious forces in the personality.

The theoretical strands of spirituality in psychology can also be traced back to the work of Assagioli (1965) and psychosynthesis. The basic tenets of psychosynthesis include the central importance of meaning, particularly of the meaning which each individual gives to life or is looking for in life. Importance is attached to the concept that each individual is in constant development, is growing, and is actualizing latent potentialities. A therapist using psychosynthesis principles considers the whole of the individual to expand the health of that person and to remove obstacles which have prevented the attainment of even greater health. Psychosynthesis includes a recognition of the depth and seriousness of human life, including the suffering which is a part of life. However, the emphasis is not solely on the pathology and suffering of the individual. There is also a recognition of positive, creative and joyous experiences and in psychosynthesis these experiences are actively fostered and induced.

Another component of the psychosynthesis approach is the consideration and use of the superconscious function which includes, among other things, ethical, aesthetic, and noetic values. Assagioli (1965) refers to “spiritual development” as all experiences connected with the awareness of the contents of the superconscious. The spiritual journey “involves a drastic transmutation of the ‘normal’ elements of the

personality, an awakening of potentialities hitherto dormant, a raising of consciousness to new realms, and a functioning along a new inner dimension” (p. 39).

Spirituality has been a part of psychology from the beginning, but as the emphasis on observable and measurable phenomenon came into favor, less tangible concepts such as spirituality and soul lost favor. In more recent years interest in the subjective experience has made room in the field for the study of the spiritual experience of both the therapist and the client.

In a survey of counselor values published in 1995, Kelly found that 85% of the counselors surveyed regarding personal values through the American Counseling Association agreed with the statement “Seek a spiritual understanding of the universe and one’s place in it.” Eighty percent agree with the statement, “Seek inner wholeness and strength through communion with a higher power.” Kelly reported that surveys of other mental health professionals including psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers reported results similar to those of counselors. A high percentage of helping professionals surveyed responded positively to spiritual issues in their own lives.

Larson (as cited in Becvar, 1997), of the Harvard Medical School, summarized over 200 studies researching the association between spirituality and mental health. He noted, “Individuals with a spiritual commitment showed lower levels of substance abuse, stress, depression and suicide and reported increased levels of overall marital, sexual and life satisfaction” (p. ix).

Bergin (1988), Mack (1994), and Hinterkopf (1994) address the need to recognize spirituality in counseling practice. Ingersoll (1997) and Kelly (1997) address the issue of incorporating issues of spirituality in counselor education and training. The Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling

(ASERVIC), a division of the American Counseling Association, has as one of its primary purposes the research and understanding of spiritual issues in counseling, and its journal, *Counseling and Values*, serves as a forum for the discussion of spiritual issues in the field. While the number of articles and books on the subject of spirituality has increased dramatically over the past several years, a review of these sources reveals that the primary focus is on the counselor's development of awareness around issues of spirituality to be better able to meet clients' needs. The spirituality of the counselor is not directly addressed.

### The Role of Nature in the Experience of Inner Life

Edward O. Wilson (1984), a Pulitzer Prize winning biologist, has coined the phrase *biophilia* to describe what he believes is our (human) innate affinity for the natural world. Our attraction to the natural environment is not simply a cultural phenomenon; there is evidence it is a deeper biological urge, a built-in genetic imprint that causes our inner need to commune with nature. It is genetically encoded in humans to ensure balance, harmony, and preservation of the natural world. Kellert (1997) suggests that this affinity to nature is "soft-wired" into our genetic imprint. Biophilia lies dormant and these inborn tendencies regarding one's relationship with nature are shaped by learning, cultural attitudes and experience.

Within psychology is a field of study called ecopsychology (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1997). A premise of ecopsychology is that deepening our ties to nature is as vital to our well being as the close personal bonds we pursue with family and friends. Duncan (n.d.) has specifically addressed the psychological benefits of wilderness. He makes the point that wilderness areas are therapeutic because they are devoid of so many of the factors that require an outward focus. Wilderness, without

the outward distractions and “the forced increase in self-dependency and isolation, provides the setting for inward self-reflection” (p. 5).

As an example of the results of empirical studies of the relationship between nature and healing, Verderber (1986, as cited in Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) has shown that the quality of the view outside of a patient’s window is a significant factor in the length of recovery time for those patients. Those patients with a view of nature from their hospital window had significantly shorter recovery times. Kaplan, Talbot, and Kaplan (1988) conducted a study which revealed that the value placed on nature in the workplace affected employees’ perception of job stresses as well as their own physical and mental well being. Those who had a view of nature from an office window or who worked in the out-of-doors reported substantially lower levels of job stress, reported fewer health problems and reported higher levels of overall life satisfaction than did the rest of the sample.

Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) also comment on the phenomenon of mental fatigue. They begin by making a distinction between two types of attention. One is involuntary attention, which requires no effort at all, as in attending to something that is exciting or interesting. The other type is directed attention which involves some exertion of effort to attend. Having to use directed attention over a period of time can result in mental fatigue. Mental fatigue can result from having to attend to a stressful event, but can also result from hard work on a project one enjoys, or in the case of therapists, the long hours of attending at a deep level that are a part of therapy and counseling work.

Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) go on to explore the restorative experience of nature as it relates to mental fatigue. The restorative benefits of nature are three-fold. First, aesthetic natural environments give pleasure. Second, natural environments



support human functioning. They provide space and freedom to move about and process information effectively. Third, natural environments permit tired individuals to recover effective functioning. Tired individuals may clear their heads, regain the ability to direct their attention, and experience “cognitive quiet” that allows for reflection.

Becvar (1997) connects the experience of nature to spirituality. Spirituality includes an awareness of the connectedness of all that is and is about acting out of an awareness of that connection. Being in nature allows one to transcend one’s self and imagine self as part of a larger picture, connected to a force larger than one’s self.

A review of the literature on the role of nature in the experience of inner life suggests that a desire to connect to nature may be innate, although may need cultural support and opportunity to manifest itself. The literature also suggests that a connection to nature offers physical, psychological and spiritual benefits.

## Discussion of Themes

### Spirituality

Every one of the participants in this study characterized experience of inner life as spiritual. Their choice of descriptors of the spiritual nature of the experience fit within the definition of spirituality including a sense of transcendence, an experience in a dimension of reality beyond the boundaries of the empirical and the knowable, a sense of connectedness, and a search for meaning that characterized the experience of inner life. One participant stated that his awareness of his inner life included an awareness of “what’s happening beyond my own mind,” and as “a sense of being connected to something bigger than myself.” Another participant expanded on the

sense of being connected to something larger than herself by adding that “I feel a part of the things that are beyond my individual self.” A third participant stated, when asked about her experience of inner life, “The first thing that comes to me is connection with myself and connection with spirit.” Along the same line, a fourth participant said simply, “What I think of is spirituality.” The other participant characterized her experience as spiritual, but in less definitive language. She was clear that her experience was spiritual as distinct from religious. This view was shared by all five participants.

The definition of spirituality also involves a search for meaning. For all of the participants, their search for meaning had begun within the context of earlier religious experience, so they had a basis of comparison for making the distinction between a religious experience and a spiritual one. All of the participants made direct reference to the fact that they came to psychology or counseling as a path in their own personal search for meaning, because the dogma of their religious practice did not address their questions or concerns adequately or had lost meaning for them altogether.

The participants also made reference to the mystery and the inability to define the spiritual aspect of the experience precisely. One participant remarked, “You are asking me to be tangible about something that is not tangible.” An aspect of the spiritual experience is that it is in a dimension of reality beyond the boundaries of the empirical and the knowable.

The search for meaning inherent in the definition of spirituality implies an active process. This notion was supported in the participants’ use of the term journey to describe the process they are involved in in their search for meaning.

The participants’ descriptions of their experience of inner life fit within the definition of a spiritual experience. Their descriptions involved the notions of

transcendence, of mystery, of connectedness. It is not surprising to this researcher that the notion of spirituality emerged. What is somewhat surprising is the magnitude of importance placed on the spiritual aspect of the experience of inner life. Four of the five participants mentioned the spiritual association within the first utterances of the interview. In fact, for four of the participants, inner life implied spirituality.

### The Role of Nature in the Experience of Inner Life

All of the participants mentioned the importance of nature in their experience of inner life. Their experiences included going into retreat in a natural setting, being outside “to commune with nature,” writing about nature, exercising outdoors, or bringing nature inside. By their descriptions, nature is an integral part of the participants’ experience of their inner life.

The participants may have been responding to an inborn or genetically imprinted tendency to seek out a connection to nature as in Wilson’s (1984) concept of biophilia. People who choose to spend time working in the garden, go for a walk by the lake, in the mountains, through a meadow, who choose to go to the countryside or the cottage in woods for the weekend, who opt for a picnic in the park instead of lunch in the office, visit the zoo, watch the birds feed, or simply watch the clouds float through the bright blue sky may simply be responding positively to physiological urges to connect with nature for survival.

It would be difficult to determine if the motivation to seek nature was due to an inborn biological drive. A more easily understood motivation, however, is that the participants may have been attracted to nature or wilderness and sought out natural areas “devoid of distractions that call for an outward focus” (Duncan, n.d.). Natural settings were sought out as places to get away from the distractions of work or home

environments. Counselors and therapists spend hours actively attending to clients and may need natural settings to recover from the mental fatigue that results from long periods of directed attention. The natural setting provides for “cognitive quiet” that allows for self reflection (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989), and may have been sought by the participants as a way to facilitate their inward focus.

Being in nature is also a way to experience the sense of “interconnectedness” that is characteristic of the spiritual aspect of the experience of inner life for the participants. Being in nature allows for one to transcend self and to experience one’s self as part of a larger cosmic design. Seeking natural settings may be a spiritual practice experienced as part of inner life on the part of the participants.

The participants were not explicit regarding, or maybe even conscious of, the reasons for seeking natural settings. However, it was clear that the experience of nature is an integral part of their experience of inner life.

### Community and Solitude

Each of the participants in this study reported that their experience of inner life was dependent upon having time in solitude, intentional time set aside for the purpose of reflection. This time alone took different forms for each of the participants, but a common contemplative activity was meditation, practiced more consistently by some than by others and with two of the participants practicing a more active form rather than sitting. Time alone was structured around journaling, yoga or other solitary forms of exercise including running, walking, kayaking, or bicycling. These activities can be considered a form of meditation, called mindfulness meditation (Hahn, 1991) when full attention is given to whatever activity is being undertaken.

The physical and medical benefits of meditation have been reported in the literature (Benson, 1993; Carrington, 1993). The reported benefits are related to the management of stress, chronic pain, anger and hostility, anxiety, depression and in the treatment of cancer and AIDS. But the participants in this study did not report practicing contemplative activities, or even exercise, for the health benefits, although each of them may experience secondary gains in that area. The purpose of their practice was to create the time and space for solitude and self reflection. By the participants' own description, this time was the single most important factor in facilitating their experience of inner life. O'Reilly (1998), in writing on self reflection, supported the intentional setting aside of time, and says, "It is impossible to hear a subtle call if you do not create a conscious time to listen" (p. 43).

While the participants needed quiet time alone, with the intention of reflection, they also valued being with others and talking with others of their experience. As noted earlier, this sharing with others didn't happen with just anyone and not in casual conversation. Rather, each of the participants had identified others with whom they could share their experience of inner life, persons with whom they could feel safe and accepted, persons who were receptive and understanding. These people were not necessarily the professional colleagues the participants worked most closely with day in and day out, but people sought out because they were nonjudgmental regarding deeply held personal beliefs and practices.

In attesting to the importance of community, one participant reports becoming more emotionally connected with his inner experience when he is in dialogue with other people. When he is by himself, he can be moved by something, but when he has to articulate it, it becomes much more powerful for him. It is the act of articulating it and having it witnessed by someone else that makes the experience

more powerful. O'Reilly (1998), in addressing the sharing of her inner experience says, "If someone pays attention to the part of me that struggles for transcendence, my search intensifies, the questioning spirit grows bold enough to claim its path. I live more thoroughly and bravely in sacred time" (p. 19). She affirms the participant's experience of the power of listening and attention.

The importance of community is also supported by Bergman (1991) and Surrey (1985) who support the hypothesis that men and women are motivated by a primary desire for connection. They say it is less accurate to talk of self than of self-in-relation. Their work is based on the work of Miller (1976) who said, "Women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then maintain relationships" (p. 83). Both Surry (through work with women) and Bergman (through work with men) support the notion that relationship informs identity, or as Surry puts it, "Experience of connectedness to others leads to an enlarged conception of self" (p. 1). Relationship is an integral part of psychological and identity development.

One participant made a point of addressing the importance of community in her experience of her inner life. If she is in situations (in community) in which inner life or spiritual life are not acknowledged as being real, or are not respected, then it does not seem to her like the spiritual realm is present. When she is in community which acknowledges and respects her inner experience the spiritual realm is felt as present. In this case, community seems to serve an affirming function for her.

The downside of community is when it is not tolerant or respectful of divergent ways of experiencing or thinking, or ways of being. One participant, reflecting on his introversion, said that he is often misunderstood or his behavior is misinterpreted. An example would be when his experience is that he is being quiet,

reflective or contemplative, others might perceive him to be aloof, detached, or even rude. At times, a more introverted person may be perceived by others as being depressed.

Another difficulty arose when language or culture became a barrier. For instance, one participant noted that others might have a similar experience (of inner life), but have a “whole different language system around it.” Another participant in addressing her reluctance to talk about her process, addressed the cultural norms, that others may not understand or consider her way of thinking strange or weird. Even the community of professional colleagues who may be aware of some of their beliefs don’t ask what meaning the beliefs have for them, precluding open dialogue about inner life or spirituality in their professional community.

Solitude and community are both facilitative of the inner experience and the key element is finding a balance between the two. Time alone is necessary for self reflection, and community is necessary for affirmation and to meet the need for connectedness. But ultimately, as one participant said, “inner work is solitary.”

### Inner Life as It Affects Work and in Professional Training

Not one of the participants felt that his or her professional training program addressed the inner life experience or spirituality directly. All the training programs involved were either master’s or doctoral programs accredited by either the American Psychological Association (APA) or the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). As noted earlier, both the subjective experience and spirituality have a foundation in the fields of both psychology and counseling, yet it has been with the rise of the rationalist and positivist scientific movements that both lost favor in research, practice and training programs.

Responding to the lack of attention paid to the inner experience or spirituality in her training program, one participant said, "It's a big lack."

The experience of inner life is, by definition, a highly subjective experience, but each participant was clear that the experience of inner life affected the work he or she does. For instance, all of them described an awareness of an inner process they could draw on while they are working. One participant, describing this awareness, says, "My own inner work increases my awareness of clients working on deeper issues." His own awareness sets him "on a good path for following and paying close attention to what is important to them." When he is in greater touch with his inner self, those are the times "I feel like I am incisive. I am right on target with my work." He goes on to say paying attention to his own spiritual path is an important part of feeling satisfied with the work he does. His own inner work and his work in the outer world "are interconnected and feed each other." Another participant says he relies on an inner process during work, paying attention to what he is thinking and feeling, being aware of what issues of his own may be triggered by clients, scanning for countertransference reactions.

A third participant said that "the more I am able to be connected to my own issues in my inner life along with the good stuff and the spiritual stuff, then I hear more clearly . . . and not have my own issues get in the way of that." Another said, "When I have gone deeply into my own process, I can be much more aware of that with my clients." The fifth participant said that her inner life helps her to be more aware of and more in tune or perceptive of the underlying issues for kids. "I think I can sometimes hear more of what they're *not* saying because of the work that I've done myself and how I've gone inside."



Aside from the time that is intentionally set aside for solitude or inner work, each of the participants talked of using breaks at work, between clients, cancellations or no-shows, as opportunities to self reflect. They might reflect on the work that has been done, an upcoming client, or as one participant said, if she has a few minutes in the office, “[I] go into myself, and that feeds me enough to be able to come back and be present again.”

The participants also made reference to the fact that being on their own journey helped them to appreciate that process for their clients. One said, “By me being aware of my own process, emotionally, psychologically and what I am truly searching for, I don’t believe I am any different than my clients.” Another said, “I think my own journey helps me understand that people are on a journey themselves.” A third participant said, “You cannot lead a client through the mine field you have not been through . . . because it is professionally irresponsible of me if I think I can do that kind of work with someone when I haven’t done that work with myself.” Doing inner work affected the empathic connection; their own inner work enabled them to be empathic to the work of their clients. The participants were better able to understand their clients by having “been there” themselves.

Conversely, not attending to their inner life contributed to feelings of depletion and disconnection that affected their work.

I (also) know that when I am depleted, when I’m worn out . . . I am not feeling as aware and able to help people . . . [this] happens when I am out of that inner examination process . . . and also when I’m not doing things that take care of nurturing [my] inner life.”

Another described being aware of her depletion by saying,

I’m not connecting with what’s really the essence of what a client is bringing or the essence of my own life. And in that lack, that disconnection, I start feeling tired, burned out, I don’t want to be here, I need to be doing something different for a living, this is draining me rather than feeding me.

Then she is drawn back to practices that feed her inner life. Not attending to inner life leads to varying levels of impairment, affecting both physical and psychological health and affecting the work with clients.

One experience common to three of the participants was the experience of personal therapy. The other two participants may have had the experience of personal therapy, but it did not come out in the interview. The three who did address this issue all had the experience of seeking personal therapy which happened to coincide with their professional training experience. It was not a part of the training program requirements, but rather sought out individually by the participants for the purpose of self exploration and a search for meaning in life, not due to the experiencing of symptoms per se. Each of them was somewhat serendipitously led to therapists who facilitated their experience of inner life either through dream work or a more spiritual approach. All of them felt that the personal therapy they engaged in enhanced their professional training. It not only gave them a way to experience therapy but also a way to apply the theory and practice they were learning in the classroom. In addition, personal therapy contributed to their personal growth and development, psychologically and spiritually.

One question that arises in applying the findings of this study to professional development is the trainability of skills related to the development and maintenance of the experience of inner life. One skill fundamental to the development and maintenance of inner life is self-reflection. In addressing the issue of self-reflection, Skovholdt and Ronnestad (1992) identified three aspects of “continuous professional reflection” including ongoing professional and personal experiences (on which to reflect), a searching process with others in an open and supportive environment and active reflections about one’s experiences. Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) contend that

self-reflection is a skill that can be developed and have outlined conditions necessary for reflection to occur. "Educating the reflective practitioner involves providing space to reflect, the permission and encouragement to reflect, the knowledge of how to inform one's reflective process and a safe relational environment in which to consider one's personal and interpersonal experience" (p. 82).

Another way to promote reflective thinking is for educators and supervisors to model this way of being (Jacobs et al., 1995). Educators and supervisors can ask questions that promote self reflection. For instance, in supervision, the supervisor can promote self reflection by asking, "What were you feeling when the client did such and such?," "What was the experience like for you?," or, "What did you really want to say to the client at that moment?" They can also model behavior that reflects the espoused values of counselors that might, in turn, contribute to providing the safe environment needed to engage in self examination. These behaviors include (but are not limited to) caring, respect, honesty, flexibility, and personal competence. If indeed, self awareness is an important and valued trait of counselors, students need to be able to see, in their professors' and supervisors' behavior, that they value it in their own lives as well. In addressing hypocrisy in the counselor educator profession, Kottler (1992) states, "It is difficult to imagine that we can really be all that effective when students, clients, colleagues or supervisees can see we are ineffectual in our personal lives, in the way we conduct ourselves" (p. 476).

Self-awareness and self-reflection are skills that can be directly addressed in other aspects of the training of helping professionals. For example, self-awareness plays an important part in ethics. Helping professionals have an ethical responsibility to self-monitor for healthy functioning to avoid impairment, or to recognize impairment and how it affects professional functioning. In both coursework and

practicum settings, trainees can be taught about concepts such as countertransference and how self-awareness helps to avoid harmful countertransference reactions.

In addressing the trainability of self-awareness and personal self-reflection, both important skills related to the development and maintenance of the experience of inner life, Palmer's (1998) *Courage to Teach (CTT)* program may be a prototype.

Palmer designed the program to address the inner life:

The CTT program follows an approach to human development called "formation work." Formation is premised on the notion that, without denying or abandoning the outside world, we must reclaim the reality and power of the inner life. Formation assumes that each person has an "inner teacher" that has a continuing capacity for discernment. This discernment is enabled by the process of creating quiet, focused and disciplined space in which the noise within and around us can subside and the voice of the inner teacher be heard. (Center for Teacher Formation, 1998, p. 3)

In a formal evaluation of the program (Center for Teacher Formation, 1998), the evaluators reported that CTT had achieved its primary goal of reaching and tending the inner domains of the participants. "The evidence clearly suggests that the attention devoted to exploring the inner realms of teachers revitalized passion and commitment to good teaching" (p. 11).

CTT is different from traditional professional development programs in that the focus is not on curriculum or technique. Instead it addresses the self of or the inner life of teachers. CTT is about "tending teachers, not training teachers" (Center for Teacher Formation, 1998, p. 32). Participants in the evaluation process reported that CTT helped them develop a "more mindful presence" (p. 37). They learned to be more aware of "how automatic and unreflective we can be when we are solely focused outward" (p. 37). Along the same line, the program participants reported that they learned to practice reflective inquiry. In the latest evaluation (Center for

Teacher Formation, 2000), 90% of the participants indicated that the program helped them develop more reflective habits.

When asked what aspects of the CTT program facilitated their experience, all the participants reported that time was the single most important feature, “quiet time for self-reflection” (Center for Teacher Formation, 1998, p. 48). In addition, another important feature of the program was the provision of a “safe space,” echoing Nelson and Neufeldt’s (1998) contention regarding the importance of a safe space as a condition for the development of self-reflection. These findings of the evaluation of the CTT program are also reflected in the findings of this study, that time and a safe space were important facilitators of the experience of inner life.

Self-reflection and personal therapy were important parts of the experience of inner life of the participants in this study. Self-reflection is not only trainable, but an important skill to possess in the practice of counseling and therapy. Personal therapy, as an avenue to self awareness, can be made available and/or promoted as an adjunct to professional training programs. Incorporating the development of reflective skills and focusing on increased self awareness in training programs may be ways to honor and support the experience of inner life. In addition, and aside from the personal gains, self-awareness and personal reflection promote responsible and effective professional behavior and functioning.

### Conclusions

The experience of inner life is a journey to self, a search for information and knowledge for personal growth and development. The experience of inner life is also important in informing professional work in the outer world of the helping professionals interviewed for this study.

The themes that emerged from this study included the spiritual nature of the experience of inner life, the importance of nature in the experience of inner life, the interplay of solitude and community and the effect of inner life on professional work along with the lack of attention paid to inner life in professional training programs. However, it seems artificial to address these themes in isolation for, in reality, they are interrelated.

The experience of inner life was characterized as spiritual. Spirituality involves a search for meaning of one's own life which is sought through self reflection in solitude. It is also about the interconnectedness of all things and carries with it a sense of connection to our natural surroundings. Natural surroundings offer reduced distractions and allow for an internal focus facilitated by quiet and solitude. As we strive to become whole, individuated beings, we seek community (connectedness) and personal integrity, experienced as a sense of congruence of inner self and outer being, and we strive to bring this sense of congruence to our work.

There is a movement evident in the literature of the helping professions to look at the subjective experience and issues of spirituality. Maybe as a response to the focus in both research and practice on developing brief treatment models in an attempt to meet the demands of managed care (models designed to address symptom relief, not the self of the client), we are hearing a call for a return to a psychology of the soul.

In conjunction with attending to the souls of clients, we must, in our professional development, attend to the souls of counselors and therapists. As professionals, we need to overcome our reluctance to address the inner subjective experience. We need to be able to talk about this important aspect of our lives with our fellow professionals, our colleagues. We need to address it in our training

programs as our responsibility to both ourselves and our clients. As a beginning, we need to examine the stigma attached to personal therapy as a route to self-awareness, including our concerns regarding personal freedom, privacy and confidentiality as they affect our professional responsibility. And if talking about our inner life, our inner subjective experience means using spiritual language, then that language needs to be integrated into our professional discourse as well.

It is hoped that the findings from this study add to knowledge regarding the subjective experience of inner life and to continued dialogue regarding how we develop and maintain a healthy inner life that in turn contributes to healthy and effective professional functioning. In addition, it is hoped these findings can contribute to the development of training programs that teach counselors in training not only how to care for the inner life of their clients, but how to care for and use their own.

### Suggestions for Further Research

All five participants in this study identified themselves as introverted or as having introverted tendencies. This researcher has questions about the role of personality style in the experience of inner life, especially the traits of introversion and extraversion. Is inner life experienced differently by introverts and extraverts? What are the training implications?

Other demographic factors need to be examined as well. How does age affect the experience of inner life? Is the experience of self-awareness a developmental issue? What effect do years of professional experience have? A larger sample needs to be examined to be able to increase the transferability (generalizability) of the experience of inner life.

It may be that the underlying “process” of inner life has common themes, but the content in the form of experiences and practices differs more significantly. It would be interesting to extend this research by inviting the participants to participate in a “round table” discussion about the experience of inner life. This would not be an attempt to accumulate additional individual knowledge. The group format itself affects the process, with qualitatively different results. By interacting in a group, members give rise “synergistically to insights and [understandings] that would not come about” individually (Patton, 1990, p. 40). Perhaps a discussion of this sort would draw forth a more coherent understanding of the experience of inner life.



**Appendix A**  
**Human Subjects Institutional Review Board**  
**Letter of Approval**

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## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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Date: 14 April 2000

To: Suzanne Hedstrom, Principal Investigator  
Candace Ross, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Sylvia Culp, Chair *Sylvia Culp*

Re: HSIRB Project Number 00-03-24

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Journey to the Soul: The Experience of Inner Life of Helping Professionals" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 14 April 2001

**Appendix B**  
**Informed Consent Document**

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

H. S. I. R. B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

APR 14 2000

x *Suzanne Hedstrom*  
HSIRB Chair**Western Michigan University****Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology**

Suzanne M. Hedstrom, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology  
 Candace W. Ross, M.A., Research Associate, Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

I have been invited to participate in a dissertation research project entitled "Journey to the Soul: The Experience of Inner Life of Helping Professionals". This research intends to explore in depth the experience of inner life of helping professionals. Inner life refers to the privately held beliefs, values and practices that give meaning to life. This project is being conducted by Ms. Candace Ross as her dissertation research under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Hedstrom.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I will take part in two interviews, each running approximately 1½ to 2 hours, focusing on my experience of my own inner life. I am aware that these interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, I will be asked to review the transcription of the first interview to make sure it accurately reflects what I have said.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or additional treatment will be made available to the subject except as otherwise stated in this consent form. The researcher anticipates minimal risk involved with my participation. If, however, I experience discomfort as a result of sharing my experience, the researcher will arrange a referral to a professional counselor or psychologist. Should I choose to engage in counseling for this purpose, the cost of counseling will be my responsibility.

I may benefit from participation in this study by becoming more aware of my own experience of my inner life. By sharing my experience, I may help to add to the understanding of this experience and its importance in the training of therapists.

All of the information collected from me is confidential. My name or any other identifying characteristics will not appear on any taped or transcribed material. Any identifying characteristics within the interview material will be removed or disguised to protect my identity.

Since participation is voluntary, I may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or prejudice or effect on my relationship with Western Michigan University. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Candace Ross (616) 353-4071 or Dr. Suzanne M. Hedstrom (616) 387-5114. The participant may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8293, or the Vice President for Research (616) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose of this study and the requirements for my participation as explained to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
Consent witnessed

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