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The Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Anglican Gay Men

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to open a window of articulation and understanding into the lived experience and meaning of spirituality in the lives of gay men who, in the past or present, identify as being members of the Anglican expression of Christianity. While over the last 50 years or so institutionalized religious institutions have been declining in their social influence and membership numbers, there has been an increase in interest and attention to spirituality.

Institutional religious movements in the past have been nearly uniformly negative or condemnatory of individuals identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT), and of same-gender sexual expressions. Recently, however, attitudes have been changing in some branches of Christianity. Within the worldwide Anglican Communion, and more particularly in the Anglican Church of Canada, official and unofficial voices have expressed positions along a continuum ranging from condemnatory to affirming of same-sex affection, desire, and relationships. This study's aim is to shed light on how gay men with roots in this particular religious community live out their gay identity and how they experience and express spirituality in their lives.

Participants ($N = 14$) took part in two interviews. The starting points for the second interview were the photographs they brought reflecting their experience of spirituality. Utilizing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), two interrelated principal lenses were identified through which participants created meaning about that experience. The first lens, *Influences*, identified the location of various influences

impacting participants' experiencing spirituality. The second lens, *Interpretative Engaging*, explored how participants sifted, sorted, and sewed together both negative and growthful experiencing of these influences as they created meaning about spirituality in their lives. Identifiable qualities characterizing these participants' experiencing also emerged. These qualities were that spirituality was (a) relational, (b) intentional, (c) directional, and (d) transformational.

Limitations of this research are discussed, along with identifying potentially fruitful avenues of future research. Implications particularly for counselling psychology are also identified, especially noting the rich potential in utilizing photographic images as tools expressing and exploring experiential areas of life when words themselves fall short.

Acknowledgements

It is hard to know where to begin, and on the other hand, where to end! That should be no surprise, for this period of time engaging dissertation and degree work has been filled with beginnings and with endings—some exciting and joyful, others heart wrenching and sad. But throughout it all, as with the rest of my life, there have been incredible moments of surprising grace—most often mediated through the wonder of personal encounter, growing friendships, and deepening relationships.

So to begin—hearty thanks go to Dr. Kevin Alderson my supervisor. He has given help and encouragement unhesitatingly throughout this academic venture, both in class and in the process of this research. Thanks too for those initial supportive conversations when I was first pondering the doing of this degree. I also want to particularly recognize members of my Supervisory Committee – Drs. John Manzo, Mishka Lysack, and Tom Strong. Thank you for agreeing to help, and contribute good counsel, in the beginnings and now the ending of this particular research project. Warm thanks goes as well to Dr. Sharon Robertson—thank you for your support in this my most recent academic adventure! To those who were the participants of this research, I am honoured that you accepted the invitation to join in this venture. Thank you for sharing your experiences and reflections. Thank you for your trust.

I have come to this place and space in time neither easily nor alone. With profound gratitude I want to recognize and celebrate the support and love others have extended and shared with me. To the other Kevin in my life—the sparkle of your eyes, the warmth of your touch, your words “have confidence in yourself” bring and stir a

deeply felt buoyancy marked by gratitude and love shared. 谢谢你. Life is an adventure with surprises, sometimes unsettlingly so. Kate, Josh, and Mark, as my children, you, know this well. Thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement. I continue in delight to see you growing into your own unique persons. You enrich my life in ways you will never know. Your mom would be very proud of all of us. And for Linda, who until her death was my partner, companion, friend, and so much more, words fall short of expressing my most profound gratitude and thanks for her tremendous insights, love and support.

Journeying on the path to this day has been an incredibly rich experience, and the fullness of this comes in no small measure through the power of entrusted stories and struggles, spiced with surprises and embodied wonders. As I write this, images flash in my mind's eye of those who have journeyed with me through the years, and in so many varied contexts—from church to Church Street, from Boston to Vancouver (and with stops between and beyond). For those times of celebration in liturgies public and private, where words and actions have often so poignantly transformed our present moments, opening to us life's richness and wonder—thank you.

To paraphrase words attributed to William Sloane Coffin, a champion of peace and justice, civil rights for all, and GLBT ally:

May God give us grace never to sell ourselves short,

Grace to risk something big for something good,

And grace to remember that the world is now

too dangerous for anything but truth, and too small for anything but love.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

“We have to trust that our stories deserve to be told – we may discover that the better we tell our stories, the better we will want to live them” (Henri Nouwen, as cited in Glaser, 2002).

Background

This research explores the stories of gay men and the experience of spirituality in their lives. In North America and Europe over the past several decades, there has been increased interest and engagement with exploring sexual orientation and the experience of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals (Rothblum, Perez, DeBord, & Bieschke, 2000). At the same time, there has been an increased interest in the nature, role, and positive impact of spirituality in the lives, relationships, and health of gay individuals. This research explores the nature and role of spirituality in the lives of gay men.

While over the last 50 years or so institutionalized religious institutions have been declining in their social influence and membership numbers, there has been an increase in interest and attention to spirituality (Koenig, 2008; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Over this time period, our understandings of the nature of the world and how we come to understand our world has undergone extraordinary change. The quest for discovering and articulating essential truths that has characterized the modern scientific method has increasingly been challenged both theoretically and methodologically. This challenge has gathered strength within an increasingly pervasive contemporary postmodern zeitgeist in which meanings are increasingly understood to be individually and socially constructed rather than being seen as awaiting discovery as underlying and

universal realities. In the midst of these debates has come an increased recognition and investigation of the individual's social and environmental interconnectedness of life. In this regard, there is a growing focus and interest in what constitutes and contributes to individual wellness and health. It is in this broad context that this current research unfolds (Seybold & Hill, 2001).

The focus of this research is the intersection of sexual orientation and spirituality. For many, this intersection has been a point of pain and conflict, particularly as institutional religious movements have, almost universally, been negative or condemnatory of GLBT individuals. For others, however, this intersection is positive and rich with meaning (Boisvert, 1999). Particularly in the Judeo-Christian tradition, formal religious institutions have traditionally served as a principal container for conveying frameworks of understanding and vehicles of expressing spirituality as individuals have searched for, among other things, inner peace, connectedness beyond oneself, compassion, and articulations of meaning and purpose. What happens in the experience of hearing exclusionary teachings negatively condemning one's identity, desires, and relationships, and at the same time hearing teachings "pleading for love and inclusion" (Boisvert, 2007, p. 34)?

This particular research focuses on gay men's lived experience of spirituality. More specifically, this research seeks to better understand the lived experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men who presently or in the past have identified as being part of the Anglican branch of Christianity. In doing this, the various understandings and debates concerning the concepts of both sexual orientation as well as spirituality are noted.

While there have been an increasing number of published biographical and autobiographical accounts narrating the experiences of gay men, often including negative encounters with religious institutions, there have been few qualitative psychological studies specifically exploring gay men's experience of spirituality in the broader framework of health, rather than that of disease (e.g., AIDS) (Davidson, 2000).

Personal and Professional Prolegomena

The choice of this research topic evolved over time. Its roots lie in my own personal journey of coming out as a gay man and working professionally as an Anglican clergy person. In the research methodology utilized in this research, it is incumbent on the researcher to name the factors, experiences, recognized biases and interests, all of which provides context for the research question and the arising quest. To this end, I will name significant inter-related dynamics marking my own personal journey as a gay man, and as a person for whom the religious and spiritual has played an important role. I will further note important dynamics encountered in my professional life. Arising out of all these influences and dynamics is my interest in exploring the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men.

Dynamics Marking the Personal

Growing up. I grew up in a household just outside of Boston that was marked by an extremely evangelical brand of Christianity. In high school, my Evangelical Free Church pastor and church community were far more responsive in providing formulaic answers than they were in responding to questions. My questions about life, God, and what was happening in my fairly dysfunctional family most often elicited silence or the

offer of prayer for me. It was alienating. With no sense of security in my home life, it was a time of inward yearning for community.

My high school was located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and just several blocks from there was an Episcopal monastery of the Society of St. John the Evangelist. It was a peaceful place, austere one might say. The chapel had been designed in a French Romanesque architectural style by Ralph Adams Cram, who designed the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. It was a place in which I experienced refuge. It was, and remains in my mind's eye, a profoundly safe space marked by silence, frequently illuminated by sunlight coming through beautiful stained glass windows, and by the flickering flames of votive candles before a stone statue of Mary. When I needed to talk with someone, the then guest master would always have a smile, some time, and the offer of tea. Around that time, I came across an Episcopal church on Beacon Hill in Boston, Church of the Advent. In this parish I found a welcome that was marked by respect, acceptance, and openness to exploring questions. It was also a place of beauty enhanced by its paid professional choir and well-choreographed liturgy.

Theological and seminary days. I completed my undergraduate degree in 1970. From the swirling world of peace marches in Chicago, I went to the pacific setting of Cambridge University to study theology. It was a life that was ordered by a daily rota of studying, eating, and worshipping together. There was a medieval feel to the buildings and courtyard of Westcott House on Jesus Lane where I resided – particularly as the bells rang out four times daily marking the hours of gathering in the chapel. It was a time of wrestling with both “faith” and “the faith.”

By second year, I did not believe I could proceed along the ordination route in good conscience. Back then, the articulation of traditional affirmations of Christian doctrine rang empty and without experiential referents. It was a time heavily and headily influenced by logical positivism. And hovering in the background were struggles with my sexuality and orientation. Through a friend and mentor, I was urged to continue to engage the questions, and to see where the journey would go.

I continued to experience a strong drawing to discover some form of community while exploring the existential questions of life and spirituality. I left, along with my doubts, wrestlings, and questions, on a pilgrimage to Taizé, France, for Holy Week. With tent and backpack, I made my way by English Channel ferry, train, and hitchhiking. It was an experientially rich week filled with talking, silence, cold showers, sleeping in a tent, vin ordinaire, freshly-baked bread, rain, sun, sitting before icons illuminated by flickering candles, and ponderings under the open sky. There were also lots of conversations alongside thousands of others my age who had come from across Europe to experience that week at that place. While there was no thunder and no lightning, there was an inner nudging towards ordained ministry. I wanted to find a life

direction in which I could help people. On that path, all of my personal questions, doubts, rebelliousness, and attractions were being woven together.

From Cambridge University, I then enrolled in the Episcopal Divinity School (EDS) back in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At this time, another struggle came to the surface: my sexual orientation. EDS students were covered by the health plan at Harvard University. While at Cambridge University, I had an inner sense that I would have to deal with an internal question about my sexuality. England, however, did not seem the place to wrestle with that. One day in 1973, I mustered my courage and walked down to Harvard's Student Health Center. It was a short intake interview. The older senior doctor and two others, all wearing white lab coats, gathered in a trinitarian huddle after hearing my concern that I thought I might be gay. They turned to me and without further comment referred me to a psychologist. That person, however, joined with me in discounting and diverting attention away from my presenting question. It was as if I had been given permission to continue to avoid that bundle of issues deep within.

Coming out. While I was growing up in a fairly dysfunctional home, I “bunkered” the core of who I was in order to feel and be safe. While over time I was able to open up, I still kept my same-gender attractions and desires controlled, sheltered, and wrapped up.

All that exploded in fall 1999. That year marked 25 years of marriage and ordained ministry as a priest. By then, I was also the father of three children. I applied for a sabbatical leave from parish work, and I was awarded a Proctor Scholarship for the fall semester at EDS.

If there were a video clip to capture the feeling tone of that fall, it would look like this. One day a self-inflating raft carefully wrapped, packed, and safely stored, is taken out of storage. The bindings begin to be cut, and then suddenly a compressed air cartridge activates and the raft breaks out of all its wrappings and opens – exposing its entire surface to the choppy waters and blazing sun.

Near the end of September 1999, I made arrangements to seek counselling to further explore my sexual orientation. I self-disclosed that I was gay to my wife, Linda, first. That disclosure began a new and difficult journey for us individually and together. Amidst the tumultuousness of this, there was a deep clarity and inner peace that I had not previously experienced in my life. Linda flew to Boston for a week. During that week written questions arrived from the nominating committee for the election of a bishop for the Anglican Diocese of Calgary.

In the process leading up to the election, I was neither asked about my sexual orientation, nor my position regarding the issues swirling in the church around sexual orientation. I had decided that if asked, I would be honest, otherwise I would continue on my personal journey of integration, separating this as much as possible from the pastoral issues and responsibilities of being bishop. It was with mixed feelings that on November 4th, 1999, I was elected Bishop of Calgary.

Linda and I had long been best friends, and faced with this now newly shared personal dynamic, we explored with intentionality what decisions would be healthy ones for each of us individually, together, and for our family. The questions around that were at times stressful, and our responses were never assumed or taken for granted. This

remained the case until Linda died approximately seven years later from complications arising from battling leukemia.

As I reflect on the spiritual dimensions of my journey (among many other dimensions), there is a prayer attributed to Bishop Stephen Bayne which I frequently reflect on, and that resonates with my own hopes and aspirations: “Lord help us not to be afraid to be different, to hold to hard truths and high goals, and live beyond mercy, and peace, and fairness in all our days.”

Dynamics Marking the Theological and Spiritual

As an undergraduate student, I enrolled in a seminar course in Process Theology. On the then edges of mainstream Christian theological thinking, I experienced it as a breath of fresh air. Process Theology is highly influenced by the British mathematician and philosopher, A. N. Whitehead. In his work, *Process and Reality*, Whitehead (1929) proposed a system of metaphysics in which substance (as traditionally conceived in Western philosophy) is rejected in favour of process. It is a framework in which reality does not consist of static and isolated objects, but rather unfolds in relationship and process. This process framework resonates today with a postmodern understanding of constructed meaning, rather than searching for statically discovered realities. It provided an engaging and living framework to help make sense of life. As the Centre for Process Studies (2007) states:

Process metaphysics, in general, seeks to elucidate the *developmental* nature of reality, emphasizing *becoming* rather than static existence or being. It also stresses the inter-relatedness of all entities. Process describes reality as

ultimately made up of experiential events rather than enduring inert substances.

(para. 3)

An understanding of the interconnectedness of experience, that at times transcends the present moment in time and/or in space, has remained core in my life. Life and spirituality, in the many ways this can be pointed to and attempted to be defined, is about relationship. I experience the transcendent in beauty, whether that be a sweeping panoramic view of nature's majesty, or of focusing on the form of a single blade of prairie grass. Over the years, I have experienced the spiritual not only visually, but also through music, in ritual transcending the present moment, in witnessing and being present at moments of life's beginnings at birth, and at its endings in death. The opportunities to experience the spiritual have at times also been enhanced in my professional life.

Dynamics Marking the Professional

In shifting my life's path in 2005 from full time ministry in the Anglican Church as a priest and then as a bishop, I commenced Ph. D. work at the University of Calgary. It has been a bringing together of the strands of training and interest represented in having completed Masters Degrees in theology, pastoral counselling, and psychology.

In the decade prior to that transition, I was Chair of the Anglican Church of Canada's Faith, Worship, and Ministry Committee for 6 years. With that position came an ever expanding awareness of the particular conflicting currents of emotional, political, and religious perspectives and convictions that swirled around issues of human sexuality, notably within the Anglican Church of Canada and in the worldwide Anglican Communion. This conflict was, and continues to be, particularly evidenced around the

acceptance and inclusion of GLBT individuals into the organizational and worshipping life of the church. This experience was made even more personally pointed and poignant in that I was also in the midst of a process of more fully coming out as a gay man.

Just as with the participants in this research, life cannot be neatly divided into isolated bits and pieces. Intertwined with my responsibilities and relationship with the institutional church, and a process of coming out, were the dynamics and effects of my other relationships, particularly with a wonderful wife, and with three uniquely different adult children.

When I first began thinking about moving into doctoral studies, my research interests had begun to coalesce around the experience of friendship, and particularly men's friendships (see, for example, Bray, 2003). Additionally, I had also become increasingly interested in exploring the relationship between spirituality and sexuality – both through a theological/spiritual and a psychological lens. However, while both spirituality and sexuality can be explored through detached academic discourses, I became more interested in how these were being lived out in the lives of gay men.

My search for, and then choice of, an appropriate research methodology to explore the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men was very much influenced by my own personal movement to an increasingly constructivist epistemological understanding of life. This movement allows for a shifting from debate over truth claims to a space in which dialogue becomes more possible, and the processes of meaning making can be explored within a more holistic framework.

I encountered Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in the midst of a graduate level course in qualitative research methodology. As a research method, IPA is fairly recent and not as well known here in North America as it is in the United Kingdom where it originated.

A Phenomenological and Hermeneutic Research Approach

There are an ever growing number of methodologies to pursue psychological research. For this present research, I chose to utilize a phenomenological and hermeneutic research approach, and more specifically to explore the research question using IPA as a research methodology. Creswell (2007) points out that the choice of one research approach over others depends on a number of factors. These factors include: (a) the desired research goal; (b) the “audience question,” that is, “what approach is frequently used by gatekeepers in the field”; (c) the “background question,” that is, the researcher’s own training; (d) the “scholarly literature question,” that is, “what is needed most as contributing to the scholarly literature in the field”; and (e) the “personal approach question” which invites the researcher to reflect on the research approaches they are comfortable in working with, or for which they have a preference (pp. 95-96).

The intent of this study was neither to formulate a theory about gay men’s experience of spirituality nor to explore their discourses. My goal was to explore the *experience* of spirituality in the lives of these participants. The most appropriate approach to do this is to utilize a phenomenological methodology that explores not just the phenomenon itself, but how this phenomenon is interpreted, or made sense of, in the lives of individuals. IPA is such a methodology (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Increasingly there has been a growing use of IPA to explore the meaning and sense making of those

having a specific experience which occurs in specific lived contexts (see <http://www.ipa.bbk.ac.uk/references>).

In both my past and present training, there has been a strong emphasis on hermeneutics, the ways in which we interpret and make meaning in our lived experience. These factors, combined with the flexibility of IPA as a research methodology, all pointed toward choosing IPA as the most appropriate research methodology for exploring the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men

This research is a qualitative study utilizing IPA, an approach that has recently arisen out of the field of health psychology in the United Kingdom (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The aim of this phenomenological approach is the in-depth exploring of how research participants create meaning for themselves and their world.

In contrast to quantitative psychological research that seeks to utilize large sample sizes in order to extrapolate to a wider population, the aim of IPA is to uncover and explore in depth the experience of a much smaller identified number of participants. IPA relies not only on the participant's interpretation of their world of experience, but also on the interpretive and analytic role of the researcher. IPA's principal means of exploring the participant's world is through semi-structured interviewing attuned to achieving the best possible understanding and interpretation of what constitutes the participant's understanding of their experience.

While the vehicle of communication in interviews is principally verbal language, this is not the only possible source of exploring a person's experience. The research design of this study invited participants to utilize photographic images to convey what for them expressed their experience of spirituality. While the use of photographs is not

unknown in anthropological and sociological research, it has been utilized even less frequently in psychological research (Graziano, 2003; Miller & Happell, 2006; Schwartz, 1989). This study offered an opportunity to explore the usefulness of using photographs as an adjunct to the use of interviews as ways of expressing and making meaning out of experience.

The Domain of Inquiry

Practical context. This research is particularly situated in two domains of practice. The first is counselling psychology and its applications in working with GLBT individuals for whom the experience of spirituality may be an important facet, positively or negatively, in their lives. The second domain consists of those in religious or spiritual milieus who also work at understanding the experience of spirituality in the lives of GLBT individuals.

Theoretical context. This research exists within a broader framework of understanding of the individual as dynamically living within the context of relationship with both the givenness and arbitrariness of his or her genetic, historical, social, relational, and cultural contexts. This is perhaps best named as an ecological understanding of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1995a, 1995b). It is an approach which highlights the relational biopsychosocial dynamics of experience and understanding. It is amidst these dynamics that an individual's lived experience takes shape and in which meaning-making itself occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

Social context. Non-dominant sexual minorities experience prejudice, discrimination, and at times are the objects of persecution and physical violence. In Canada, we have experienced significant legal and social attitudinal changes marking a

growing tolerance and acceptance of GLBT individuals. This has been transitional time first marked by Parliament decriminalizing homosexuality in 1969, and the passing and proclamation of Bill C-38, the Civil Marriage Act, which redefines marriage as being between two persons, regardless of their gender.

Homophobia, however, continues in various ways to mark the external and internal landscape of many gay men's lives (Janoff, 2005). This remains quite profound in most Judeo-Christian religious institutions. Some gay males have experienced internal conflict in consequence of these judgmental Judeo-Christian traditions (Borgman, 2005). There are, however, movements in some branches and denominations in Judaism and Christianity that seek to re-evaluate and re-interpret biblical texts and dogmatic teachings that are condemnatory of non-heterosexual attractions and relationships.

Research context. Influencing and informing IPA are two streams of theoretical paradigms. The first stream is phenomenology that has its roots in philosophy and particularly the work of Husserl and Heidegger. Fundamental to phenomenological approaches is the quest to discover in-depth an individual's experience of a phenomenon, rather than to attempt to articulate an objective description of that phenomenon itself. The second stream is symbolic interactionism, which posits that the focus of research ought to be the meaning individuals give to events and that those meanings are only arrived at through interpretation (Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Discursive/linguistic context. Integral to this research are two streams of discourse revolving around the terms sexual orientation and spirituality. While in the

past sexual orientation, and more particularly gay male identity, was often equated with same-gender sexual behaviour, increasingly there has been dissatisfaction with this definition. Cox and Gallois (1996; see also Alderson, 2003) identify the multidimensional nature of sexual orientation as including self-identification, gender-identification, gender role, fantasy, emotional attachments, social preference, sexual attraction, life-style, and sexual behaviour. Sexual orientation is both intrapersonal and interpersonal, cognitive and affective, and involving attraction and/or behaviour. Spirituality has been variously equated with religion and religiosity, and distanced from the same. For the purpose of this research, the attributes of spirituality include its: (a) its addressing existential or transcendent questions; (b) its belonging to a domain of “cardinal” values that underpin an individual’s life and decision making; and (c) its being metacognitive, that is, an individual is not only self-aware but is aware of his or her relationship to self and non-self (Ho & Ho, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to open a window of articulation and understanding of the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men. What are the conflicts, the positives, and the constructs in the unfolding interactional experiences of spirituality and gay identity? How do gay men move through these experiences and make sense and meaning of them? IPA pulls into the interpretive process not only the experience of research participants, but also the experiences of the researcher. Thus, my own experience will enter into a dialogic interchange with the articulated experience of research participants. Through the anticipated insights gained in this research, greater

consciousness and understandings regarding the nature and role of spirituality in the lives of gay men can be raised and expanded.

Another purpose of this research is to provide those in counselling psychology further insights into the nature and role of spirituality in the lives of gay men who may be their clients. Further, for those working particularly within a Christian institutional framework, and particularly with those working in or with the Anglican Communion, this research will provide a qualitative psychological perspective and another lens through which to understand the experience of gay men who are a part of their congregations, parishes, or other church communities.

Potential Significance

The significance of this study will first be to develop a widened horizon and deeper understanding of spirituality in the lives of men who self-identify as gay. This will potentially (a) contribute to the practice of counselling psychology in giving a richer expression of the dynamics and issues of spirituality and gay men; (b) affirm and support the voice of the spiritual quest and life of gay men; (c) contribute to a growing body of work in queer theology that seeks to explore the lived experience of spirituality, sexuality and sexual orientation; and (d) contribute to the combating of homophobic fear that excludes and condemns.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study is: “What is the nature and role of spirituality in the lives of Anglican gay men?” This question also led to listening for narratives that might add to understanding of these participants’ experiences regarding questions such as:

1. How do gay men integrate their experiences of coming out with their spiritual or religious experiences and/or beliefs?
2. Has there been, or is there currently, an experience of conflict between identifying as gay men and their experience or understanding of spirituality in their lives? If so, how has this sought to be resolved?
3. What marks the expression or practice of their spirituality (when, where, how, and with whom)? Has this changed over time?
4. How, if at all, is the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men affected by an individual being part of a particular age cohort?
5. What marks the nature and interaction of spirituality and sexual expression in the lives of these gay men?
6. In what way was spirituality affected (or not) by coming-out? Similarly, how was coming-out affected (or not) by gay men's experience of spirituality?

Rationale for this Study

The research approach chosen for this study is a qualitative methodology. There are a multitude of research formulations that are subsumed under *qualitative*. A useful anchoring definition for qualitative research is that it:

is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self... qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world... qualitative researchers study things in their natural

settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pp. 4-5)

As Creswell (1998) notes, this approach to research is particularly appropriate for exploring the question “what?” It is a particularly appropriate approach for this study’s research question (i.e., “What is the nature and role of spirituality in the lives of Anglican gay men?”).

Over the past half century, there has been a growing amount of empirical quantitative research carried out regarding GLBT persons’ identity, development, relationships, and health. It has as well faced sampling challenges marked not only by generally small numbers of subjects, but also by the composition of these samples, notably for the most part Caucasian, middle-class, individuals. Quantitative studies have also been criticized regarding consistency and definition of both the nature and measurement of independent and dependent variables utilized in these studies (Bieschke, McClanahan, Tozer, Grzegorek, & Park, 2000; Bieschke, Paul, & Blasko, 2007). An empiricist approach, while useful in identifying trends, causal relationships, the effects of defined variables, and correlational relationships between variables, is limited in its ability to explore the richness of individual experience. It is individual experience in its local and wider context that is particularly pertinent in the field of counselling psychology.

The reasons outlined by Creswell (2007) for the carrying out of qualitative research are particularly relevant in the exploration of the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men. Creswell notes:

We conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue... when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices... because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue... to follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models... because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply to not fit the problem. (p. 40)

Qualitative methods have been identified as being particularly useful in assuming a different perspective on the experience of GLBT individuals (LaSala, 2005). Over the past 35 years, there has been an identifiable increase in the number of studies regarding health, spirituality, and religion. This has been marked by a definite trend of increased focus on spirituality and a decreased emphasis on religion during this period of time (Weaver, Pargament, Flannelly, & Oppenheimer, 2006). Comparatively speaking, a relatively small number of quantitative and qualitative studies have focused on spirituality, religion, identity, and GLBT life and relationships.

Over the past 10 years, various published journal qualitative studies have explored such topics as (a) spiritual experiences and challenges of gay and lesbian college students (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005), (b) spiritual and religious issues confronting gay Mormon men and the coping methods they employ in reconciling faith and sexuality (Goodwill, 2000), (c) meaning and utility of spirituality in the lives of African American gay men living with AIDS (Miller, Jr., 2000), and (d) counter-rejection of gay Christians and the church (Yip, 1999).

On the other hand, published journal quantitative studies have also explored areas such as (a) gay and/or lesbian experience and religion and mental health (Chew, 1999); (b) psychological health and current faith affirmation experiences, internalized homonegativity, and spirituality (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005); (c) the importance of spirituality among gay and lesbian individuals (Tan, 2005); (d) religious conflicts experienced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals (GLB) (Schuck & Liddle, 2001); and (e) lesbian Christians' experience of cognitive dissonance and its resolution (Mahaffy, 1996).

Of interest to the formation of my proposed research were the explorations of three studies in particular which give evidence of (a) increasing individualism in articulating and expressing spirituality in the lives of non-heterosexual individuals (Yip, 2002), (b) conflict arising from the interface of identifying as non-heterosexual and religious (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Rodriguez, 2006), and (c) a decline in the role of institutionalized religious authority in the lives of many non-heterosexual individuals but the persistence of articulating and expressing spirituality in their lives (Rodriguez, 2006).

Yip's (2002) research found a decreasing influence of religious institutional authority on participants' attitudes towards sexuality and spirituality. He states that the findings of this quantitative and qualitative study ($N = 565$) involving self-identified GLB individuals "lends credence to the popular argument that, in late modern society, the religious landscape, as well as the construction and management of religious identities and expressions, are increasingly characterized by privatization, individuation, self-reflexivity, and a consumerist ethic" (p. 210).

The qualitative study of Coyle and Rafalin (2000) explored Jewish gay men's accounts of negotiating cultural, religious, and sexual identity. Utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as its method of inquiry, Coyle and Rafalin explored the experience of 21 men in Great Britain concurrently identifying as being Jewish and identifying as gay. Particular curiosity focused on how these men developed a gay identity, how they experienced the dynamics of this identity interacting with that of being Jewish and what, if any, were the difficulties and conflicts that emerged, and how were they resolved.

Rodriguez's (2006) dissertation was a quantitative study of religion, spirituality, conflict, and integration in gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of faith. His purpose was (a) to explore the religious and spirituals lives of a large sample of GLB individuals ($N = 750$), (b) to explore the conflict that can occur between these individuals' sexual orientation and religious/spiritual beliefs, and (c) to explore the integration that can occur between these individuals' GLB identities and their religious/spiritual identities. Findings showed not only a "flight of GLB individuals from established Christian denominations" but also that while attendance at religious services might be low, the presence and importance of beliefs and spirituality remained high, albeit not without the presence of experiencing conflict (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 68).

It appears to be that in Canada, North America, and Europe, there are (a) growing trends of disaffiliation with the authoritativeness of religious institutions, (b) sustained and increasing interest in expressing spirituality, and (c) a persistent presence of conflict. In this context, how do these factors impact the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men? What is the role and function of spirituality in their lived

experience? This particular focus of attention has thus far not been explored in research literature (however, for personal biographical and anecdotal accounts, see for example: Bouldrey, 1995; Lake, 1999; McNeill, 1998; Shallenberger, 1998).

Engaging in a qualitative research approach to this question not only is appropriate given the gap in knowledge about this experience of gay men, but also is appropriate to gain an understanding of the richness of that experience. Additionally, qualitative research has long been engaged with studies regarding non-dominant sexualities (Gamson, 2000). This is particularly true because of this method's openness in inviting the voice and experience of the non-dominant marginalized to be heard. It is with a curiosity and desire to explore and better understand these lived experiences that IPA was chosen as an appropriate methodological path for this research.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

As Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) have stated: “In choosing IPA for a research project, we commit ourselves to exploring, describing, interpreting, and situating the means by which our participants make sense of their experiences.” IPA in the above quote is the acronym for the qualitative research methodology known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

The object of the hermeneutic task lies in the making sense of the particular experiences of participants. How do participants make sense of their own experience? How do I, as researcher, engage their articulation of their experience and their expressed interpretation? In this process, other voices from the research literature help tune my listening ear. Consulting the research literature has been a recursive process. Initially I researched the literature to gain an understanding of what has and has not been the focus of research in this area. This continued in a refining of the focus of this research project. In addition there was an ongoing exploring and following up on ideas and constructs sparked by participants’ contributions.

Paying attention to the embedded nature of experience invokes an invitation to explore that experience and its context through various lenses and perspectives. Exploring gay men’s experience of spirituality, and more particularly that experience of those having Anglican religious affiliation, invokes voices of research and reflection from across disciplinary boundaries. Listening to some of these voices in addition to psychology and counselling research is important in exploring more fully both the context and the articulation of these men’s experiences of spirituality and how, from a

counselling perspective, this might not only invite future research, but also might inform counselling practice itself.

Contextual Social, Cultural, and Relational Factors

Homophobia in Canadian Society

Non-dominant sexual minorities worldwide experience prejudice, discrimination, and at times, persecution and physical violence. In Canada over the past 45 years, we have experienced significant legal and social attitudinal changes, marking a growing tolerance and acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals. Significant milestones marking these changes range from Parliament decriminalizing homosexuality in 1969, to the passing and proclamation of Bill C-38, the Civil Marriage Act, which redefines marriage as being between two persons of any gender (Cotler, 2006). Homophobia, however, continues in various ways to mark the external and internal landscape of many gay men's lives (Janoff, 2005). This is evidenced, for example, in Statistics Canada reporting that those self-reporting as homosexual or bisexual were two to three times more likely to have reported being cyber-bullied than heterosexual individuals (Perreault, 2011). Statistics Canada also reported that 13% of hate crimes reported in 2009 were identified as being motivated by sexual orientation. While this proportion was consistent with that reported for previous years, the overall numbers of reported incidents increased 42% from the previous year (Dauvergne & Brennan, 2011).

Homophobia in Religious Institutions

Homophobic dynamics remains quite profound in many if not most Judeo-Christian religious institutions (Bates, 2005; Standing, 2004). Conflict has not

uncommonly been experienced by some gay males impacted by institutional expressions of these Judeo-Christian traditions (Borgman, 2005; Ribas, 2004). There are, however, movements within some branches and denominations in Judaism and Christianity that seek to re-evaluate and re-interpret biblical texts and dogmatic teachings that are condemnatory of non-heterosexual attractions and relationships (see, for example, Frontain, 1997; Goss & West, 2000; Koch, 2001; Loughlin, 2007). Positive reformulations and new articulations of Christian tradition and text in the light of same gender experience can particularly be seen in an emergent theological lens known as queer theology (Cheng, 2011, 2012).

Family and Friends

Family and friends are formative in the social development of every person. For GLBT individuals, their family of origin can be the source of great support, or the cause of great pain (Alderson, 2002; Connolly, 2005; Elizur & Mintzer, 2001; Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Lee & Lee, 2006). Social support, or its lack, likewise impacts a person's growth and sense of well-being (Bauermeister et al., 2010; Fenaughty & Harré, 2003; Granello, 2001; Mustanski, Newcomb, & Garofalo, 2011; Siebert, Mutran, & Reitzes, 1999; Siewert, Antoniow, Kubiak, & Weber, 2011). This is particularly true regarding the presence or absence of friendships in the lives of both gay and heterosexual men (Fenaughty & Harré, 2003; Galupo, 2007; Granello, 2001; Nardi, 1992, 1999; Siebert et al., 1999). Gay male friendships can be powerful and effective counterbalances to experiences of discrimination and homophobia in the wider heteronormative society (Blumer & Murphy, 2011). Andrew Gottlieb (2008) speaks to the meaning of friendship between gay men:

...those relationships have always been safe havens, places where we can be understood, feel valued, and experience acceptance and live.... we, as gay men, depend on our friends to see something special in us, which then helps us to see that special something in ourselves.... Friendship helps us to survive. (p. 4)

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, friendship has continued to be a focus of relational expression of human and divine, a focus of reflection, and a source of personal support (Boyatzis, 2005; Bray, 2000, 2003; Levin, 2001; O'Day, 2004; Tull, 2004; Vernon, 2006). In exploring gay men's experience of spirituality, it is a reasonable supposition that family and/or friends will impact that experience in significant ways. First, the impact of family and friends will be experienced positively, negatively, or both, as a male self-discloses his self-identifying as gay. Second, the engagement or lack of engagement of friends and family will likewise impact positively, negatively, or both, those who experience the construct of spirituality as an important dynamic in their lives (see Bray, 2003).

Gay Identity: Understandings and Dynamics

Sexual /Affectional Orientation

There is no singular answer to the question of what factor is constitutive of a person's sexual orientation and the formation and claiming (or not) of a gay identity. Cox and Gallois (1996) point out the multidimensional nature of their understanding of sexual orientation that includes self-identification, gender identification, gender role, fantasy, emotional attachments, social preference, sexual attraction, life-style, and sexual behaviour. All of these interact personally and socially. The interplay of cultural and social movements upon the formation of sexual orientation identity is approached

through an exploration of narratives across older and younger cohorts of those identifying as gay (Weststrate & McLean, 2010). In their exploration of the narratives of 251 individuals ($N = 156$ males), they observed a shifting of a weighting of cultural memories and more personal individualized narrative memories when comparing older gay and lesbian cohort individuals and younger gay and lesbian cohort individuals. Whatever the shift, there remains a mix of both cultural and social contextual factors alongside the many characteristics that mark an individual's narrative and sexual orientation identity naming across cohorts.

There has been much written about sexual behaviour, attractions, preferences, and the nature and configuration of how these are experienced and lived out (see, for example: D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Easton & Hardy, 2009; Kelman, 1998; Panati, 1998). More specifically, the question of how we understand, and how those in history have understood, same-gender behaviour and attraction provides additional material for ongoing debate (see, for example: Bray, 2003; Broido, Perez, & DeBord, 2000; Foucault, 1990; Halperin, 2002; Nissinen, 1998).

Is sexual orientation a given, an indelible something akin to genetically inherited characteristics of ethnicity or eye colour (Bocklandt, Horvath, Vilain, & Hamer, 2006), or is it something that is culturally and temporally defined and constructed (Baumrind, 1995; Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Weststrate & McLean, 2010)? The underlying ontological and epistemological frameworks from which our response will emerge provide important roads of exploration into understanding sexual identity and orientation. The implications of our framing of these underpinnings lay at

the heart of current political, legal and religious debates around sexual orientation and same-gender relationships (Waites, 2005).

Likely both elements of essentialism and social constructionism are reflected in the lived experience of “coming-out,” both in self-identifying and then in disclosing a gay identity (Bohan & Russell, 1999; Haldeman, 1999). The narrations of those having come-out as gay men most frequently underscore both a signifying and identifying their experience as being a same-gender orientation and not being a matter of their personal choice, alongside their experience of constructing meaning and identity within, and influenced by, their social and cultural environments (Alderson, 2000; Thompson, 1994).

The variety of ways that sexual orientation/sexual identity has been measured or determined in studies reflects definitions assumed by their authors. Randall L. Sell (1997, 2007) has provided a historical overview of how researchers since the 1860’s to the present day have defined and attempted to measure *sexual orientation*. Definitions have incorporated elements of sexual affection and/or behaviour directed toward or with individuals of the same or differing gender. Closely related to affectional attraction is how a person articulates their sense of identity regarding sexual attraction. One example that speaks both of sexual orientation as well as sexual identity is provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) in a pamphlet *Answers to your questions: For a better understanding of sexual orientation and homosexuality*.

Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers

to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. (2008)

In this and other definitions, what is considered defining? Broido et al. (2000) ask: "Is there a difference between experiencing same-gendered desire, engaging in same-gendered relationships, experiencing same-gendered romantic relationships, and identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or gay?" (p. 14). Definitions utilized in studies have ranged from only using simple self and other categorizing as, for instance, "homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, or uncertain" (Ellis & Hellberg, 2005), to focusing solely on whether a person has engaged in same gender sexual behaviour (Savic, Berglund, & Lindstrom, 2005), while other studies have utilized definitions that encompassed asking about same-gender fantasy in addition to same gender behaviour (Hines, Brook, & Conway, 2004). Still other studies have incorporated asking study participants about same-gender attraction, fantasies, recent and past sexual behaviour, and actual and ideal self-identification (see Hamer & Copeland, 1994).

Underlying these questions, and working definitions, is the ongoing debate regarding essentialism, the understanding of sexual orientation being immutable and biologically based, and social constructionism, where sexual orientation is understood as variable, changeable, and socially constructed (see, for example, Halwani, 1998; Morrow, 2006). Emerging from his ecological model, Alderson (2012) advocates for using the term affectional orientation as opposed to sexual orientation, which is in current common usage. It is an attempt to re-focus and balance the constituent components that underpin what is being pointed to in using these terms. The intent is

also to move away from a common weighting of meaning of sexual orientation as primarily being one associated with sexual behaviour and/or biologic sexual attraction.

In providing a definition of affectional orientation, Alderson (2012) states:

“Affectional orientation refers to the attraction, erotic desire, and philia for members of the opposite gender, the same gender, or both” (p. 3). Further to this, Alderson notes that on the basis of factor analytic work, affectional orientation can operationally be defined and measured via six components: sexual attraction, sexual fantasies, sexual preference, propensity to fall in love romantically, being in love romantically, and the extent to which one has sexual partners of each gender.

Coming-out. Coming-out can refer to either self-identification as a gay or lesbian individual, or it can refer to identity-disclosing to others. For males, it is “the process of accepting, revealing and affirming one’s identity as a gay man” (Grierson & Smith, 2005, p. 54). For most adults experiencing coming-out, the acknowledgement of “being gay” is a major life transition that impacts not only on the self, but also on one’s relations with others and wider society. The most primary and fundamental coming-out is to oneself, acknowledging that being gay is, in fact, a significant dimension of experiencing one’s own self and being. The degree to which this reality is shared with others depends on many factors.

Unlike many other major adult life transitions, coming-out is not initiated by a single defined event (or non-event), such as marriage or the death of a child, or being infertile. For many, an awareness of their being different and having same-gender attractions may indeed be long-standing, recognized first in childhood. For these individuals, it may be a growing into a time of transition – aware that they do not “fit”

into a normative default heterosexual identity, and then begin seeking out an identity as part of a non-normative minority sexual orientation (Isay, 1997). For others, there may be a particular event that triggers both awareness and a beginning of a transition into identifying as a gay person. It is a transitional time that can be marked both by positive feelings of growth and by experiences of conflict.

Various models attempt to describe the process of forming a gay identity. Some models propose set stages that a person coming out moves through. Coleman (1982), for example, postulates five developmental stages and describes tasks needing to be completed for gay identity integration to occur. These are: (a) pre-coming out, (b) coming out, (c) exploration, (d) first relationships, and (e) identity integration. Peacock (2000) advances another developmental model in terms of gay male experience, maintaining, with modifications, Erickson's eight stages of personal development. Social constructionist perspectives posit self-identity formation as an ongoing reality that takes place interactively with the social, historical, and cultural environment. Self-identity is not a state one discovers or at which one arrives. One is continually arriving, developing, and forming that identity (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001).

Another model of coming out as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI) is proposed by Alderson (2012). It is a human ecological model affirming biologic realities and the formative importance of social interactions and environment. The three stages of developing a positive LGBTI identity delineated by Alderson are: (a) before coming out, (b) during coming out, and (c) beyond coming out. His description of the dynamics of what marks these stages resonates with the process dynamics of the endings, neutral zone, and beginnings of Bridge's (2001) model of adult life transitions.¹

This model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Ecological Model of LGBTI Identity

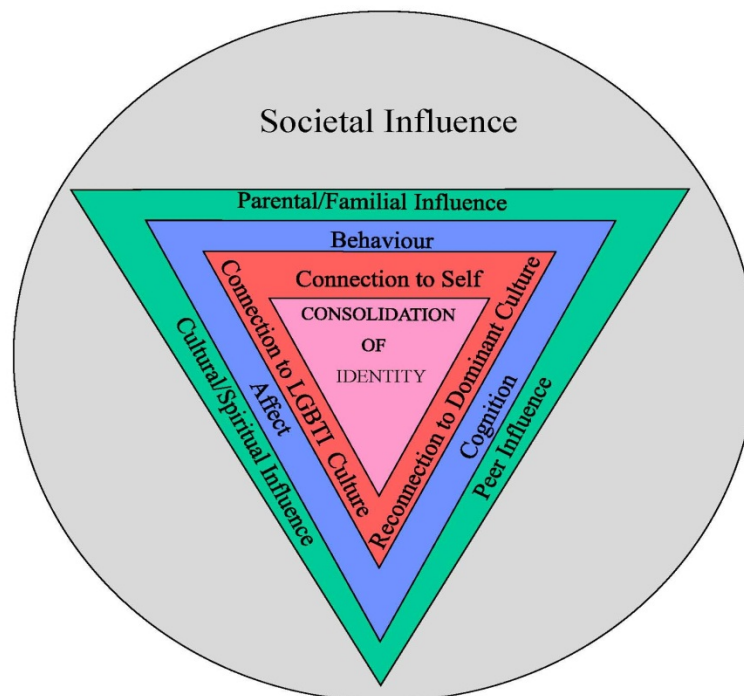


Figure 1. Alderson's (2012) Ecological Model (reproduced from p. 39 with permission of the author).

As Alderson (2012) points out, this model locates the individual's coming to identity formation in a broad context of social and cultural forces that influence and shape each person's life. In relation to gay men, the multidimensional aspect of sexual/affective orientation as involving not only biological arousal but also affect and cognitive engagement is also very explicitly part of this model. The impact of claiming for oneself a non-dominant sexual identity involves navigating relationships that are

similarly multidimensional: developing a cogent and integrative sense of self, relating to the dominant culture and its implicit and explicit assumptions, and establishing relationships with those similarly identifying a non-dominant sexual identity.

A challenge for a static two-dimensional model presented in printed format is how to capture the impact of environmental dynamics in an individual's life and relationships over time. There is no easy way of illustrating the at times complex interactive impact of social, cultural, and relational factors that form the environment in which a person's identity grows and continues to develop throughout the life cycle. Such changes and challenges can be lived in experiences of conflict related to the impact of one's claiming a non-dominant sexual identity or their disclosing of that to others.

The importance of identity achievement and identity affirmation, as relating to psychological well-being, has been demonstrated in research carried out by Ghavami, Fingerhut, Peplau, Grant, and Wittig (2011). In their research with ethnic and sexual minority samples, identity achievement and identity affirmation are used in the following way:

.... *identity achievement* is used to refer to cognitive processes of exploring and understanding the meaning of one's identity. The term *identity affirmation* refers to the affective process of developing positive feelings and a strong sense of belonging to one's social group. (p. 79)

In their study analyzing gay and lesbian identity (281 gay men, 217 lesbians; age range, 18-76; $M = 32.73$), participants were given an adaptation of Phinney's Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure and four measures related to psychological well-being (a Satisfaction with Life Scale, Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, the Center for Epidemiological Studies

Depression Scale, and items from the State Trait Anxiety Inventory). The results showed a clear association between exploring identity with “greater feelings of affirmation” about one’s gay or lesbian identity and this “in turn predicted better psychological well-being” (p. 86).

Conflicts in coming-out. Examples of research dealing with conflicts arising from coming-out include: (a) exploring the impact of disclosure on immediate family members (Connolly, 2005; Williamson, 1998), (b) the impact on children of a parent who has come-out (Gottlieb, 2003; Murray & McClintock, 2005; Vervoort, 1999), and (c) the impact on the spouse when heterosexually married to a partner who has come-out (Buxton, 2005; Grever, 2001; Pearcey, 2005).

One by-product of experiencing homophobia can be an internalized sense of shame in the lives of gay men (Kaufman & Raphael, 1996). Another not infrequent occurrence is the internalizing of homophobia in those identifying as gay (Alderson, 1999, 2002). In Kaufman’s treatment of shame and gay identity, he articulates the challenge for any minority grouping in society to achieve positive identity (Kaufman, 1992). By very definition, minorities are “different from,” lacking power, and are “out” groups (Kilianski, 2003). For those in North American society who are gay and whose ethnicity is Black, Latino, Aboriginal, or Asian, there is another layer of “minority” status related to the intersection of ethnicity with gay issues (Barney, 2003; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Poon, 2004). Minority status, whatever one’s sexual orientation, brings with it stress and impacts health and wellness (Astin & Forys, 2004; Meyer, 2003a, 2003b).

The closet. Being *in the closet* refers to an individual's being aware of but not acknowledging their affectional or sexual orientation, or of hiding that sexual/affectional orientational identity from others, whether family, friends, or others. With the shift that continues to take place in our postmodern world of thought and influence of social constructionism, it is interesting to note how discussion regarding the closet, and being *in* or *out* of the closet, is expanding. In some dialogues, there is a movement from intense discussions of the pro and con ethics dealing with rights to privacy, the closet, and outing (see, for example, Mayo, 1994; McCarthy, 1994), to a contextualized postmodern exploration of the closet potentially being a place within which to move and find freedom of being (Fisher, 2003). Reflecting on the ethnographic study of immigrant Russian gay and lesbian individuals in West Hollywood, Fisher (2003) notes "We use the opportunities of unmarked closet space as a way of 'escaping prediction' and 'making do' in a world that enforces real consequences associated with sexual deviance and the betrayal of social norms" (p. 190).

There are, nonetheless, discernible impacts of individuals making a decision to conceal sexual/affectional orientation from others. Cole (2006) cites research indicating that there is an elevated risk of physical illness for gay men who engage in concealing behaviour. Stein, Beckerman, and Sherman (2010) report on research done with lesbian and gay elders who reported fears of rejection and of having to go back into the closet if they required long-term care. Willis (2011) reports on young adults' negotiating the workplace closet speaking of their "negotiating the shifting boundaries between visibility and invisibility within the workplace represents a secondary process of labor that is not required or expected of heterosexual employees" (p. 976). Whether young or

more elderly, stress takes its toll in the lives of gay men navigating the waters of disclosure vs. concealment of their sexual/affectional orientation.

Gay Men's Health and Wellness

Health Issues

While life is never without risk, for gay men, there are particular risk factors that can and do impact their health and well-being. While it is important to note the power and presence of stereotypes and stereotyping, it is also important to acknowledge those specific areas of concern shown to relate to particular health risks for GLBT individuals, and particularly gay men (Boysen, Vogel, Madon, & Wester, 2006; Dean et al., 2000). Frequent reference to concerns around drug and alcohol use, psychological distress (e.g., depression and anxiety), and risky sexual behaviour are cited in research focusing on GLBT adolescents as well as adults (Cochran, 2001; Gay and Lesbian Medical Association and LGBT Health Experts, 2001; Halkitis, Wilton, & Drescher, 2005; Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2001; Mail & Safford, 2003; Saewyc, 2011; Wright & Perry, 2006). More particularly, reference is often highlighted with regards to risky sexual behaviours, HIV/AIDS, and suicidality (Blechner, 2002; Cole, 2006; Kulkin, Chauvin, & Percle, 2000; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003; Wolitski, 2005).

The existence of homophobia, ignorance, and fear have been identified as creating barriers not only to research around GLBT health issues, but also as barriers present within health services, preventing the accessing of adequate and appropriate health care for GLBT individuals (Dean et al., 2000; Gay and Lesbian Medical Association and LGBT Health Experts, 2001). Mail and Safford (2003) note not only the importance of health care providers being aware of life-cycle dynamics particular to

GLBT individuals, but also the importance of the concept of wholeness when considering what constitutes health and well-being. In understanding wholeness as “a major frame of reference for an individual seeking to define him- or herself” they point out the dimensions of living that wholeness embraces: the physical, mental, social, and spiritual environments.

More recently, Isacco, Yallum, and Chromik (2012) have reviewed the growing literature regarding gay men’s health issues, noting in particular that much of this research is “based on a deficit model or a focus on diseases of gay men.” Addressing health practitioners, these researchers approach and contextualize gay men’s health from the perspectives of three theoretical models: minority stress, gender socialization, and identity development. This contextualization stresses, among other factors, the strengths of gay men and the importance of noting the multifaceted cultural, social, and age factors that impact health and wellness, the challenges to health and wellness, and the resources available to utilize in working towards health and wellness in each person.

Wellness, Wholeness, and Health

The focus on strengths and wellness, while not unacknowledged in the past, has more recently received greater attention and research. Psychology’s past has been marked by an intense focus on dysfunction. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have ironically commented that in amidst the Western world’s prosperity and stability “psychologists have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living” (p. 5). Lately, however, there has increasingly been a focus in the psychological literature on what contributes to wellness and health, wholeness, and strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In no small way, this has been heralded by the United Nation’s World Health

Organization (WHO), who defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 1946, p. 2). Models of wellness incorporating the biopsychosocial dynamics of living have also begun to emerge (Hoffman & Driscoll, 2000; Myers & Sweeney, 2005).

In formulating a model of what positively constitutes wellness, Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000) present a holistic model of wellness that identifies characteristics and dynamics of healthy people over their life span. In this model, spirituality is defined as “as awareness of a being or force that transcends the material aspects of life and gives a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to the universe.” In this model, this is seen as the core characteristic of healthy people and is the source of “all other dimensions of wellness” (p. 253). Myers and Sweeney (2008) defined spirituality as “personal beliefs and behaviors that are practised as part of the recognition that a person is more than the material aspects of mind and body” (p. 485).

In a similar vein, the development of a healthy and positive gay identity is the focus of Alderson’s (2003) ecological model of gay male identity. In Alderson’s model, as in the work of Myers and Sweeney (2008), one particular dynamic which can strongly influence health and wellness is that of spirituality.

In these particular models, spirituality is identified as a key dynamic that strongly influences, negatively or positively, the health and wellness of individuals. In approaching the exploration of the function and role of spirituality in the lives of gay men, the question remains as to how *spirituality* can be defined. While the methodology of my research elicited what spirituality means in each of the participant’s lived

experience, it is important to see how spirituality has been increasingly used and defined in a growing body of research literature in fields such as psychology, social work, and health.

Spirituality

As with definitions and understandings concerning sexual orientation, there are many different ways of understanding and defining what spirituality is, including how spirituality is related to religious frameworks of belief and practice (Miovic, 2004; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Spirituality and religion are not new phenomena. As the Dalai Lama has stated, “Throughout humanity’s long history, individuals and communities have looked to their religion and culture as a source of meaning and basic spiritual and ethical values” (Hitchcock, Esposito, & National Geographic Society [U.S.], 2004, p. 396). This ascribing universality to spirituality is further noted by Peterson and Seligman (2004).

... all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred, and divine force. Further, all religions seek to help people to grapple with core existential concerns... and posit rules and values that guide individuals’ relationships, as well as their efforts to cope with the travails of life.” (p. 601)

Religious systems often claim to speak for God, or to have a correct understanding of God’s being and relationship with the created order. All too often religious claims have been condemning of same gender attractions and behaviour (Fischer & DeBord, 2007). Conflict arises when these messages condemning as well as labeling these attractions and behaviour as perverted, evil and distorted, are heard by those who, for instance, claim a gay identity. When these values and understandings

conflict, how is this terrain traversed by non-dominant sexual minorities? More particularly touching on this research—how does this play out in the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men? Such are the questions that have fueled my research journey.

Spirituality and Religion: Conflations and Distinctions

The landscape of religious systems and spiritual expressions is a terrain rich and complex. Speaking about spirituality leads to speaking about religion for most people. There is no singular agreed upon definition of either concept, or an agreed upon clear delineation of the distinction between the two (Franch, 2008; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Maher & Hunt, 1993; Spilka, 2003; Tsuang & Simpson, 2008). Indeed, there is considerable overlap of understanding regarding these terms and the experiences they seek to identify (Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Additionally, there are not only distinctions in beliefs and practices between major religious or spiritual traditions, but also great variation within each (Beaver, 1994). The experiencing of this landscape is further fashioned by the interface with factors such as cultural ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation, and the contextualizing of these in the midst of particular historical and political forces and influences (Cervantes & Parham, 2005).

The Royal College of Psychiatrists' leaflet *Spirituality and Mental Health* (2010) distinguishes spirituality from religion in this way:

Spirituality is not tied to any particular religious belief or tradition. Although culture and beliefs can play a part in spirituality, every person has their own unique experience of spirituality - it can be a personal experience for anyone,

with or without a religious belief. It's there for anyone. Spirituality also highlights how connected we are to the world and other people (p. 1).

Further, in terms of defining spirituality, they offer the following:

Spirituality involves experiences of:

- a deep-seated sense of meaning and purpose in life
- a sense of belonging
- a sense of connection of the deeply personal with the universal
- acceptance, integration and a sense of wholeness.

These experiences are part of being human..... Spirituality emphasises the healing of the person, not just the disease. It views life as a journey, where good and bad experiences can help you to learn, develop and mature (p. 1).

This positive openness to and framing of spirituality is indicative of the change in interest and research that has marked the past 30 years. At the turn of the 20th century with thinkers like William James, and in the field of psychiatry, Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, there was considerable interest in exploring religious experience and its impact in the lives of individuals. With the rise of behaviourism, social science in general shied away from exploring religious or spiritual experience. Spilka et al. (2003) and Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) note that interest in empirical research regarding religion has revived since the mid twentieth century.

More recently, particularly over the past 30 years, there has been increased attention given to exploring the dynamics and role of spirituality and religion in the social sciences, especially in the theory and practice of counselling (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Gorsuch, 1988; Powers, 2005; Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004, 2005).

One evidence of this is seen in a dramatic increase in the number of journal articles and books indexed in the American Psychological Association's PsychINFO database concerning spirituality and counselling over the past 30 years (Helwig & Schmidt, 2011; Koenig, 2008; Powers, 2005) . Although neither expansive nor extensive, this recent exploration of the experience of spirituality is one touching on the presence and significance of spirituality in the lives of GLBT individuals (Boisvert, 2007; Bouldrey, 1995; De la Huerta, 1999; Shallenberger, 1998; Stuart, 1997, 2003; Tan, 2005). This is further evidenced with the production of the revised American Psychological Association's (2012) *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients*, in which "psychologists are encouraged to consider the influences of religion and spirituality in the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons" (Guideline 12, p. 20-21). The diversity of both the influence and experience of religion and spirituality is noted in this particular guideline as being:

complex, dynamic, and often a source of ambivalence. Such is the case because their experience, especially with organized religion, is varied and diverse. While some religious and spiritual belief systems are relatively neutral about diverse sexual orientations (e.g., Buddhism and Hinduism), others historically have been more condemnatory (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, and Islam). Even within religious traditions which have been historically disapproving of non-heterosexual orientations, there has been an emerging and growing theological paradigm in the past 20 to 30 years that accepts and supports diverse sexual orientations. (p. 20)

Peterson and Seligman (2004) identify five contemporary approaches to investigating religious and spiritual life: (a) seeking empirical measures of religious and spiritual domains; (b) exploring functional significance of these domains in human coping, relationships, and health; (c) examining the cognitive, meaning making, and emotional dimensions of these domains; (d) studying social patterns and impact of involvement with relation to these domains; and (e) exploring the neurophysiology of religious and spiritual experiences. My research particularly deals with the meaning making gay men make of the role and function of spirituality in their lives. Its focus is primarily on the experience of *spirituality* rather than on the experience of specifically religious events, rites, or rituals. Naming this distinction acknowledges the ongoing sets of issues regarding the definition, delineation, as well as inter-relatedness of spirituality and religiousness, which continues to be variously articulated in both research and reflective literature.

Defining Spirituality

Bernard Spilka (Spilka et al., 2003) commented that spirituality is “a word that embraces obscurity with passion” (p. 8). Although there is considerable overlap and variety of understandings, the following is one of the more expressive and expansive definitions of spirituality:

... the animating force in life, represented by such images as breath, wind, vigour and courage. Spirituality is the infusion and drawing out of spirit in one's life. It is experienced as an active and passive process...a capacity and tendency [to move towards] knowledge, love, meaning, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, compassion, wellness, and wholeness. Spirituality includes one's

capacity for creativity, growth, and the development of a value system.

Spirituality encompasses a variety of phenomena, including experiences, beliefs, and practices...provides a sense of connection to life, to nature, and to others which goes beyond the physical limits of one's own biological mortality (Association for Spiritual Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling , n.d., p. 2).

This definition reflects research reporting discovery of the sacred in everyday life (Adams, 1996). It also mirrors the results of Ingersoll's (1998) use of a panel of leaders from various spiritual traditions to refine the dimensions of spiritual wellness. Additionally, this dovetails with the attributes of spirituality identified by Ho and Ho (2007) in that it: (a) addresses existential or transcendent questions; (b) belongs to a domain of "cardinal" values that underpin an individual's life and decision making; and (c) is metacognitive (i.e., an individual is not only self-aware but is aware of his or her relationship to self and non-self).

Spirituality as a concept is differentiated from religiousness to a greater or lesser degree by some but not all researchers (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). A particular differentiating definition is given by Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi (1975) who define religion as "a system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals directed towards such a power" (p. 1).² However definitions may evolve in the research literature, religiousness and spirituality are constructs that point to fundamental human processes and phenomena (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). The experience of these constructs has also been explored developmentally across the life-span.

Spirituality, Health, and Human Growth

Exploring spirituality has taken a number of different directions in research. Some of these directions have been focusing on development and life span dynamics of spirituality (Boyatzis, 2005; Levenson, Aldwin, & D'Mello, 2005; McFadden, 2005). Fukuyama and Sevig (1999) explore spirituality through a lens of culture, and also note several examples of models of faith/spiritual development (see also Fowler, 1981; Moody & Carroll, 1997; Oman & Thoresen, 2003).

While it is far beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate the validity of claims regarding spirituality, health, and religion, it is important to note the increase of studies that focus on the relationship between these factors (Hussain, 2011; Seeman, Dubin, & Seeman, 2003; Thoresen, Oman, & Harris, 2005). Two arenas of particular interest exploring spirituality and health deal with clients living with HIV/AIDS and those who are older adults (Hampton, Halkitis, & Mattis, 2010; Holt, Houg, & Romano, 1999; Jernigan, 2001; Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, & Canda, 2007; Nelson-Becker, 2004; Ridge, Williams, Anderson, & Elford, 2008; Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002).

In addition to exploring the dynamics of health, wellness, and spirituality, research has also examined the relationship of spirituality and identity in adulthood. In this regard, Erik Erikson's "psychoanalytic, developmental, and teleological" (Hoare, 2009, p. 187) views on adult psycho-social development and the nature of the spiritual in adult development continue to be explored. . As Hoare further notes, in Eriksonian thinking: "The sense of self as a spiritual being is a necessary compatriot of adult vitality and of the ethical that is encased in a mature identity" (p. 188; see also Kiesling & Sorell, 2009). Ghavami et al. (2011) draw in part on Erikson in developing a model that

explores the relationship between psychological well-being and identity achievement in both ethnic and sexual minority individuals.

Identity achievement is used to refer to cognitive processes of exploring and understanding the meaning of one's identity. The term *identity affirmation* refers to the affective process of developing positive feelings and a strong sense of belonging to one's social group. (p. 79)

Ghavami et al.'s (2011) research posits that initial questioning, exploring, and coming to better understand one's own minority identity can be foundational for "developing positive feelings about and a sense of belonging to one's minority identity, which in turn contributes to psychological well-being (p. 87). This process of identity achievement enables a positive identification with others sharing that identity, and that in turn provides positive and affirming psychological benefits for that person.

The Christian tradition has a long history of relating health and wellness to spirituality and ritual (Ellsworth & Ellsworth, 2010; Kelsey, 1973; Shuman & Meador, 2003), and current research is now including spiritual traditions from the West and the East (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005; Levin, 2001; Turner, Fox, Center, & Kiser, 2006). Throughout time, there have been those who have exhibited non-dominant sexual attractions and behaviour and who found their religious or spiritual identity within the Christian tradition, and as members of that tradition, sought health and wellness in its sources of spirituality and ritual (Boswell, 1980; Bouldrey, 1995; Countryman & Ritley, 2001; Goss, 1993; Shallenberger, 1996, 1998; Stuart, 2003). It has been a seeking, however, and not without challenges.

Ongoing Dynamics Impacting Gay Men's Lives and Spirituality

Several dynamics continue to affect organized Judeo-Christian religious attitudes toward sexuality and, in particular, those who identify as gay. Given that the institutions of organized religions have been key in the transmission of spiritual traditions and expressions, it is important to note some of the dynamics that impact the interpretation and living out of those traditions.

The first dynamic is that of a chasm that has particularly existed in the Judeo-Christian tradition between spirituality and sexuality in general (Turner, Center, & Kiser, 2004; Turner et al., 2006). The often fearful negativity turned judgment expressed around the power of physical sexual drives and expression has been hurtful and harmful to many. At the same time, there have been voices that have sought to bridge this chasm. Most recently, this is witnessed in an increasingly articulate gay, lesbian, and queer theological voice that is affirming of bodily expressed sexuality and its positive relationship with spirituality (Ellison, 1996; Cheng, 2011).

A second dynamic is that of the frequently experienced struggle of those seeking to live into, and affirm, a positive gay identity in the face of many harsh judging religious voices. These voices have in past, and the present, condemned both the person and their expression of same-gender sexual attraction. For example, the Roman Catholic Catechism states that homosexual acts and inclination are “intrinsically” and “objectively disordered” (Roman Catholic Church, 1993, Part 3, section 2, article 6, I.2357-2358). Similarly within the worldwide Anglican Communion, there are voices which join in condemning the “evil of homosexuality which is a perversion of human dignity” (Akinola, 2006, p. 1).

Not surprisingly, in response to these attitudes are voices within the gay and lesbian communities that urge individuals to leave such homophobic institutional religious organizations and pursue their own solitary quest (Barret & Barzan, 1996). In the midst of these tensions, and in many ways despite them, are yet other voices affirming a positive expression of same-gender sexuality, a positive spirituality, and a presence within those, at times, oppressive religious institutions (Boisvert, 2007; Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001; Cheng, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Ritter & O'Neill, 1989; Tan, 2005; Yip, 2002).

A third dynamic arises from recent debates and legislation regarding the civil definition of marriage. This manifests itself both in terms of a growing and ongoing debate around blessing same gender unions in many mainstream Christian denominations as well as in Reform and Conservative Judaism. With some religious denominations, the question moves beyond a blessing of same-gender relationships and extends to debate around whether these denominations will provide officially sanctioned rites and rituals to enable same-gender marriage taking place in their congregations. This continues to be an ongoing point of debate within the Anglican Church of Canada (Anglican Church of Canada, 2010).

While the presence itself of same-gender couples in society, and in religious groups, is not just a recent modern phenomenon (Boswell, 1995; Bray, 2003), there is a greater visibility and recognition of these couples today. Over the past few decades in North America and Europe, there have been many within and outside gay and lesbian communities working for the legal rights of marriage to be extended to those same-gender couples desiring marriage. On the other hand, and as has been mentioned, there

have been religious voices expressing rejection even of thinking of the possibility of same-gender marriages (Ratzinger & Amato, 2003). Into this mix rise some voices speaking from within a queer theoretical framework, challenging the hegemonic heteronormativity of marriage as an institution (Grindstaff, 2003). In the midst of these debates and controversies, there are many same-gender couples who are creatively shaping identities as married couples (Lahey & Alderson, 2004) and who seek institutionalized religious organizations to bless and celebrate their relationships.

The Anglican Communion consists of approximately 80 million members worldwide, representing 44 regional and national member churches in 160 countries. It is a communion of churches that remains highly divided with regards to issues of non-heterosexual relationships (Brown, 2006). The Anglican Church of Canada is one of those national member churches. In this crucible of liturgical and theological expression can also be found a full range of positions regarding the dynamics surrounding the nature of inclusion or exclusion of gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual individuals and their significant relationships. These issues continue to generate great upheaval both in institutional Anglican ecclesial life, and more particularly in the lives of those who have in the past, or continue in the present, to identify themselves with this particular branch of Christendom (Bates, 2004; Linzey & Kirker 2005; Wilton & Wall, 2011).

Exploring the Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men

Quantitative and Qualitative

Over the past half century there has been a growing amount of empirical quantitative research carried out regarding GLBT persons, identity, development, relationships, and health. This research, however, has been hampered by a lack of

coherent theoretical frameworks. It has as well faced sampling challenges marked not only by generally small numbers of subjects, but also by the composition of these samples, notably for the most part Caucasian, middle-class, individuals. Quantitative studies have also been criticized regarding consistency and definition of both the nature and measurement of independent and dependent variables utilized in these studies (Bieschke et al., 2000; Bieschke et al., 2007). An empiricist approach, while useful in identifying trends, causal relationships, the effects of defined variables, and correlational relationships between variables, is limited in its ability to explore the richness of individual experience. It is individual experience in its local and wider context that is particularly pertinent in the field of counselling psychology.

Qualitative methods have been identified as being particularly useful in assuming a different perspective on the experience of GLBT individuals (LaSala, 2005). Over the past 35 years, there has been an identifiable increase in the number of qualitative studies regarding health, spirituality, and religion. This has been marked by a definite trend of increased focus on spirituality and a decreased emphasis on religion during this period of time (Weaver et al., 2006). Comparatively speaking, a relatively small number of quantitative and qualitative studies have focused on spirituality, religion, gay identity, and same-sex relationships.

Over the past 10 years, various published journal quantitative studies have explored a number of areas. In the arena of health, research has been carried out with such focus points as: (a) the interactions of sexual identity, gender, and religious or spiritual identity on college student substance use (Eliason, Burke, van Olphen, & Howell, 2011); as well as (b) the psychological health and current faith affirmation

experiences, internalized homonegativity, and spirituality (Lease et al., 2005). In terms of focusing on spirituality, studies have explored such things as: (a) the importance of spirituality among gay and lesbian individuals (Tan, 2005); and (b) religious conflicts experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

Exploring assumptions concerning contemporary gay adolescent spirituality is also a focus of recent research, one of these studies also examined the relevance of previous research carried out with this population in light of the great social and cultural changes that have taken recently taken place (Johnston & Stewart, 2011).

On the other hand, there have also been a number of qualitative studies exploring such topics as the spiritual experiences and challenges of gay and lesbian college students (Birch, 2011; Love et al., 2005), as well as exploring the interaction of spiritual identity and experiences with being lesbian or gay (Love et al., 2005). Other research has focused on the experience of specific religious and ethnic groups, such as the experience of gay Mormon men and the coping methods they employ in reconciling faith and sexuality (Goodwill, 2000). Another particular focus of research has taken place exploring the experience of spirituality interfacing with living with HIV/AIDS (e.g. Miller, R., 2000), as well as exploring the role of spirituality in HIV prevention strategies (e.g. with young black men who have sex with men in Foster, Arnold, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2011). In addition to these directions in research there have been other areas of research such as exploring “the ability of stigmatized social actors to invent social biographies not only to defend their moral choices, but also to challenge the credibility of sources that question and stigmatize their choices” (Yip, 1999, p. 47).

Particularities Shaping This Research

Of particular interest as I approached my own research were the explorations of three different studies. Yip's (2002) quantitative research explored the role of institutional religious authority as opposed to the authority of the self in the lives of self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians. Coyle and Rafalin (2000), utilizing qualitative methodology, explored the question of the presence of identity conflict experienced by Jewish men who self-identified as being both gay and religious. They explored both the presence of experienced identity conflict, and the strategies which these individuals used to cope with that conflict. Rodriguez's (2006) research used a large sample of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals in exploring their religious and spiritual lives, and the conflict as well as the integration that can occur between their identified sexual orientation and their religious or spiritual beliefs.

Yip's (2002) research found a decreasing influence of religious institutional authority on participants' attitudes towards sexuality and spirituality. His mixed-methods study included 565 self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals (age range = 18 - 76). Yip commented that his findings lend credence to the "popular argument that in late modern society, the religious landscape as well as the construction and management of religious identities and expressions are increasingly characterized by privatization, individuation, self-reflexivity, and a consumerist ethic" (p. 210).

The qualitative study of Coyle and Rafalin (2000) explored Jewish gay men's accounts of negotiating cultural, religious, and sexual identity. Utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as its method of inquiry, Coyle and Rafalin explore the experience of 21 men (age $M = 37.2$, range 19-67) in Great Britain concurrently

identifying as being Jewish and being gay. This study focused on how these men developed a gay identity, how they experienced the dynamics of this identity interacting with that of being Jewish and what, if any, were the difficulties and conflicts that emerged, and how were they resolved. All but one of these participants indicated that at different times in their lives they experienced times of struggle to reconcile their identity as being both Jewish and gay. Sources of conflict arose around both traditional Jewish religious condemnations of same gender acts as well as cultural expectations. In particular this focused on the expectation of creating one's own family. Approximately 50% of the participants "described parental concerns about their sons not marrying, not creating a Jewish home and a Jewish family and not providing them with grandchildren" (p. 34). Coping with these conflicts took various forms including changing their relationship with Jewish synagogue and religious life, others exercised caution in sharing personal information with others in the Jewish community. Those experiencing negative reactions from the religious community were reported to often engage in disputing the right of the other person to judge them in this way and delegitimizing their views, thereby reducing any identity threat that these responses might have created (such as their potentially corrosive effect upon self-esteem or the attribution of negative distinctiveness to the person). (p. 37)

Rodriguez's (2006) dissertation was a quantitative study of religion, spirituality, conflict, and integration in gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of faith. His purpose was: (a) to explore the religious and spirituals lives of a large sample of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) individuals ($N = 750$); (b) to explore the conflict that can occur between these individuals' sexual orientation and religious/spiritual beliefs; and (c) to explore the

integration that can occur between these individuals' GLB and religious/spiritual identities. Findings showed not only a “flight of GLB individuals from established Christian denominations” (p. 68), but also that while attendance at religious services might be low, the presence and importance of beliefs and spirituality remained high, albeit not without the presence of experiencing conflict.

In Canada, North America, and Europe, there appears to be the following occurring: (a) growing trends of disaffiliation with the authoritativeness of religious institutions; (b) a sustained and increasing interest in expressing spirituality; and (c) a persistent presence of conflict. Questions arise regarding the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men. What is the role and function of spirituality in their lived experience? This particular focus of attention has thus far not been explored in research literature (however, for examples of personal biographical and anecdotal accounts, see Bouldrey, 1995; Lake, 1999; McNeill, 1998; Shallenberger, 1998).

Proposing a qualitative research approach to this question was not only appropriate given the gap in knowledge about this experience of gay men, but also is appropriate to gain an understanding of the richness of that experience. Additionally, qualitative research has long been engaged with studies regarding non-dominant sexualities (Gamson, 2000; Smith et al., 2009). This is particularly true because of this method's openness in inviting the voice and experience of the non-dominant marginalized to be heard. It is with a curiosity and desire to explore and better understand these lived experiences that IPA is being chosen as an appropriate methodological path for this research.

While semi-structured interviewing, and transcriptions of those interviews, is the primary source of data in IPA, a participant's responses to a researcher's questions are not the only source of potential data that can be used to more fully explore lived experience. Some studies utilizing IPA have also used other sources of data in addition to the question and dialogue interview process. These other sources have included focus groups, observational notes, diaries, and email (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The broader qualitative research literature also identifies artistic and photographic images as a rich source of information and understanding of experience.

Symbols and the creation of symbols permeate and express religious and spiritual experience and narrative across times and cultures (Hitchcock et al., 2004; Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi, & Jaffe, 1964). "Symbols serve as the connection between reality and human thought and fantasy. Through making visual images the capacity to symbolize is developed... [and] is a link to other complex mental representations (images, fantasies, thoughts, concepts, intuitions and dreams)" (Long, 2004, p. 318). Images serve more than representations of things imagined or in our midst; they are in fact a rich source of data because they can capture an experience or perspective that cannot be so captured with quantifications or even with words (Rich, 2002). Photographic images can be a source of such images.

The Canadian photographer, Freeman Patterson (1979), identifies characteristics that differentiate photography from other visual arts, including: (a) in photography you are always confronting some aspect of the world around you, "every photograph is a document of something, no matter how unrecognizable" (p. 86); (b) photographs have the capacity to render detail and can force us to take notice of things we might ordinarily

miss; and (c) a photographer chooses the right time and place for taking a photograph, whether by design or by chance opportunity. These characteristics have marked the use of photography in ethnographic and sociological studies (Ball & Smith, 1992; Denton, 2005; Harper, 2003; Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). In the world of psychology, photography has been utilized in counselling and therapeutic settings (Weiser, 1999, 2004) and in qualitative psychological research (Barbee, 2002; Darbyshire, Macdougall, & Schiller, 2005; Miller & Happell, 2006; Szto, Furman, & Langer, 2005; Turner, 2005).

Particularly germane to my proposed research is Turner's (2005) phenomenological study of the experience and understanding of hope in the lives of 10 Australian adolescents. Participants were given disposable colour film cameras and asked to "to imagine that they were being paid to mount a photographic exhibition on hope, and to take photographs that depicted hope to them" (Turner, p. 510). Two weeks later the cameras were collected, photographs developed, and these then became stimuli for conversation and verbally exploring in depth the experience of hope in these individuals' lives.

A similar study was done using participant photographs in a study of the meaning of hope for people living with schizophrenia (Miller & Happell, 2006). Reflecting on the use of participant photography, Miller and Happell (2006) commented "The contrast between the data derived from participants using photographs as opposed to those who did not, suggests that participant photography is a potentially useful tool for research involving abstract and subjective concepts" (p. 1062). It was my intention

in this study to utilize participant taken photographs as another vehicle of discovering the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men.

In IPA, as with other interpretative approaches in qualitative research methodology, the researcher is not an absent or distant observer, but rather is active participant in the research process. What the researcher brings to the process of research in terms of their beliefs, biases, and basis of interest and connection to the focus of exploration, need to be taken into account as part of the research process (Fine, 2007; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007; Yeh & Inman, 2007).

CHAPTER 3 -- METHODOLOGY

Increasingly qualitative research methodology has gained contemporary standing as a legitimate research approach. This is particularly true in the study of human experience and its meaning (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2008). Qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” and that studies things “in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches have been utilized in studies of both religion as well as the experience of spirituality (Hood et al., 2009). Frequently cited maxims concerning the constitutive markers of the quality of a research project point to: (a) the appropriateness of a chosen research method to the research questions being explored; (b) the skill in applying that method; and (c) the ways in which findings are interpreted, “in light of appropriate theoretical concepts” (Coyle, 2008, p. 59).

The question propelling this present research is, *What is the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men?* It is an exploratory question, one in which the parameters are not predetermined (for example, personality or characterological variables), except for the initial recruitment criteria. The intent is to articulate the richness of spirituality in the lives of these men. It is this kind of exploration that particularly underlies qualitative approaches in research (Ashworth, 2003), and which suggests this approach as most appropriate for this research project.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the methodology. It offers a means of exploring both the lived experience of these individuals and the

meaning of those experiences. As its very name indicates, IPA is phenomenological in providing an approach for describing lived experience, and it is interpretative in its engaging of both participants and researcher in articulating what the meaning of this experience is or might be. As a research methodology, IPA provides opportunity for employing what Coyle (2010) names as “a pluralist interpretative stance” (p. 81). This approach is named as one open to applying and exploring different epistemological, ontological, and theoretical perspectives to the same data, in order “to produce rich, multilayered, multiperspective readings of any qualitative data set” (p. 81). Coyle notes that when researching questions and topics about which, for example there is no agreement regarding ontological claims “and where ontological discussions can become polarised.... a stance of interpretative pluralism which its diverse “ways of looking” seems highly appropriate (p. 81). This is a pertinent consideration when exploring the experience of spirituality.

IPA was also chosen for its openness to include both verbal and nonverbal participant data, as well as its attention to the nature of the presence and engagement of the researcher in the research process. In this process of research, data was collected through both semi-structured interviews and through photographs and other images taken and chosen by participants. Participants were asked to take these photographs to depict in some way their experience of the phenomena under study. Increasingly in qualitative research, attention is brought to bear not only on the research participants, but also on the person, experience, and role of the researcher, as this person engages the research process (Finlay, 2002, 2008). IPA explicitly addresses the interpretative role of the researcher in making sense of the meanings attributed to participants’ experiences as

they themselves are invited to share their understandings and descriptions of their own experience.

Following a brief description of the philosophical underpinnings and the general methodological approach of IPA, the research design for this study will be presented, including the steps involved in recruiting participants, data gathering and management, and the tools and procedures utilized in data analysis will be identified. The individuals participating in this research will be described, and the procedures utilized in working towards ensuring both integrity and quality of data gathering and data analysis will be outlined.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA has emerged fairly recently in Great Britain within the field of health psychology as a qualitative research methodology. Increasingly, IPA has been utilized in ever widening research fields and disciplines (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). IPA's approach can be understood to steer a pragmatic middle ground between post-positivist and social constructionist ontologies. IPA posits a reality of bodily "states" of the persons at the centre of its focus (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997). It is exploring and interpreting the experience and the ways of meaning making of these real persons that is the focus of IPA's research approach.

As its name implies, IPA is linked with both the intellectual streams of phenomenology and hermeneutics. An additional distinguishing marker of IPA is that its approach is idiographic. That is to say that this method focuses on exploring the richness of individual cases in contrast to nomothetic approaches which conflate individual cases into an aggregate that is then analyzed (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith points out that Husserl's philosophical approach to understanding the content of our experience and its context has not only influenced IPA but also the wider expanse of phenomenological psychology, of which IPA is a part. What Husserl's work commenced was a formulating of a phenomenological philosophical approach to understanding phenomena, that is, those things we experience as comprising part of our existence. This was a quest for understanding the natural daily world of living (*Lebenswelt*). From the philosophical theoretical perspective of Husserl's concern with how we come to understand phenomena, Martin Heidegger's work focused on *Dasein* ("there-being"). It is an existential focus on the person in their lived relationship and engagement with and in the world. For IPA, the key important ideas from Heidegger's work are

Firstly, that human beings can be conceived of as "thrown into" a world of objects, relationships, and language; secondly, that our being-in-the-world is always perspectival, always temporal, and always 'in-relation-to' something – and consequently, that the interpretation of people's meaning-making activities is central to phenomenological inquiry in psychology." (Smith et al., 2009, p. 18)

Additionally, the contributions of Merleau-Ponty and his focus on embodiment and J. P. Sartre's focus on the process of becoming are understood as being key contributing ideas underpinning IPA.

Amongst its roots, IPA also draws on the contribution of symbolic interactionism "with its concern for how meanings are constructed by individuals within both a social and a personal world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 52). The ways in which access is gained to the meanings individuals create and claim is through their "tell[ing] their own

story, in their own words, about the topic under investigation” (Smith, et al., 1997, p. 68). This account then is subject to an analysis by the researcher whose own conceptions also enter the reflective research process. “The resultant analytic account can therefore be said to be the joint product of the reflection by both participant and researcher” (Smith, et al., 1997, p. 68). This process of interpretation is what hermeneutics is about.

Hermeneutics has a long history, not the least of which has been in the exegesis of sacred texts (Crotty, 1998; Klemm, 1986). In exploring the philosophical rootedness of IPA, Smith points to Schleiermacher’s approach to the interpretative process as being one of coming to understand not just a text in isolation but also understanding the author and all those contextual factors that framed that author’s experience of writing that text (Smith et al., 2009). To this is added the contributions of H. G. Gadamer to understanding the hermeneutic process the focus of which is not to isolate the context of the search for meaning to, for example, the person and his or her experiencing, but this process is one that involves “the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices” (Gadamer, Weinsheimer, & Marshall, 2004, p. 271). Eatough and Smith (2008) point to Heidegger’s conceptualization of hermeneutics as being not just a method, but that “the very nature of Being-in-the-world is hermeneutic” (p. 180).

The hermeneutic endeavour is a dynamic one of discovering within the experience the meaning that is made by the person. Furthermore, it is about the researcher’s meaning making interpretation of that person and their experience of meaning making. Thus, Smith and Osborn (2003) refer to this process of exploration that marks IPA as one of a two stage or “double hermeneutic” (p. 51). The hermeneutic

process is a dialogic one, and one that iteratively moves between part and whole in what is commonly referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA is also characterized as being idiographic. In other words, it has as its primary focus the particular rather than a nomothetic quest in search of group commonalities. However, it is a focus on the particular within its embedded context of living and life in a particular context. Analysis does not stop with that of the individual case, but moves and “brings us closer to significant aspects of the general” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32). IPA thus can explore the comparison of individual cases and noting their commonalities and divergences which in turn can lead to “a cautious climb up the ladder of generality, seeking for universal structure but reaching them only by a painful, step by step approach” (Harre, quoted in Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 183).

IPA studies utilize small and fairly homogeneous sample sizes ranging, for example, from 1 to 30 (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith & Eatough, 2006). The means of collecting data is primarily through semi-structured interviews permitting “the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of... the participants’ responses” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 55). The importance of using smaller sample sizes was noted in one study as “as potentially subtle inflections of meaning may be lost in the analytical process of coding large swathes of transcribed interview data” (Collins & Nicolson, 2002, p. 626).

While semi-structured interviewing, and transcriptions of those interviews, is the primary source of data in IPA, a participant’s responses to a researcher’s questions are not the only source of potential data that can be used to more fully explore lived experience. Some studies utilizing IPA have also used other sources of data in addition

to the question and dialogue interview process. These other sources have included focus groups, observational notes, diaries, and email (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The broader qualitative research literature also identifies artistic and photographic images as a distinctive and rich source of information and understanding of experience (Banks, 2007).

The creation and depiction of symbols in artistic images permeate and express religious and spiritual experience and narrative across times and cultures (Hitchcock et al., 2004; Jung et al., 1964).

Symbols serve as the connection between reality and human thought and fantasy.

Through making visual images the capacity to symbolize is developed.... [and] is a link to other complex mental representations (images, fantasies, thoughts, concepts, intuitions and dreams). (Long, 2004, p. 318)

Images serve more than representations of things imagined or in our midst; they are in fact a rich source of data because they can capture an experience or perspective that cannot be so captured with quantifications or even with words (Rich, 2002).

Photographic images can be a source of such images.

The Canadian photographer, Freeman Patterson (1979), identifies characteristics that differentiate photography from other visual arts. As was stated previously, these include: (a) in photography you are always confronting some aspect of the world around you, “every photograph is a document of something, no matter how unrecognizable” (p. 86); (b) photographs have the capacity to render detail and can force us to take notice of things we might ordinarily miss; (c) a photographer chooses the *right* time and place for taking a photograph, whether by design or by chance opportunity. These characteristics

have marked the use of photography in ethnographic and sociological studies (Ball & Smith, 1992; Denton, 2005; Harper, 2003; Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). In the world of psychology, photography has been utilized in counselling and therapeutic settings (Weiser, 1999, 2004) and in qualitative psychological research (Barbee, 2002; Darbyshire et al., 2005; Miller & Happell, 2006; Szto et al., 2005).

In IPA, as with many other interpretative approaches in qualitative research methodology, the researcher is not an absent or distant observer, but rather is active participant in the research process. What the researcher brings to the process of research in terms of their beliefs, biases, and basis of interest and connection to the focus of exploration need to be taken into account as part of the research process (Fine, 2007; Suzuki et al., 2007; Yeh & Inman, 2007).

Participant Selection and Characteristics

A snowball method of recruitment was employed in order to reach and enlist sufficient numbers for inclusion in this study. This method is frequently used in qualitative research (Noy, 2008) and more particularly in GLBT studies (Meezan & Martin, 2003). Contact individuals were asked to inform others who might be interested in participating in this study. Contact individuals were provided with a recruitment notice briefly stating the purpose of the research along with contact information for obtaining further information (see Appendix A). The contact avenues were my private email address and my personal cell phone number.

During the initial stage of contact with potential participants, I utilized a recruitment script which presented information about what was entailed for those participating in the research (see Appendix B). The text was available in written format

for responding to those making contact by email, and was verbally read to those making contact by phone. Those who then choose to participate were asked to review and sign two copies of the ethics consent form prior to beginning interviews (one copy remained with the researcher and the other was given the participant; see Appendix C). The form and content of a consent agreement can be seen as “a way of spelling out [the researcher’s] obligations to the partnership, in addition to enumerating the protections available to potential participants” (Wheeler, as cited in Meezan & Martin, 2003, p. 9). This consent form also gave permission to the researcher to use participant provided photographs in electronic and print publication of research findings. It was further stipulated that any further use of these photographs would require seeking and receiving participant permission.

Participants having the following characteristics were sought for this research: (a) male; (b) identifying their sexual orientation as gay; (c) identifying as being an active present or former member of the Anglican Church of Canada³, (d) indicating that spirituality is an important identifiable dynamic in their lives; and (e) willing not only to engage in confidentially audio recorded semi-structured interviews, but also to take photographs (with a digital camera) that illustrated in whatever way they chose, something of their lived experience of spirituality. These photographs became the core focus of attention as participants engaged in the second interview in this research process.

Participants for this proposed study were initially solicited with the recruitment notice attached to an email sent to personal clergy and lay friends and acquaintances that were known by me who could pass the information on to those who might have interest

in participating. This initial contacting in part utilized the Integrity Canada listserve. These initial emails were sent to individuals in Calgary, Vancouver, and Toronto. At the same time, I placed a copy of the recruitment notice on my Facebook page and arranged for a notice about this research to be placed in an online information page of the gay magazine *Outlooks* based in Calgary. Responding emails began to be received the following day and within a month the first interview had been arranged. Two weeks following that first interview, further interviews with individuals in Ottawa and Toronto were scheduled.

Mutually agreed upon publically accessible spaces affording privacy were utilized for interviews (eight sets of interviews took place in hotel settings, three in private home dining room settings, and a further four in either in reserved university library study rooms or similar space). A total of 15 individuals were interviewed. One participant was dropped from the study due to the poor quality of the digital recordings of his two interviews which did not allow for their transcription. Of the remaining 14 participants, all participated in the first interview and all but one provided photographic images that then formed the basis of our second interview.

The figure below maps the recruitment process of these participants.

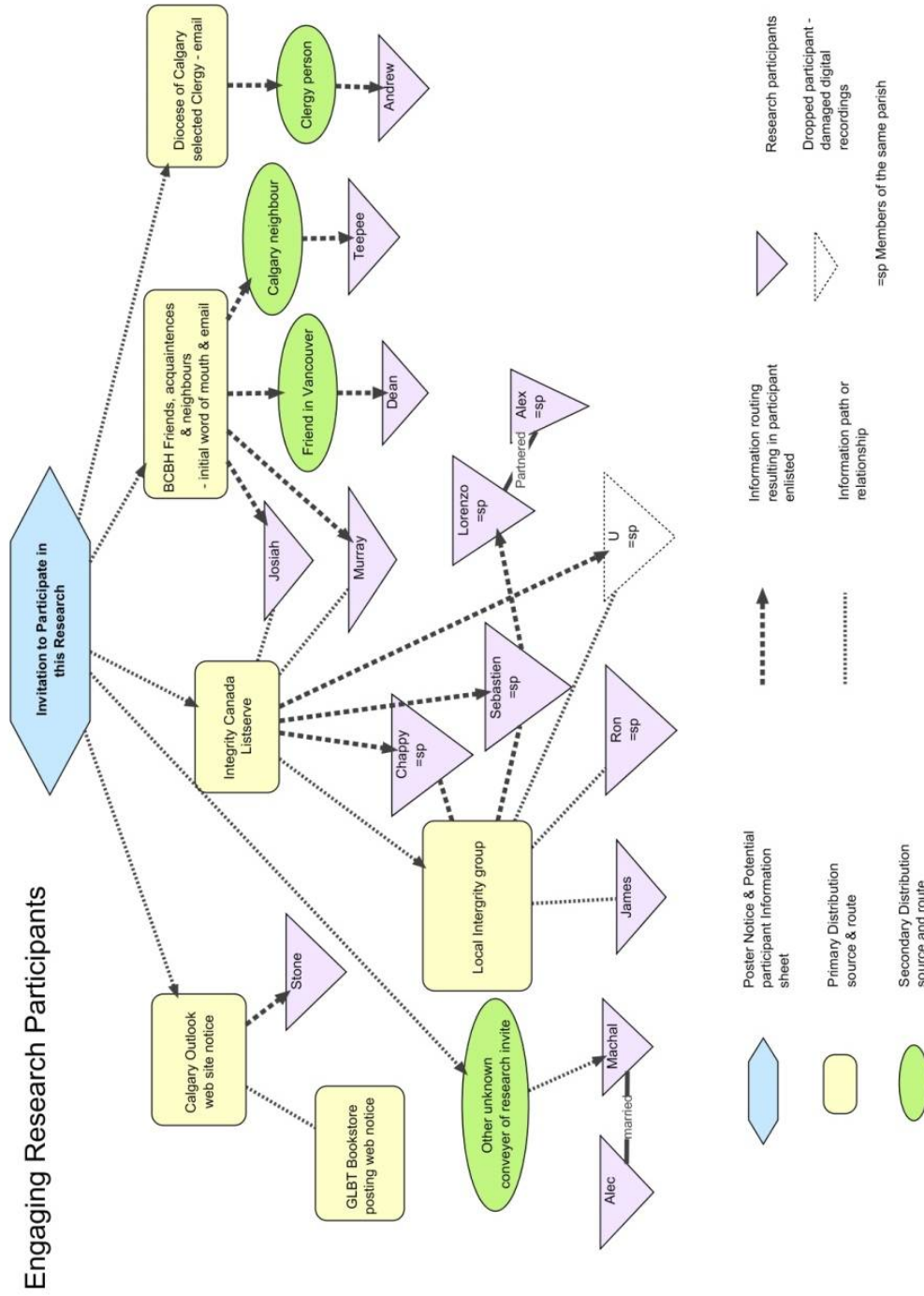


Figure 2. Tracing how participants learned of this research

Participants were male and Caucasian, 13 of whom were born in Canada and 1 in the United Kingdom. Table 1 presents selected demographic characteristics of these participants. Additionally, participants indicated that they have attended Anglican services at least once or twice a year over the past two years (11 of the 14 attend Anglican services at least once a month). All participants indicated that from time to time they attend other non-Anglican religious services or gatherings (such as Roman Catholic, United Church of Canada, Lutheran, Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian, and Buddhist).

Table 1.*Selected Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 14)***Age**

| | |
|-------|---|
| 25-37 | 5 |
| 42-58 | 5 |
| 62-71 | 4 |

Denominational Background

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Anglican | 3 |
| Christian Missionary Alliance | 1 |
| Presbyterian | 4 |
| Roman Catholic | 3 |
| United Church of Canada | 3 |

Employment Status

| | |
|---|---|
| Active in work force: | 9 |
| Clergy, post graduate education, information technology, social work, musician, business management | |
| Retired: | 5 |
| Civil Service, nursing, government lobbyist, corporate management | |

Relational Status and Characteristics

| | |
|--|----|
| Single | 4 |
| Current same gender relationship | 10 |
| Common law/uncategorized | 6 |
| Legally married | 4 |
| Divorced from same gender partner | 1 |
| Previously married opposite gender | 5 |
| Parents of children from previous opposite gender marriage | 5 |

Researcher's Role

In IPA research, the researcher is fully engaged in the process of research. Using open-ended interview questions, I engaged and encouraged participants to give as full

and rich a verbal description as they could of their experience. Prior to the interviews, I developed a schedule of questions to assist myself in preparing for the interviews and identifying dimensions of inquiry that might emerge as participants narrated their own experience of spirituality (see Appendix D “A Matrix of Question Options”). These were prepared not as a list of questions to ask each participant, but as a reference for myself as the interviewer anticipating a possible situation in which the participant could benefit from a prompt to “say more” about the nature of the experience they were recounting.

Aware of the bias that could enter the interview encounter, I purposely did not identify myself in any written communication or verbal interaction by written or verbal as being an Anglican priest or bishop apart from the participant recruitment script. At the time of the interviews, I had not been active in the Anglican Church either on a local or national level for a period of 4 years. Nonetheless, this may still have been an influencing factor in the interview process, particularly with 2 individuals with whom I had had limited contact acting in my previous role as Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary. It should be noted that the identity or role, past or present, of my being a clergy person was not overtly raised or alluded to by any of the participants in the interviews that took place.

Data Collection

As Smith et al. (2009) state, IPA requires “rich data” so that “participants should have been granted an opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length.” Consequently, in IPA, there is “great room for imaginative work” in data collection (p. 56).

This research utilized three primary sources of data from participants. These sources were data from demographic questions, data from transcribed semi-structured interviews, and data provided by photographs that participants were asked to provide. In addition, supplementary data was voluntarily provided by several participants.

Demographic Data Collection

As part of the arranging for scheduling of interview times and location, each participant was sent a copy of the “Informed Consent Form” (Appendix C). This form outlined the purpose of the study, what participants would be asked to do, their ability at any point to withdraw from the research process, the personal information which would be requested from them, potential risks and counselling resources available in their geographic area, arrangements for ensuring confidentiality and security of data provided, and a specific request for permission to utilize photos taken in reporting research results. Additionally, each participant was sent a copy of a brief form asking for basic demographic information (Appendix E). The requested information included: contact information, for the purposes of identification in this research a name of their choosing to be used as a pseudonym, age, ethnicity, educational background, occupation, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and involvement with the Anglican Church and other religious expressions.

Semi-structured Interviews

Two interviews of 60-90 minutes each were scheduled. Arrangements took into consideration the need for privacy and a confidential, quiet setting as free as possible from distractions in which to conduct these interviews. Initial arrangements for such a space were proposed to participants. Several participants proposed alternative

arrangements which were also private, quiet, and provided a confidential venue in which the interviews could take place. In Calgary, the location for interviews was a reserved study room in the university library. There was one set of interviews, however, that for the participant were more conveniently arranged to be held in a private residence dining room. One other set of interviews took place in a Calgary motel dining room outside of dining hours. In Ottawa, I made hotel reservations for a suite that had a sitting space that was separate from sleeping space. Interviews here took place at a table around which two chairs were placed. Two individuals requested the interviews to be held in their home dining room, which I agreed to. In Toronto, one set of interviews was held in a similar hotel suite configuration the other set of interviews was held in a University of Toronto college common room that was not at use by others at the time of our interviews. Interviews were arranged over a 2-day period in Ottawa and 1 day in Toronto. Approximately three weeks lapsed between the first set and second set of interviews for 13 participants. One participant did choose not to participate further than the first interview. All interviews were completed within a 10-week period.

Prior to the first interview, I provided three open-ended questions to serve as stimuli to begin a process of intentionally reflecting on participants' own lived experiences of spirituality. These three questions were: "What does 'spirituality' mean for you? What's it been like to integrate (or not) your experience of identifying as a gay man with your spiritual or religious experiences and/or beliefs? How has your experience changed, if it has, over time?" These questions were provided to each participant along with the demographic questionnaire and a copy of the Informed Consent form accompanied by a request to complete these and bring them to the first

interview. However, at the beginning of the first interview, if they had not done so previously, participants were asked to complete these forms.

Both in the recruitment script and in the Informed Consent form, the voluntary nature of participation was clearly stated, and the right of the participant to withdraw at any time was affirmed. In addition, at the beginning of both interviews, the researcher verbally reviewed the participant's consent to participate and their right to withdraw at any time. If the participant elected to withdraw from the study, any information provided up to that point by the participant would be retained and used in the study, but no further input would be requested or utilized.

Additional copies of the Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet were available if the participant had forgotten to bring them to the first interview. Following the signing and completion of these forms, the participant was given one copy of the completed Consent Form and one copy was retained for my records. A Sony digital recorder (model ICD-P210) was used to record the interviews. The first interview then began with an open question to begin the exploration of the nature and role of spirituality in participants' lives: "Tell me about your experience of spirituality as a gay man." Immediately after each interview, the digital recordings were transferred from the Sony recorder to a Sony Vaio laptop computer (when traveling to Ottawa and Toronto) or my PC desktop computer (in Calgary) and a quick check was made to ensure the transfer had been successfully made. Interview files stored on my laptop were then transferred to my desktop computer upon return to Calgary. The pseudonym chosen by each participant was used in naming the digital files, and for each file further identifying whether it was the first or the second interview.

Photographic Images

At the end of the first interview, participants were asked to imagine that they were going to present an exhibition of photographs on spirituality and were invited to take photographs that depicted their experience of spirituality (however concretely or symbolically). All participants were asked if they had access to a digital camera. As a contingency plan, I had a digital camera (with instruction manual) that would have been made available for completing this task for anyone without access to such a camera. As had been outlined in descriptive information previously provided participants, each participant was asked to select five of these images that best captured their experience of spirituality. Participants were asked to email me their five selected digital image files. All acknowledged that they either were familiar with how to transfer these files as attachments to an email message, or they knew someone who would assist them in this task.

In a very brief verbal overview, it was explained that the second interview would utilize these selected photographs as points of departure in further exploring their lived experience of spirituality. Participants were told not to be concerned about their skills, or lack of skills, as photographers. In the event that photos taken by participants showed visibly identifiable individuals, participants were told they would need to obtain a signed release from those individuals, and were each given two copies of this form for that purpose (Appendix F).

Mutually agreeable arrangements were confirmed for the second interview. The original plan had been for the digital images to be printed with two sets of 8" x 10" colour prints being made. One physical set of prints to be forwarded to the participant,

and one set to be retained by the researcher. The actual data collection unfolded with all the participants engaging in the second interview providing photographic images. All but one did send them by email prior to the second interview, with that individual bringing printed copy of the images with him to the interview.

Envelopes were prepared and as files were received one set of images was printed in colour for the participant and one set in gray scale for purpose of my making notes as the participant talked about the images he brought. These prints were placed in envelopes labelled with each participant's pseudonym in preparation for the second interview. There were several participants in Ottawa and Toronto who had not provided the electronic files prior to my departing Calgary. I took with me a portable Canon Selphy photo printer which enabled me to print out a single set of prints prior to their arrival for the interview. These files were downloaded on my laptop through the hotel's Internet access. For 2 individuals, the files were not able to be printed in the hotel room due to an initial file format incompatibility for printing, but were able to be displayed on my laptop screen. Electronic copies of all photographic images were put in an electronic directory containing folders identified by each participant's pseudonym.

Thirteen of the 14 participants brought a total of 68 photographs and participated in the second interview. Rose (2007) proposed that there are three modalities or aspects of analysis of visual images that can be helpful and "contribute to a critical understanding of images" (p.13). These are technological, compositional, and social. For the purposes of this research, participants' photographs were categorized as to their technological modality, that is, their origin, where they came from. They were also categorized in terms of their compositional modality, that is, what was the focus of the

photograph's contents? Thirdly, they were categorized in terms of their social modality, that is, what was the context within which the photograph's focus took place?

Table 2

Photographs: Category of Analysis

| | n | % |
|--|----|----|
| Technological modality | | |
| <i>Origin of images</i> | | |
| "Found images" - not taken by participant | 6 | 9 |
| Previously taken photographs | 23 | 34 |
| Intentionally taken photographs | 39 | 57 |
| Compositional modality | | |
| <i>Focus of images' contents</i> | | |
| Buildings (non-religious) | 3 | 4 |
| Inanimate (e.g. signs, vehicles, books) | 11 | 16 |
| People (e.g. partner, grandparents, friends) | 12 | 18 |
| Religious (objects and buildings) | 19 | 28 |
| Nature (e.g. flowers, mountains, clouds, fields) | 23 | 34 |
| Social modality | | |
| <i>Context of what is captured in the image</i> | | |
| Places of public gathering | 4 | 6 |
| Inside home places of work/reflection | 5 | 7 |
| News events or signs | 6 | 9 |
| Partners & individuals (relaxing, hiking, gathering) | 8 | 18 |
| Places or objects of religious ritual or activity | 20 | 29 |
| Natural world outside | 25 | 37 |

Supplementary Data Sources

Participants were invited to submit additional material of their choosing to illustrate or further expand their experience of spirituality. Three participants responded to the invitation to supplement these data sources with other material, namely referencing particular hymn texts and music that for them were particularly expressive and salient in their experience of spirituality. Additionally, following my summation of reflections and understanding of each participant's interviews participants were invited by email to correct or add any further clarifying comments in response to my summarization (see Appendix G). Five participants responded with one providing clarification of a quote and one providing some brief explanatory background information about his religious formation. The remaining three responses were affirmations of the summaries' capturing the essence of their contributions in the interviews.

In addition to this participant data are my own brief field notes made during and about the unfolding course of engaging this research process from the beginning of developing the research question to be pursued. In the midst of this unfolding process, a further personal journal file was created to be a place for personal reflections. As I noted in the opening of this particular file, "This research... pulls me from the sidelines as observer or listener to a personal engagement with the question. What is *my* experience of spirituality?"

Data Management

Interviews were digitally recorded. Following each interview, the audio digital files were uploaded to an encrypted folder on my home computer – only my supervisor

and I will have the password to access this folder. Transcriptions of the audio files were kept in a separate password secured subfolder. Digitized copies of photographs and all other researcher notes were kept in their own subfolders in this encrypted research folder.

Throughout research documentation, participants were only be referred to by their pseudonyms, and only their pseudonyms were used to identify their interview and demographic data. Paper notes, paper research journal, and any other non-digitized research data or memos were kept in separate folders in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

When travelling to and from interview sites, interview material, files, and their media were secured in transit in a briefcase which was always in the possession of the researcher or in locked and secure facilities. All original data, whether digitally stored or physically stored in secured folders, will be securely kept for 5 years following the final publication of research findings. At that time electronic data will be digitally shredded and physical data will be physically shredded.

Data Analysis

IPA's approach to data analysis is both interpretative and descriptive. The beginning of analysis starts with the first participant's interview transcripts. The process of analysis for each transcript is identical. Each transcript is read multiple times. Annotations are created by the researcher about anything that seems of interest or significant.

The next step engages the researcher to discern more specific themes that "aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text." The goal is to find

expressions that will “allow theoretical connections within and across cases but which are still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 68). Pertinent textual illustrations are noted. Emergent themes are then listed, connections are sought between them, and the resulting clusters are given a descriptive label.

This process continues with each transcript, along with a looking for connections and themes across the different tables of themes, respecting both “convergences and divergences” in the data and emergent themes. Analysis continues with the formal writing up of a narrative which gives expression to the meanings uncovered through the interplay between the interpretive actions of the researcher and the narrative actions of the participants.

It is important to note that analysis also takes into account the multiple influences that exert themselves on experience, including culture, history, and social norms. Following the initial analysis of themes for each participant’s interviews, a brief summary of these articulated themes was forwarded to the participants for any corrections, elaborations, or further comments on what emerged in the researcher’s articulations and reflections. This is part of the process of establishing not only the credibility of this research process, but also the trustworthiness of this research project (Morrow, 2005).

QSR NVivo 8 & 9

In this research, QSR’s qualitative research software program, NVivo 8 (later upgraded to NVivo 9, see www.qsrinternational.com), was utilized, along with concept

mapping software developed at Tufts University, VUE (Visual Understanding Environment).

NVivo's history as a qualitative research software tool began in 1981 with a mainframe computer program, NUD*IST 1. NVivo 8 is described as a "method free" set of tools which can be used in the service of a variety of qualitative methodological approaches in research (Bazeley, 2007, p. 3). Lewins and Silver (2005) have identified common functions of qualitative data analysis software as follows: (a) the project created in the software acts as a container or a connector to all the different data that comprises that project, (b) most programs provide easy access to the actual data, (c) all enable searches for words or phrases, (d) these programs provide ways to code words and data which can then be retrieved and explored;, (e) these programs provide ways of managing and organizing the research project and its components;, and (f) all offer ways of exporting reports in various forms.

The choice of NVivo 8 for this research project was based not only on its robust reputation but also in my own fledgling familiarity with the program based in previous, albeit limited, experience. In this research, NVivo 8 was extraordinarily useful in its ability to act as a container which provided ready access to all the research materials, including participant interviews in their audio and transcribed formats, photos and other participant materials, as well as providing the tools and means of documenting the analysis of this data and documenting my own progress and reflections throughout this process (see Appendix H).

Vue

While NVivo 8 has very powerful tools for handling a variety of data formats, for my purposes in working with photographic and other graphic images, I found the Tuft's concept mapping tool, VUE, to afford a greater flexibility and ease of use (see <http://vue.tufts.edu>). Concept mapping has been utilized in a variety of studies in counselling psychology (Goodyear, Tracey, Claiborn, Lichtenberg, & Wampold, 2005). In VUE, it is possible to not only input and display text, but graphic images and url links to local and Internet accessible files and sources as well. VUE was particularly helpful in developing the summaries of interviews for each participant (e.g., see Appendix I) and then in developing the model of themes which emerged from all of the participants' input.

Analytic Process

IPA Analytic Process

The IPA analytic process is described by Smith et al. (2009) as one that utilizes a "paper and pencil" methodology. Figure 3, found at the end of this chapter, outlines the process put forward by Smith et al. alongside adaptations of this process made for this research utilizing the software tools of NVivo and VUE.

Analysis of Participant Photographic Images

The photographs which participants selected became the core of what was discussed in their second interview. In their intentional production and selection, the photographs become embedded in each participant's narrative of exploring their experience of spirituality. There is no established methodology for a particular analysis of photographic images in phenomenological qualitative approaches to research. For the

purposes of this research, the images taken and selected by participants are explored both as being part of the narrative of each participant and as, in a sense, forming a visual narrative corpus in their own right which can then be explored in their own right. And so in addition to the integral incorporation of these images in the text of the interviews and their being part of IPA's methodological process of exploration as outlined above, they also are explored in their own right as narrative expression. One facet of exploring these images in this way is to identify their demographic characteristics, as it were.

Banks (2007) distinguished two kinds of narrative that mark visual images, internal narrative and external narrative. Exploring the internal narrative of an image is asking the question, "What is this an image of?" Hand in hand with this is a contextualization of the image in exploring the external narrative of that image which moves beyond, while remaining anchored to, that image itself. This external narrative is gotten at with using such questions as: "Who took or selected this image? When? Why?" Asking these questions "enlarges the (metaphorical) *frame* of the image... to consider persons and events that may extend quite widely in time and space" (p. 14).

To facilitate this exploration of narrative, an Excel spreadsheet was created and descriptive information was summarized for each image. This spreadsheet was organized with participant selected images identified by the participant's name in rows. Descriptive information was placed in columns so that information about each image could be described in terms of:

- Technological modality
 - Production context (Was the image intentionally posed or composed?
Taken spontaneously, for example while on trip?)

- Original image generation (Was it an image of another photo, stained glass window, or statue, etc.?)
- Compositional modality (What is the image's content, what is it an image of?)
- Social modality (Is there a particular context in which this image was taken?)
- Selected quotes from the participant's reflection on that particular image.

In further exploring the images in their own right as narrative, each image was printed (17 x 13 cm). This enabled a visual exploration of the images which could be spread out on a large surface, arranged and rearranged according to whatever characteristics of the images lent themselves to interpretative analyses of how these images from these participants spoke to the experience of spirituality in the lives of these men.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to “the authenticity and consistency of interpretations grounded in data” (Yeh & Inman, 2007). One major threat to establishing the trustworthiness of research is the researcher's own subjective influence on both the gathering of data and its analysis. Transparency regarding the researcher's preconceptions, biases, reflections, and how these interact with the gathering and interpreting of participant data is essential. “Reflexive reporting... about these interests, experiences, and actions... allows the reader to weigh the researcher's role in the conduct of the study, and the understandings gained from engaging with the study participants, data and setting” (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002, p. 728). This reflexive reporting becomes part of the keeping of an audit trail that will include

raw data of interview transcriptions and photographic images, the products of data reduction and analysis, the products of synthesis, process notes, all researcher notes and materials relating to the planning and carrying out of this research, and all forms, questionnaires, and any other material used (Chwalisz, Shah, & Hand, 2008).

Trustworthiness also entails what Denzin refers to as “thick description.”

A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (Denzin, as quoted in Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007, p. 416)

Guidelines for reviewing qualitative research such as presented by Elliott, Fisher, and Rennie (1999), Morrow (2005), and Smith et al. (2009) are used as standards against which the quality of this research is designed to be measured. This includes methods of triangulation to check consistency of findings with other published works in gay and queer studies in a review of both the quality and depth of research findings and understandings (Yeh & Inman, 2007). This is augmented by thorough literature reviews as well as the reading of published autobiographical reflections particularly, but not exclusively, of gay men who reflect on their experience of spirituality.

Several procedures were used in this study to act as a check on the trustworthiness of my analysis and the interpretive processes. One such procedure

utilized a fellow researcher who was also using IPA in her research. I randomly selected 1 participant's interview materials and first forwarded transcripts of these two interviews. This was followed by sending a copy of these transcripts with my comments and identified themes. These were produced from NVivo's screen output of the transcript with coding and comment's. Coding stripes and titles designating themes were placed in the left column while comments entered in red typeface were placed in the right hand column. My colleague commented on and coded the transcripts and then compared her analysis with my comments and identified themes. Following her completion of this task, we met and discussed the interview and its contents and theme identification.

A second procedure was employed to assess the accuracy of my initial identification and summarization of themes in each individual's interviews. This consisted of my reviewing each individual's transcripts from both interviews and in two pages or less summarizing the themes of what was spoken regarding their experience of spirituality. Assisting in this process of summarization identity and identification was utilizing VUE's concept mapping tools. A concept map was created for each individual's material, which also included thumbnails in the concept map of the photos which they had brought as the basis of the second interview (see Appendix I). The completed two page or less summary was then sent by e-mail to each participant inviting any further comments or corrections that they deemed might be necessary to accurately convey what they intended to say and share. They were then requested to reply to me within two weeks with any such comments or I would assume that my summary captured what they had intended to convey at that time.

In addition, informal consultation in person and by email and telephone conversation took place relating to the use of QSR's NVivo-8 in this research. Researchers with established experience in using NVivo in qualitative research, or in researching the experience of spirituality, were consulted with regard to the suitability of use, and then the most appropriate use, of qualitative software such as NVivo in this research.⁴ Through these personal communications, both my described usage of this qualitative research tool, as well as its appropriateness and the appropriateness of IPA for researching the experience of spirituality, were affirmed.

Ethical Concerns

This research did not entail more than minimal risk for participants. The potential minimal risks involved the following. The exploration of personally meaningful life experiences can be tiring, and if these experiences entailed negative or stressful components, there might have been a stirring in the present moment of those past memories, which would be experienced as emotionally painful. Revisiting such memories may further stir other emotional, cognitive, or existential issues or questions with which the participant may then feel the need to engage. A list of selected accessible counselling agencies in the cities where the interviews took place was provided.

The ensuring of confidentiality and anonymity is a paramount concern in research. Matters regarding measures of securing files and using pseudonyms have already been discussed. A particular concern in this study is use of material which, in a small non-dominant queer world, could inadvertently give clues as to the identity of the

person. Participants were told that if such quotes or materials were judged to pose such a possibility, direct permission to use such material will be sought from the participant.

While photographs taken by participants remain the property of the participants, permission for their use in reporting this research was sought and given. Photos revealing the identity of others were required to have written release of those individuals for any public or published use of those photos. The research proposal was submitted to the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) which subsequently gave approval for this research to proceed.

Procedural Steps of Interview Data Analysis

Smith, Flowers, & Larkin
(2009)

Adapted in Utilizing QSR
NVivo 8 & VUE

Step 1: Reading and Re-reading

The transcript text is placed in the middle of three columns is carefully read through several times.

Within NVivo the interview audio file is played and its transcript is checked for accuracy in the program's detail window.

Step 2: Initial Noting

In the right hand column are placed researcher annotations, i.e. exploratory descriptive, linguistic, conceptual comments regarding what the participant said.

In subsequent readings researcher annotations are entered in the transcription text, readily identifiable by using bracketed red font (see Appendix H).

Step 3: Developing Emergent Themes

Emerging themes, i.e. themes that characterise each section of text, are identified and placed in the left column. Identified themes are named with descriptive labels, in vivo terms, or quotes. As this process unfolds, theme threads are checked back to their linkage with the original text.

Themes are identified and labeled using the node coding functions. A node is created by selecting text and then creating a characterizing label for that selection. Nodes are created as either free or hierarchical; a description of the node (node properties) can be entered. New nodes are created as they emerge and are identified by the researcher.

Step 4: Searching for Connections

Emergent themes are listed on paper and connections between them are explored and noted. Initially themes may be listed chronologically, subsequently as they are refined in definition and content, they are clustered together with a continued checking back to the transcript to ensure connectivity with the participant's experience.

Selecting "Nodes" in the navigation window accesses the nodes folder in which nodes or themes are created and named. Created nodes appear in the list window which then can be selected and will, in the display window, display the selected text(s) coded with this created node/theme.

A summary table is created of structured themes and subordinate themes with identifying quotations and page and line numbers.

It is important to only include material and themes that are related to the research question and experience being explored.

Nodes/themes' contents are explored and then these nodes are merged, divided, clustered and organized as the analysis proceeds. Notations of this process are documented in a journal memo describing the ongoing research process. Node reports tracking this process are periodically generated and saved as files.

Step 5: Moving to the Next Case

Analysis then continues with the next participant's transcript(s): using the summary themes from the initial transcript as a beginning in identifying these and any additional themes, or by putting previous transcript(s) and their coding to one side and starting afresh with each subsequent transcript. The researcher notes converging and diverging data, and how themes are similar but also different between participants.

Nodes/themes already named and identified as either free nodes or tree nodes are utilized, and new nodes are created, as each successive interview is processed as described in the steps above. An iterative process engages in naming, comparing, questioning, refining, exploring texts of interest and relevance as they relate to the research question. In this process nodes are named, combined, divided, renamed, and clustered.

Step 6: Looking for Patterns Across Cases

A list of the master themes is created that reflects the experiences of participants as a whole. This is a cyclic process; emerging themes are checked for their veracity and connectedness with original data. Analysis continues until the point that all themes have been integrated. If new subordinate themes emerge, these too are checked with the original participant material.

Node reports are generated and printed out. Nodes/themes as they are refined are checked with original excerpts which gave rise to their creation. Visually mapping the meaningful clustering of nodes using VUE concept mapping software is undertaken. A master table of themes and their relationships is created in VUE. This is then vetted for its ability to convey meaning and its veracity in being able to capture the breadth of participant experience.

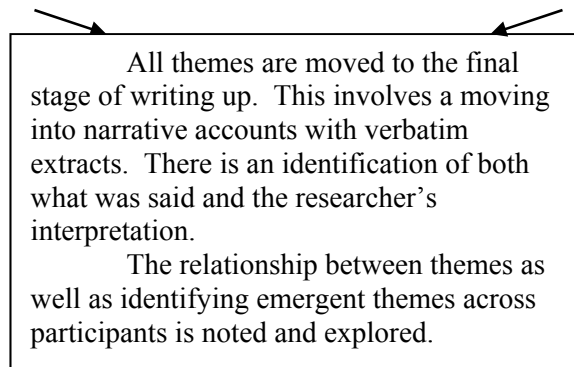


Figure 3. Procedural Steps of Interview Data Analysis. In the left column is the data analysis process as outlined by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009, pp. 83-103) utilizing paper and pencil methodology. In the right column is this process as adapted and expanded in this study utilizing QSR's NVivo8 and VUE software.

CHAPTER 4 -- PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the participants of this research. I connected with each participant in two interviews (the exception being Stone, who only participated in the first interview). The material which follows is edited from the summary of themes I prepared following each set of interviews. These summaries were then sent to the respective participant, providing an opportunity for feedback, correction, or any further clarification they wanted to provide.

Alec

Alec (age 71, married to Machal): At the core of Alec's experience of spirituality is openness, involved nurturing, risking vulnerability and an engaged caring. It is very much through the wide-angle lens of being an artist and interior designer achieved through academic degree and world-wide experience that he speaks of his understanding and experience of God and spirituality. About "God" he stated: "God is... the Universe... to me now at my age, there is no person, there is no Heaven, and there is no Golden Mansion that I am going to. You just become part of the universe." And while there is transcendence in this experience there is also an imminent groundedness. This is revealed in his being both artist and gardener.

He states, that as an artist, it is "in things that I create, I find spirituality."

Spirituality for Alec is

a feeling inside you which draws you closer to the universe through art , music, other people – it's to do with your senses so that all of them can give you a feeling of spirituality, draw[ing] you closer to what I would get as the Universe which is our Earth or whatever.

There is another and very profound connection or” link to the universe” for Alec, and that is in his garden and gardening. He stated that while exploring the universe as an astronaut was something he could not do, “what I can do is get my hands in the ground – in the earth – and create beauty.”

In his early twenties he married a woman who had her own professional life. They had three children - for whom Alec was the primary source of nurture. As he said of his son (and expressed as well about his daughters), “just being with him and watching him grow was very spiritual for me.” Alec was also to later find this spiritual connection in relationship with his present partner and husband Machal. “There is an incredible spirituality to our relationship, sexually and in every other way.”

Meeting Machal, Alec came out of an insulating introversion, and then more fully discovered the power of connecting with others: “I found all these wonderful people and almost everybody on earth is worth talking to....” And... having a conversation with and finding out about them... that was very much an uplifting discovery in myself....” Relationship, connecting, is all tied in to his experience of spirituality.

Alec and his husband discovered an Episcopal parish in a vacation spot in the United States that has become for them a spiritual home when they are there for a portion of each year. Alec states:

we volunteer with [Habitat for Humanity] and there’s a great reward. And I think it’s spiritual, in service to people and the old saying that you hear all the

time is 'you get back much more than you can give' is true. And I think that's spirituality too.

In speaking of his getting married to Machal, Alec related the anger and pain of not being able to get married in an Anglican church. Alec stated: it "upset me very much because we are part of you... I'm not asking you to do this from outside. I'm in it."

Alex

Alex (age 42, common law married to Lorenzo): While Alex initially stated "I can't say that I've ever been really religious," it was quickly apparent that he has a strong, deep, and experiential sense of the spiritual in his life. Music and silence, nature's rhythms in unfolding seasons, growing up in a rural community on a dairy farm, playing the organ in church since age 12, all intertwined in his quest to find place and space in community and in the universe.

While his life began in the United Church, at age 12 he was drawn to the Anglican Church through its liturgy. Attracted by the kinaesthetic and aesthetic patterns of movement, music, and ceremony, he states: "I connect spiritually within the ceremony of religion. It's kind of a grounding point." Alex was playing the organ in church since age 12. "The organ represents... God at His finest." Music both in church and school became the place and space that served as an anchor of identity and engagement with others for Alex throughout his adolescence. It is both the playing of, and listening to, music that is key to his experience of spirituality. "A good hymn, to me, is a spiritual place.... My spirituality works best when it's in the small things in

life.” This is exemplified in his “taking the time just to listen to nothing – to let my mind quiet... [a] whole range of life’s experiences are spiritual if I let them be spiritual.”

For Alex, God is what he terms “greater consciousness.” “Spirituality, for me, is that ability to connect into that greater consciousness... It’s God is inside of me, and it’s that part of me that has all the answers that I haven’t unlocked yet.” At the same time, connecting and establishing connectedness is also a challenge for Alex: “it’s... a sense of connectedness with other people that I’m searching for but don’t know quite how to obtain.”

Rhythms and patterns are important in Alex’s life for him in order to experience connectedness. This is true whether it is the Christmas decorations lighting up on December 1st, and being put away each January 1st, to the saying of grace before meals. It is those traditions that become touchstones “that help me recognize where I fit in the universe.”

Alex grew up on a dairy farm in rural Canada. The rhythms and beauty of nature are important points of connecting, for finding his place in the universe, and in his experiencing spirituality. When he finds himself in the midst of nature,

Everything else is set aside and you have a time and the opportunity just to be silent, and to shut out the noise of the everyday world. So that in and of itself is a wonderful gift. I can open myself up to a spiritual connection with myself and with God.

For Alex sexuality and spirituality are separate and distinct in his own personal experiencing. In reflecting briefly on this he uses the word “compartmentalized.”

He and Lorenzo have found a welcoming presence in the present congregation in which they are involved. He describes not only their embracing of diversity, but also comments that: “if you are going to be a Christian, they are the kind of Christians I want to be associated with. Where it’s not about a set of rules, it’s about being a place that comforts and supports people.”

Andrew

Andrew (age 37, single): Andrew’s experience of spirituality is one that is very much rooted in traditional public and private Western Christian liturgical expression. Baptised a Presbyterian, Andrew was then drawn as a teenager to an Anglo-Catholic Anglican parish, and “found it absolutely fascinating to hear all the mystical things in this church.” It was also there that he heard in Confirmation class that love, “when it comes as a gift from God, was love, whether it chooses to be between two people of the same gender” or opposite genders. Andrew understood and accepted his same-gender orientation “early on” in his teenage life.

Andrew is an organist and teaches music. His spiritual quest is very much like one of searching out for a particular music score, or arrangement of a most important piece of music. While attracted to the modern Roman Catholic liturgy he is put off by that church’s rigidity. In a similar vein, his attraction to Anglo-Catholic expressions of worship is off-set by his assessment of the Anglican Church sometimes being “stifling,” its’ having a lack of “breath,” and it being “too stuck in tradition.” The current divisions the Anglican Church is experiencing are troublesome to Andrew. There is a despairing of finding a place to find a spiritual home (a place having “the whole sacramental and doctrine thing”).

His experience of spirituality is very much linked with “going to a recognizably sacred place so it’s actually going to a church.” It is not, however, just the atmosphere of a sacred place, “there has to be a link with some sense of [a] learned doctrine of the Church.” Spirituality for Andrew is very much both of the head and the heart. And this also entails rhythmic religious practice.

There’s something spiritual about going to a church location at 6 o’clock every day for the daily office.... Sunday services, in many ways, are the least spiritually uplifting for me... my most refreshing moments are if I’ve been in a busy city, rushing around all day, and can go into some big dark old cathedral at 6 o’clock for 20 minutes and see some wafting incense and things like that....

And while he states that going to church is not about social connecting, yet there is a yearning for a place where as a gay man he “can look around the room and not be the only one.” Andrew feels that it is important that he be with others that believe the same things that he does, “because it gives confirmation that they’re true.” “The hierarchy of the church is important so for me, it’s important that the theologians of the church and deciders of doctrine of the church... can come to a consensus.”

Determining what is right and what is wrong is important in Andrew’s life. While not too rigid in these matters, he looks to the church for guidance. The rootedness for experiencing spirituality lies in the context of liturgy and worship for Andrew. The senses are all engaged in this experience – sound and touch, the smell of incense, and the sight of stained glass. In terms of his private spiritual practice, Andrew regularly recites a portion of the rosary as part of his daily rhythm of spiritual practice – a practice that can give him “great strength.”

Andrew's experiencing of his sexuality and love-making is one in which it is spiritual but not in a religious sense. While he can use the word 'majestic' to describe enjoying sex, he refrains from naming this experience as "spiritual" in the way which he usually uses that term (i.e. to refer to a "religious Christian sense").

Chappy

Chappy (age 57, single): A key locus of Chappy's experience of spirituality is found in his passionate engagement in the process of public policy process, formation, and change. Whether on Parliament Hill, or the local or national organs of Anglican ecclesial decision making and life, Chappy is energized by the process of dialogue. "And it will always get you up because there's never a conclusion to the conversation.... In spiritual terms, we'd call it a pilgrimage." This process of dialogue strives to include everyone, with the intent of effecting change and justice.

Active engagement requires moments of pause in the midst of the intensity of the ongoing "conversation." While on the one hand he states "I'm lousy at the contemplative stuff," on the other hand he recounts experiencing moments of silence, awe, and renewal, in the presence of art. Of particular significance are the paintings of Claude Monet at le Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. Being in their presence has the power to bring tears to his eyes.

It was the medical prognosis of death, in the shadow of being diagnosed HIV positive, that propelled Chappy to find a church in which his funeral would take place. He found himself back in an Anglican parish with which he had been associated as a university student. He "came here looking for a place to die and what [he] found... was new life and family."

Chappy's experience of public policy work particularly as it relates to the life of the church motivates and enlivens him. He comments:

The genuineness of the community can be measured by how well it deals with the people on the margins.... why I stick with the Jesus thing is I think he showed us in a very, very simple manner... how to deal with that.... It's very much about everyone coming to the party, and no one being expendable in that process.

Chappy recounted watching the film "Milk" – the story of Harvey Milk and his short but impactful influence through being elected as the first openly gay elected municipal official in the United States. Milk's all too short time in office as a San Francisco Supervisor ended when he was shot and killed. One of the mantras that Milk frequently cited was "you've got to give them hope." Even the experience of his being assassinated did not have the power to stop the hope. For Chappy it is hope, and the path to change, that lies at the heart of Jesus message and life. Jesus ministry was with "the people at the margins."

It's a matter of engagement with the process, with the conversation, particularly when that conversation has to do with matters of inclusion, with matters of justice. "It is about dealing with troubles and people – [it is] about dealing with troublesome people who don't agree on anything but had good intentions. That's what the spiritual quest is to me." He adds: "It's not so much in the arriving as in the getting there that I find really intriguing."

While the church has not for the most part been a safe space for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, that reality has not dissuaded Chappy from remaining in the Christian path.

I'm in the church because it gives me a language to deal with those spiritual issues. So I'm comfortable with the Christian moniker.... I'm not just talking about God and Jesus, I'm talking about much deeper... where do you fit into the universe and what is your role.... It's about right relationship.

It's that quest of "doing it right" that propels Chappy in his spiritual quest of action and engagement – a quest which is always an act in progress.

Dean

Dean(age 37, partnered): As a priest and gay man in an open committed relationship, Dean's experience of spirituality is shaped in the midst of an engagement with institutional ecclesial politics, his unfolding personal lived story, and the stories and lives of those with whom and to whom he ministers. Of late, what is emerging is an experience of spirituality that is intentional and deepening. "As much of a roller coaster as my relationship with the institution has been, my faith life and my spiritual identify as an Anglican seems to have just plodded along quite steadily and, if anything, probably deepened." This has, by his own admission, been assisted in his not presently holding a full time pastoral position.

From the institution Dean experiences words of encouragement from bishops in private conversations, but in public there is a silence and inaction that maintains a reality of Dean being "other" and "less than." This is attributed to his openness about this sexual orientation and about his living together with his partner as a couple for the past year.

Dean's experience of life and spirituality is compartmentalized, but it is not a contented compartmentalization. "I'm so terrified of just wasting my life... the sense of

not being able to be who I am.... and I don't know where to go to be that person." The institutional church is not the only source of suspiciousness and mistrust experienced by Dean as a gay man. The gay community (communities) also react with suspiciousness and mistrust to Dean as a man who unabashedly will speak of being a follower and believer in Jesus. Being seen as being part of a religious community is seen as remaining in an abusive relationship.

I always wanted to understand my sexuality in terms of my spirituality and vice versa. I would give whole speeches to other people about how they intertwined but in reality, I think that I very deliberately kept the two separated.

In terms of spiritual practice Dean engages in prayer – "I have a covenant with God that I will show up. I will be there and we will have a visit and it may not be particularly exciting, and we might not have much to say to each other, but I'll show up." He loves to read, particularly stories of "people that aren't satisfied with the status quo.... it makes me feel less alone in the search."

James

James (age 45, partnered): James' experience of spirituality continues to be particularly shaped in the crucible of family relationships – past and present. His journey toward self-acceptance and affirmation of being a gay man is linked intimately with his spiritual journey – "your spirituality should be continuous growth from the cradle to the grave.... it is very sad when you see people who just suddenly stop in growth."

For James this journey was rooted in a family that through its members provided him with an exposure to religious groups beyond his family's Presbyterian grounding. It

was a very conservative religious atmosphere that on the one hand provided the message of a loving God, yet on the other had provided a vision of God that was stark, rigid, and judgmental.

The question of having a relationship with his Creator was a motivating question beginning from the time of his grandfather's death, when James was in his early 20's. This was also tied with the beginning stirrings of his awareness, and struggle with, being gay. James came to awareness that he could not simply "shelve" his sexual orientation.

His brother was also gay and was ostracized from their parents. James' father's reaction to his brother being gay was one of judgment – "your brother is going to burn in Hell." Throughout his life his relationship with his father has been very important. James exhibited tenacity in wrestling both with his relationship with God, as well as his relationship with his father. "I think what I wanted was I wanted a relationship with the Creator... was I damned to the fires of Hell? Or was I just as who I was?" Similarly James wanted an accepting relationship with his father, as well as a healing of the rift between his father and his brother. He counts himself blessed to be experiencing both.

James draws on two arenas of his experience to understand and speak of spirituality. One arena is in the experience of rural country life. "I think it's easier to come to know God in the country... you get to see a lot of life come into this world and then a lot of life leave this world." The other arena of experience is James' work at the potter's wheel. It has to do with the nature of clay, the formative power that exists between potter and clay, and the process of firing that gives the very fragile piece of clay strength.

James' own formation and strengthening comes very much from his relationship with his partner. There is not only a close relationship with his partner's ex-wife, but an intentional engagement "planning for children in our life right now plus the possibility of future [adopted] children." Sexuality and spirituality are intertwined for James. Sex is a God given means for two people to express their love. God solidifies that relationship because it helps giving a certain point of intimacy... and so when two people actually make love, it's the whole concept of their souls connecting, as well as their bodies. It helps keep continuity to that relationship.

Josiah

Josiah (age 29, divorced from same-sex marriage): Josiah was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth. None-the-less, the physical is the place of joyful spiritual and sexual encounter and experience, theological reflection and integration, and the facing down of fear in his life.

Raised in an evangelical and charismatic Pentecostal Christian environment, the experience of fear was not unfamiliar – whether it was a fear of Josiah's stepfather who was described as being at times abusive, or "Father God" who in Josiah's thinking was similarly thought of, and experienced, as an abusive father.

I met Jesus when I was 5... my step-father turns to me and says... "you know, you're a sinner which means you do bad things and Jesus died to take away the sins of the world and if you accept that, then you are forgiven and you'll become a different person"... that was a life-changing experience for me because, before that, I would say I was crippled by fear.

There is a visceral quality of Josiah's experience of the Holy Spirit that is rooted in his Pentecostal background and expression of Christianity. And although he has made a move to the Anglican Church and a more liberal theological understanding of Scripture and the Christian message, he continues to expect and encounter the Holy Spirit in physically felt ecstatic-like manifestations. In this regard he refers to speaking in tongues, physical healing in people's lives as a result of prayer, and experiencing the transformative sensed presence of the Holy Spirit.

His experience in worship of receiving communion in the Eucharist "is God's invitation to become who I am – and feeling that and imaging that is a really powerful piece of my spirituality." His first recognition of same gender attraction occurred when he was twelve. It was a recognition that was accompanied by a profound sense of terror and brokenness. For several years around the age of 20 he attempted, in counselling, to "revert to be a heterosexual." It was a time of struggle and conversation with God:

... you know, I'm gay and if I'm wrong, bring me around"... And still, to this day, I feel like a kid in a candy store – I really do because I look around and because I'm much more comfortable in my own skin with this sense of – this is fun – I have this same sense about being a gay man....

There is a celebratory framing of life, possibility, and his experience of spirituality and sexuality. In contrast to evangelical Christianity's understanding of a world that is fundamentally broken and infected with evil, Josiah has come to an understanding that "the body is good and sex – aha – is good." He has had a desire from his childhood days to become an ordained clergy: "Christ is alive! And still present and

that changes things for people and I get to be a part of that? This is so great so – that’s the fun for me.”

Lorenzo

Lorenzo (age 50, common law married to Alex): Lorenzo experiences “God,” his “Higher Power,” as intimate partner, as partner who “shows up” without respect to circumstance - in good times, in desperate times, in ordinary times. “Love just doesn’t show up when it suits you.” The “showing up” is more than a mere presence, it is a personal and powerful presence that confronts and comforts, supports and guides, and challenges - and all the while rooted in respect for the freedom of the other in their decision making . For Lorenzo, “showing up” entails a courageous vulnerability and openness to the moment, to decisions beckoning to be made, and issues a call to grow into an unfiltered honesty regarding self and others. In Lorenzo’s narration of his experience of spirituality, “showing up” is profoundly “spiritual” and dynamic. Talking with God / Higher Power is as natural and flowing as talking with Lorenzo’s most intimate partner. And even when there is a hint of what might be seen as magical thinking interjected into this narration, action and decision making remains with the individual.

It is in, and out of, the struggles with alcohol addiction, the experiences of incest and childhood abuse, and his same-gender sexual drives that he “hit bottom.” Through AA and therapy he went through a gently spiraling journey from denial to a celebration and growing into a personal integrity of self-acceptance, love, and identity as a loving father who was also a gay man.

Early on in adulthood, in response to his recognizing his same gender attractions, he laid it out before God - 'if it is a sin, take it, if not a sin help me to affirm it.' In the affirming came an initial and devastating loss of spouse, children, family, and livelihood. The strength to move through this journey from "the bottom" was found in the principles of AA's program. Lorenzo found that to turn and move towards integration and wholeness necessitated learning to love himself.

His sense of not feeling welcome from the institutional church was only altered through experiencing a welcoming, embracing, and accepting community of people at a local Anglican parish. Lorenzo's experience of God intertwines, informs, and celebrates both his understanding of himself as a person, a father, a gay man, and his celebration of his sexuality, his healthy enjoyment of his own body, and particularly his expression of himself sexually with his partner, Alex. "I want God part of this relationship – God lives in me in all areas of my life – and that includes my sexuality."

A motivator to attend an Anglican parish was expressed as "a need for me, and for us as a couple, to have some sense of connection." Reflecting on their initial experience, "I love churches and I love the feeling of it – absolutely love the Anglican church and the singing – I didn't see all of that in the Catholic Churches and to really feel welcome." This was all to change when, three years later, the "issue" of same-sex marriage and relationships became the topic of reflection and study. They left during a sermon in which the rector declared herself against gay marriage and relationships. Still feeling the need for "connection" two years later Lorenzo heard of another Anglican parish having a reputation of being welcoming to all. This parish became for them a source of support, welcome, and community.

Machal

Machal (age 71, married to Alec): When asked to describe his experience of spirituality, Machal's immediate response was "I am not sure." The question, however, took him to the heart of a struggle he has experienced most of his adult life, and that struggle has to do with death.

I fear death. And I don't know – I just don't know what's after this life. And I really – I just don't know... Your mortality catches up to you. It's something that disturbs me.... it's something that I have thought about and sometimes worried about for most of my adult life.

After a hiatus of many years in which 'church' offered little to him, he expressed experiencing a "great deal of satisfaction" in joining with others in an Episcopal (Anglican) congregation he and his husband attend in the southern United States six months of the year. The activities that provide that deep satisfaction are, for example, joining with members of the congregation in building houses with Habitat for Humanity, as well as, for example, joining in providing other forms assistance to young families in dire straits.

His and Alec's experience of that particular congregation is in stark contrast to their experience of rejection in a rural Canadian parish. "I went up to introduce myself to the priest. And I said – and it was obvious that we were two men together and probably gay.... so I went to shake his hand and I said "I'm Machal " and he just turned and walked away."

Machal's relationship with Alec, spanning several decades, is pivotal and transformative for his life, and his living life. Their relationship is one that is

experienced as nurturing and as a source of deep joy and security. This relationship is what gives him hope, direction, as well as security.

Machal's life profoundly changed with his relationship with Alec. Prior to his meeting Alec, Machal lived a life of solitude built and fortified by fear. Following his coming out and embracing his relationship with Alec, the solitude of fear became, in contrast, a discovering of a solitude of security and authenticity. This has born a desire to form community with others, in a realization that there is more to life than material things.

Machal's life has been, and continues to be, marked by contrasts. For example,

- the happiness he experiences now is in stark contrast to the acrimonious divorce process that marked that transitioning period in his life;
- whereas in the past the fear of being 'found out' cast an isolating barrier around him, "since Alec and I have been living together – relationships have become very, very, very important."

Life though is not without its contradictions for Machal. Two of the photos he chose illustrated the devastation of war - a photo of a fiery explosion and a troop transport vehicle in Afghanistan, and a photo of the Highway of Heroes in Ontario with people lined waiting a cortege of vehicles carrying the bodies of soldiers slain in battle. As Machal stated, "It's so easy to say but we have got to do something to stop killing each other." At the very same time Machal's life work involved arms for the military. The feelings, the realities of both, are present but separate in Machal's life. The same compartmentalization exists in his pondering of the relationship between his sexual

experiencing and his experiencing of spirituality – “I can’t say that I feel that there’s an intertwining – I don’t think so.”

Murray

Murray (age 31, partnered): Murray’s understanding of spirituality is about “accessing the Divine.” The Divine awaits discovery and experience in “thin” places – places of intersection of the divine with the material. The doors and windows of these thin places are such things as poetry, music, art, devotions, prayers, and other “various means and methods.” Accessing these spaces and places for Murray is best, but not exclusively, achieved through spiritual practices, public and private, that provide order and a rhythmic pattern to days and seasons.

Coming out of a science, physics, chemistry, and math background, Murray experienced little need for “additional gobblede-gook” to understand, or live life. Baptized as an infant, but only “dragged” to church by his grandparents on the odd occasion, religion and spirituality were not part of his world. However, a little more than seven years ago, in his encounter with several others, he noticed they had an “extra dimension to their personalities... a sense of how they fit in to something bigger than them in size.” This spurred a search which took him reading about and exploring various religious expressions. It was a search that in the end narrowed down to Christianity.

Murray was aware by age 11 or 12 that rather than liking the girls he liked the boys. He came out to his family when he was 13. Now nearly several decades later he reflects on living as a gay man being like dancing with situations and settings:

There's always a process of creation and re-creation as a gay man.... it's hard to remember if I'm out or not out to a given person or have they met Daniel [his partner]?... Do they know I'm a Christian? Do they not?

His connecting with the Anglican Church came through learning about Integrity through conversation on a gay internet site. Attending an Integrity Eucharist he responded to the invitation to return and check out the rest of the congregation's life. Various things drew him to the parish including its emphasis on addressing social justice issues.

Privately for nearly a year he has been saying the service of Morning Prayer five to six days a week. As he described it,

I am a ritual order neatness type person and so having something consistent – a touchstone in my day – it just – it's almost like a morning cup of coffee.... It just allows me to stop, breathe, and it gives me a transition point – leaving home, going to work, leaving home, going to wherever – and it's just sort of – stop, breathe, ground, connect... It grounds and provides strength.

He reflects that the church's "liturgy is orderly, it's gracious, it proceeds." For Murray the Sunday Eucharist is more than one more event in the week. It is something he prepares for by reading the scriptural lessons and thinking about them prior to the next Sunday's worship. "Sunday morning is the fuel for the rest of the week." A felt sense connecting with the Divine also occurs as he drives through the mountains.

Murray expressed despair at what he labels as the hypocrisy of national and international Anglican institutional life. While official statements express a desire for listening to the voices of gay Anglicans, yet gay Anglicans are denied full access to

sacraments and opportunities to serve in ordained ministry (particularly when the individual is openly living in relationship with a person of the same gender).

Ron

Ron (age 65, married): For Ron, spirituality is the lifelong struggle of learning “what it means to walk and accept ourselves and others.” Growing up in a household of eight children across from the local Roman Catholic Church, he was an altar boy, and from an early age felt drawn by “the bells and smells... a lot of incense and a lot of ritual.” At home was the nightly family recitation of the rosary. As a child he often thought of one day becoming a priest.

Church was an ongoing presence in Ron’s growing up. Knowing he was gay from an early age, it became a source of conflicting feelings. His experience of spirituality is tied in no small way with his experience of death — the death of a friend when he was 10, his sister dying of rheumatic fever, his father dying, and then one of his brothers, also gay, dying of AIDS. This personal experience impacted his vocational decision to become a nurse, and an ongoing working with the dying. Now retired, he continues to volunteer in a hospice. He reflected:

When you are sitting with and chatting with — be it a family or patients who are actively dying — it brings into focus your own sense of what you are, why you are here, where you are going — all those kind of heavy questions.... [they are] kind of interwoven into my spirituality.

One of Ron’s photos was of a dirt road which also spoke to him of his spirituality — a road familiar from where he grew up, yet whose end point is not now known. Ron knew from a young age that he was gay. He was growing up though, in an era in which

engaging in “homosexual” acts was illegal. And, as he put it, he “certainly tried” to go straight. With an assurance from a psychiatrist that once married “the problem” would “go away,” Ron married. and with his wife had two children.

His being gay did not go away, and after coming out to his wife they remained together for a number of years until they decided to divorce. During this time he held on to the conviction that “I may not be accepted by society or the church or whatever but He, as in God, accepts me.” Confession was a regular route of dealing with guilt from secretly seeking sex during the time he was married.

His relationship with the Roman Catholic Church continued well into his adult years. It was a relationship marked by a

kind of pulling and pushing... wanting to be accepted within the church and knowing that I probably never would be.... eventually... I just could not deal with the stigmas that were coming out of the Vatican and... I thought “I can’t do this anymore.

Then 16 years ago he met his present partner and husband. This relationship makes Ron much more aware of his own spirituality and what that means. He believes that gay men have a very “innate sense of spirituality.” Reflecting on the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, he commented: “They can be and quite often are intertwined.... [spirituality is] a kind of total letting go, a total trust in God.... And sex can be and quite often is a total letting go and a total thing of trust.”

Sebastien

Sebastien (age 62, married): Eight years ago Sebastien emerged from a 40 year experience of walling off the church, and things ostensibly spiritual, from the rest of his

life. Raised in the Roman Catholic Church, at age 13 his mother was dying and the priest refused to give her Last Rites – because she and his father were not married. The hurt of this was compounded by the church saying that he was, as a gay person,” going straight to hell.” He states:

I basically forced it [spirituality and religion] out of my mind... I finally said “No, I’m not going to accept that. That cannot be...” and so my escape from all that was to put the wall up and make it so thick that no one, and when I mean no one, no church – will ever touch me again.

That barrier building was a “liberating” experience as he continued to grow professionally and personally and in relationship with his partner (now of 34 years and with whom he has been legally married for four years). Nearly 40 years later he recognized “that deep, deep, deep, down, I wanted that spirituality. I wanted the connection with the Church.... I did reject the words “God” and “Church”.... but I never lost my feeling that I wasn’t alone.” He started reading, taking distance courses in theology, and particularly pondering Bishop John Spong’s books. In addition to the intellectual explorations were his partner’s invitations to join him at church.

Sebastien spoke of always being spiritual in having a belief in “a bigger power than we know.” He experiences spirituality in reflection and in questioning and in the experience of relationship with others in the context of daily life. Over the past six years he has increasingly experienced a renewed reconnection with the Eucharist in his local parish that is spiritually very alive. It is about the sharing.

... the Eucharist to me reminds me that we’re all one in this.... It doesn’t matter to me what the [Anglican] communion says, as long as my community says

“You are loved, you are accepted, you’re one of us.” So, that’s where I get my strength from, my community.

At the same time he raises questions about the wider church’s life because: “[It] is not accepting me 100% as a person and I do not have the right to all sacraments. And that... is shameful.... Why is the church still rejecting me? Only accepting me at 99%, not 100%?”

He encounters the awesomeness of “God” in beauty and nature, and in carefully listening to a burdened soul. “I find it exciting discovering this spirituality of mine.... I want to know more. I get carried away trying to find more.... what it does is bring to me calmness.”

One photo he brought was of clouds against the backdrop of a blue sky. Recalling a childhood saying that clouds were God’s doodling, he connected the image with a

sense that you are free to create, you are free to explore, you are free to change, you are free to take something and make it your own, you are free to accept it or not accept it – so to me, it allows the possibilities of transformation, the possibilities of exploring, going beyond.

Stone

Stone (age 25, single): Stone’s experience and direction in life is marked by his identifying, and attempting to follow, whatever for him is experienced internally as being an “inclination.” He used the word “inclination” to: (a) describe his experience of being and living as a gay man, (b) his moving from Christianity to Buddhism, and (c) his engaging in the practice and discipline of yoga. “Inclination” is not a simple attraction;

it is a deep interiorly experienced path of becoming “who” he authentically is. Not who others expect, want, or judge him to be.

Stone grew up in a home where his mother was “very Anglican” and regularly attended a conservative Anglican church. His father was less devout, but none-the-less also counted himself an Anglican. Stone came out around the age of 15. The news was greeted with very judgmental and condemnatory messages, both from his parents, and from the local Anglican rector who labelled his being gay as a sign of a lack of respect for his parents. As far as his sexual orientation is concerned, “I don’t question it - anymore - it’s an inclination.... It’s very natural.... being a gay dude is frickin’ hard work.... I didn’t know I had such a high tolerance for liquor before I came out of the closet.”

Stone described spirituality as being something that he experiences being a part of, rather than something he possesses. “There is Divine presence in everyone, and everywhere.” His interest in Eastern approaches to spirituality increased after an experience of hearing a sermon with his boyfriend, in which the Anglican preacher blamed flooding in England on, among other things, that country’s legal recognition of same gender civil partnerships. Stone commented

I just thought to myself... I can’t hate myself anymore.... I honestly describe it as ending an abusive marriage.... there’s something that I used to get from going to church every Sunday and I don’t have that anymore, so I need to find out what’s up, where to go, take ownership and do my stuff.

Stone reflected on his relationship with Christian teaching and the message of Jesus: “I think that He [Jesus] had wonderful teachings... about charity and

unconditional care for everyone around you and He really embodied the kind of person that I am trying to be.”

A significant influence and experience for him was his two month sojourn in an Ashram. There is received a mantra which he chants in a daily meditative practice. “One of the big things... yoga has taught me is that if you’re forcing yourself to perform [a particular] ritual... you probably shouldn’t be doing it.... You should be inclined to it. It should come naturally to you.”

Teepee

Teepee (age 49, partnered): Teepee’s experience of spirituality is intimately tied into his experience of nature, particularly in the grandeur of mountains and where his family’s cabin is located there. Linked to his personal and family past, being there brings “this kinesthetic feeling in my body... feeling touched... feeling healed, feeling calm.”

It is a feeling of closeness that moves him to tears. “I just call it spirituality.... It’s a joyful feeling and it’s a complete humble feeling....’God, we are just little specks on this planet and we’ve made our lives so complicated.” Coming into this setting helps him remember that, and helps place “anxiety into its right place.” When asked what those tears would say if they had a voice, Teepee responded:

They would say ‘you’re not alone... you are one of God’s children like we all are.... your path on earth is a challenging one right now but don’t lose faith [or] hope that you’ll find your path’.... This spiritual experiencing “enters your pores. It’s in the centre of your bones.” Spirituality is also a vehicle “to understand ourselves and our purpose and our essence.

Teepee sees God in the marvels of the human body, and sees God in people – particularly when they exhibit a willingness to take up a challenge, or to move through a struggling event. There are also moments of spiritual connectedness when he looks at his daughter, or the beauty of a garden, or the harmonious sounds of a choir. Each is “a priceless moment when everything comes together beautifully. And I somehow think God has a piece of that.”

His life as an adolescent and young adult were marked with struggles with both drugs and alcohol. AA has been instrumental in supporting his decision to quit drinking nearly two decades ago. AA introduced him to speaking about a higher power, conceptualized and defined by each person for themselves. This was in contrast to what he remembers about attending confirmation classes. He said his dropping out of those classes resulted from

being aware of my own homosexual feelings, and hearing the messages about what’s okay and what’s not okay. And it’s like – “Jesus, this is way too uncomfortable – I shouldn’t be here.... I’m kind of dipping my toe into all these waters of areas [and] I’m told that’s not what a good person should do.”

A short time after he stopped drinking, he started meditating. Participation in a meditation group was particularly important when he was initially struggling to make sense of his own sexuality and sexual drives. When he got married to his wife, “there were some things I kept secret and it was a double world and it was frigging complicated.”

It was twenty years later that he came to a point in counselling that he could hear the message of his counsellor that “it is absolutely correct[to] connect sexually with

a man if that's what you feel." It was a turning point in his life. Several years after divorcing his wife, he met his current partner. A focal point of ongoing struggle is the internalized homophobia he experiences. This spiritual wounding for him comes from hearing the judgmental messages sometimes heard from those claiming to speak for God.

Teepee hopes "for a loving world where I'm not going to be judged [for clasping the] hand I'm holding." Acknowledging that our sexual lives often have been the target of judgment, for Teepee sexuality and sexual expression is very sacred. He notes that our sexuality is "still quite mysterious" – and in the face of all that, the challenge remains to embrace the whole of ourselves.

CHAPTER 5 -- RESULTS

A brief overview of the thematic model consisting of themes will be discussed. This will be followed by a review of each super-ordinate theme with its constituent subordinate themes, supplemented with material shared by the participants.

Experiencing spirituality for these participants was not the experiencing of something “added,” as it were, to life. Rather, the experiencing of spirituality was discovered and discerned in the unfolding of life’s experiences and within the “containers” that hold and nurture life’s experiencing.

The embedded nature of experiencing spirituality is reflected in the themes that emerged from the data. I began the process by formulating thematic models for each individual participant. In exploring emergent themes across participants, I was struck by the challenge of conveying the dialogic dynamism of relational experiencing that very often fails to be readily apparent in the creation of a two-dimensional table of themes. The focus of this chapter is a presentation of the descriptive themes emerging from participants’ interviews and photographs. In line with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analytic approach, the focus of the next chapter, Discussion, will engage an interpretative exploration of the experience and impact of these themes in the lives of these participants.

As is illustrated in the figure mapping out the emergent themes (Figure 4), two interrelated principal lenses are used to explore participants’ experiencing of spirituality in their lives. The first lens, *Influences*, names and identifies those influences that impact or form the participants’ named loci of experiencing spirituality. The second lens, *Interpretative Engaging*, explores how participants sift, sort, and sew these

influences together in meaningful ways as they name the experiencing of spirituality in their living life. This experiencing of spirituality has identifiable qualities. These qualities are not mutually exclusive, but are to be found in varying degrees in each of these participants' experience. These qualities are identified as (a) relational, (b) intentional, (c) directional, and (d) transformational.

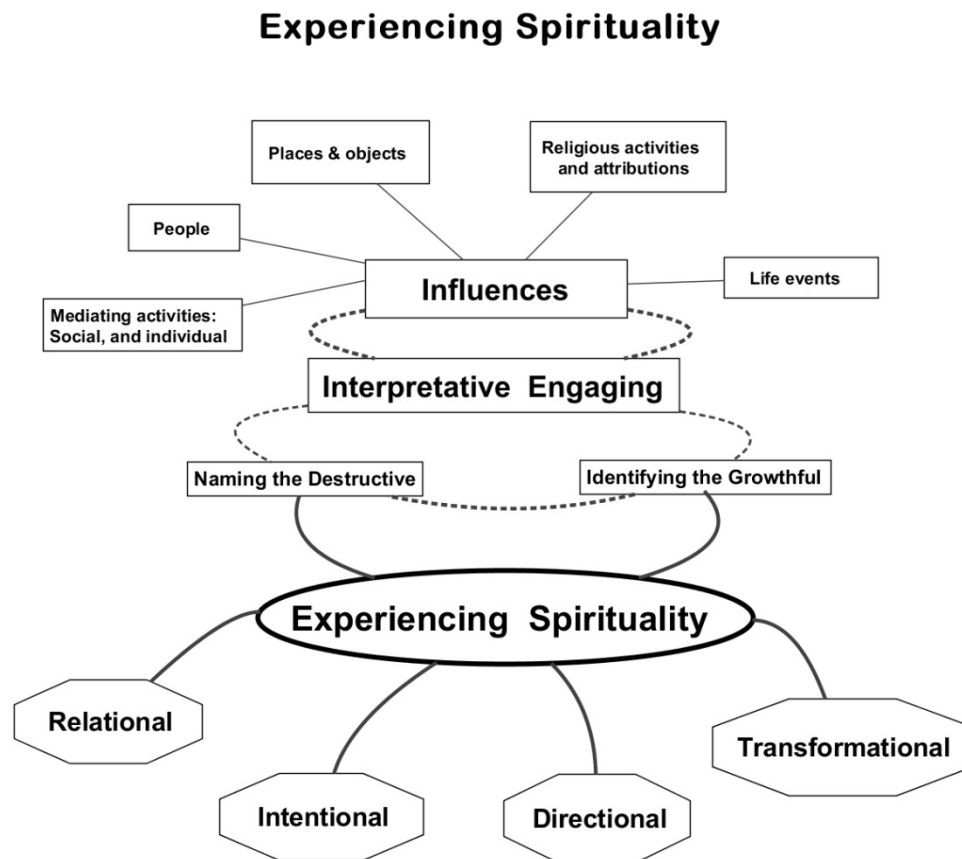


Figure 4. Thematic model: Emergent themes from participants' interviews and photos. Lines in this figure indicate connections. Causality is not implied in this model. The boldness of lines indicates strength of relationship.

While the identifying of these themes through these lenses produces a somewhat static appearing table of themes, the experiencing of spirituality was not static for any of these participants, or indeed for me in my own life. Through the interpretative process,

life's past moments become the landscape of living today, a today emergent with hopes, worries, and anticipations for however ongoing the moments of our tomorrows will be. It is in the mix of all of these identified themes each participant shared their unfolding experience of spirituality – at times with great clarity, and at other times haltingly and very much reflective of the apostle Paul's words, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Corinthians 12:13, New Revised Standard Version). Helping to illuminate the dimness, though, were the participants' bringing photographs as ways into further exploration of their experience of spirituality.

Participant Photographs

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the ongoing connectedness of most participants to religious tradition and expression, is the observation that there was a tendency for these participants to include as subject matter religious symbolic content. Several of the participants presented a majority of their photos focused on religious objects, whether those found within a church building, or statuary, which was located outdoors. Alongside these were photos depicting scenes from nature – some panoramic, and some with a particular focus of beauty, such as a single flowering plant. These symbolic photos of nature were often described with words such as "unexpected beauty that just kind of makes you smile," "moment of peace," "stillness," "we come we were born and we lived and we die – and we are reminded of that every year, with nature."

Other participants chose photos of individuals. These were photos described with words of denoting closeness and trust. These were photos of partners, trusted celebratory friends, or, in one instance, hands of an older person which became symbolic of life's journey with all its hardships and joys, struggles and resiliency. Photographs

capture moments in time but none of these photos were described as being “just” a photo bereft of context. Each was framed within a context of motion, of activity, of engagement.

Participants often described the content of their photos in terms of movement. It generally was a direction to a place and space of encounter with the “spiritual,” or with “God.” Murray, for instance, in talking about going to the mountains: “They are rock. They don’t tend to move that often.... they are anchored.... [And] I’m in the mountains. I’m back where I belong – back where things are good. God is here. God is near.”

Some photos lend themselves to what we might term pilgrimage. Others point to the space of encounter within a religious ceremonial space. It is described as space of joining with others in celebration and in community with others. And at times, upon further reflection, several noted the absence of that yearned for closeness or connectedness. This absence itself became a sign of their “otherness” in a religious world most often tainted by words of condemnation and exclusion for those who are gay.

In some participants’ photographs, there is an implicit depiction of movement towards spaces and places of relational encounter. In some cases, it is a realized and realizable encounter, in other cases, a longed for encounter. Spirituality, and the experience of spirituality is embedded in space and time, and most of all in relationship – whether that relationship is experienced in touch and lovemaking, or in being “in the presence of,” or in participating in ceremonies that connect with others over the course of millennia. Whether the depiction is of an object, a person, or a capturing of nature’s

beauty, the photographs were visual pointers to the influences participants experienced as part of their experience of spirituality.

Influences

Influences are those things that have power to sway or affect the course of events or someone's thinking or action. Influences can be as tangible as a physical location or as ephemeral as a smile. An influence can be an action, an experience, a place, or an object. Those things that influence the experiencing of spirituality in the lives of these research participants are wide ranging. Some influences have been identified by nearly each of these 14 individuals, while other influences have been identified by considerably fewer.

Places and Objects

Places and objects were identified by participants for their engendering, containing, or innervating their experiencing of spirituality. Places can be spaces intentionally constructed or defined by a given activity, or can be a specific spot or location in the natural environment. Participants found themselves in these spaces or places both through intentionally seeking them out, as well as through fortuitous and serendipitous discovery.

For participants in this research, it is not just places but sometimes it is certain objects occupying those spaces that are touchstones for mediating an experience of, or understanding of, spirituality. Objects in this set of influences can have functional purposes or not, some are intentionally constructed, while others are shaped by the forces of nature. Regardless of causal agency, the importance of place and object is the meaning attributed to them and the mediation of experience conveyed through them.

Places and objects in the natural environment. Places and objects in the natural environment become vehicles of reflection and learning about the mysteries of life's rhythms and its beginnings and endings. It is an identified theme which also encompasses a joining with the life force that marks growth, whether gardening in flower gardens or tilling the soil in a farmer's field.



Figure 5. Places and objects in the natural environment: Canadian Rocky Mountains. TeePee photo 5.

Teepee has a deep connection with the mountain location of a cabin that has been in his family for as long as he can remember (Figure 5). He returns to that area several times a year and recalls that at certain locations in that setting, “I’d go over there and be moved to tears. I’d sit and cry, and it’s... I just call it spirituality.” In that setting he experiences joy, healing, and humility. “It’s like ‘God we are just little specks on this planet and we’ve made our lives so complicated.’”

Sensing an acute awareness of being in the presence of something larger, powerful, and beyond understanding was at the root of many participants' comments in this research. With some of the photos Alex brought (see, for example, Figure 6), he reflected:

There is a majesty to the growing season... and how things change and the power of nature and I think that's one of the places where I can connect spiritually the most.... Everything else is set aside.... I can open myself up to a spiritual connection with myself and with God.



Figure 6. Places and objects in the natural environment: Summer flowers. Alex: “It’s this pop of colour and this unexpected beauty that just kind of makes you smile.” Alex photo 3.

From this stance of observing the natural environment, there is a movement towards an active interacting with the natural environment that is reflected in the experience and thoughts of Alec. Alec’s professional work involved worldwide travel

and in that work he stated, “I would go to the gardens... gardens have always been a very spiritual thing to me.” That connectedness to gardens is morphed into his own gardening experiences now.



Figure 7. Places and objects in the natural environment: Alec’s garden. Alec: “my garden.... it is my connection to the universe.” Alec photo 5.

Reflecting on a photo of part of his own garden behind his home (Figure 7), he stated:

I can’t climb every mountain... but what I can do is get my hands in the ground, in the earth, and create beauty. And this is something that I have done since I was a little kid.

Fashioned or created places and objects. Fashioned or constructed places and objects also become points of reflecting on experiencing spirituality. Highlights of this theme are variously picked up in experiences of art, as well as spaces created by the intention and design of those gathering in those places. I have placed specific religious settings and artefacts named by participants under the theme of Religious spaces, activities and attributions.

Murray stated that “anything that gets you to a thin place really defines spirituality or accessing the divine,” naming art as one of those means. When reflecting on his experience of spirituality, James spoke of sitting at his potter’s wheel experiencing the expressing of creativity working with clay that “almost becomes a living thing.” The potter moulds the clay and yet does not force the clay “but let[s] the clay do what it wants to do.” Similarly Alec, an artist by training, commented “I paint – so in the things I create, I find spirituality. Things that other people paint or do give me a spiritual feeling....”

In this vein, Chappy reflected on the nature and purpose of artistic expression, whether pre-historic cave paintings of Southern France or the impressionist “Lilly Ponds” of Monet (see Figure 8) “when it [art] rises above the level of simply entertainment.... there’s always spirit in there....” And speaking further about art, Chappy states both that “there’s something obviously spiritual about art and this quest for beauty” and that “there is something very human about art, and trying to create something of beauty.”

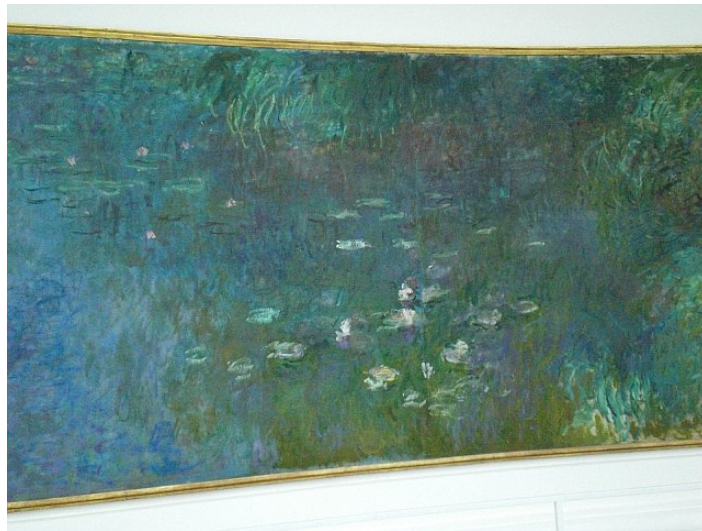


Figure 8. Fashioned or created places and objects: Monet. Chappy:” how art does it [is] to try to express the ineffable.” Chappy photo 2.

Created places are not necessarily physically constructed sites. This is the case with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)⁵ groups that meet once or twice a week in various locations in over 180 countries worldwide (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1972). For Teepee and Lorenzo, AA meetings have played and continue to be important places not only for them in maintaining their sobriety, but also as places and spaces in which spirituality is found and nurtured. As Teepee commented:

I went to AA and that introduced me to some form of spirituality in funniest way – not an organize[d] church but they speak about a higher power and they speak about that can be anything. It could be what you think church is, wherever you’ve come from – and/or it could just be the group – and/or it could be a higher part of yourself, you know. I liked that. It didn’t feel judgemental to me.

For Lorenzo, AA was a place of safety and stability as he not only embraced sobriety, but also came out to himself and his wife, children, and family, as a gay man. “So I proceeded to watch my life fall apart but really understood that somehow God was

there.” AA was also experienced as place of encounter and understanding: “It’s like I get into recovery in AA and I don’t want to just there. When I’d speak, I always say ‘I didn’t come today to sit and learn to knit. I came here to understand.’”

Several others identified the spaces for seeking out and engaging in anonymous sex as being those containing spaces in which encounters there had for them spiritual significance. Not that the space was spiritual, but it had to do with the encounter, as one participant noted, “It’s more than just a park.” He further recalled an encounter that “made such a wonderful difference in that moment in my life. I remember the first time making love to him.... it was just such a gift from God to help me to start defining what being gay is.” Another participant, in musing on his experience of the intersection of spirituality and sexuality, reflected “that’s certainly my experience – and the bathhouse, certainly the vulnerability – I recall some of the Old Testament stories of the encounter with the stranger who actually is an encounter with God.”

People

While places create one context in which spirituality is identified as being experienced, the experience of relating with others (including oneself) was identified by nearly every participant as influencing their experience of spirituality.

For Sebastien, one of the focuses of his reflecting on his experience of spirituality was captured in a photo of the hands of a 90-year old friend of his (Figure 9).



Figure 9. People: Hands of experience. Sebastien: “they’ve experienced life... these are the hands that taught me how to bake bread.” Sebastien photo 3.

... To me it was so spiritual, to look at these hands. These hands... have toiled, have nurtured children, have caressed in love, have dug in the garden, have hurt, have smoothed things out, have held loved ones.... These hands have seen joy, have seen sorrow, have wiped away tears... and when I look at these hands... I see the nurturing, I see the love.... they’ve experienced life.

Both Alec and Machal spoke a great deal about friends. “I have all those people who are very close and who we can sit and talk about anything.... I think having friends are a very spiritual thing,” states Alec (see Figure 10). Echoing this comment is Machal’s reflection, “Our friends really are very important in our lives.” This, for him, is a qualitative shift from when he was in the closet and that while the experience of his children growing up was “very important and very meaningful.” “I found, since I’ve “come out, since Alec and I have been living together – relationships have become very, very, very important.”



Figure 10. People: A circle of friends. Alec: “The love that you receive from your group of friends is very spiritual.” Machal photo 4.

Family members have been both sources of pain and wellsprings of joy for participants. Alec very directly stated that “having children was a very spiritual thing for me” in his contrasting his wife’s distant mothering style with his own intimate closeness to his two children from birth through adulthood. Just as he spoke of his son, “Just being with him and watching him grow was very spiritual for me.” Alec experienced a similar closeness with his grandparents who raised him (Figure 11). “I still reference them in – when I have decisions to make or things that I might say or not say – they’re there – speaking to me. So, they are very much part of the spirit of who I am.”



Figure 11. People: Family. Alec: “There is a wonderful spirit in the remembering of them... and the life I had with them... they are definitely lifters of my spirit.” Alec photo 2.

An experience of spirituality in relationship with his same-gender partner that has undertones of comfort and acceptance was reflected on by Alec as a contrast with his prior relationship with his former wife: “There was no spirituality during that time... it just was very, very, empty and then I met Machal and we are incredibly compatible... there was spirituality just in knowing him.” He further describes that experience as being filled with “more wonder and joy and all the other positive things you can think of... There is an incredible spirituality to our relationship, sexually and in every other way.”

Lorenzo attributes with a trusting certitude Alex’ presence in his life as God given gift: “I requested for God to place a wonderful man..... And one day Alex showed up out of hundreds and thousands and he was the one and he is a soulmate. And he was placed absolutely by God, I know.”

For several participants, their encounter with clergy was an experience either of highlighting and affirming their own spiritual path, or of opening a door to further

journey on their own spiritual path. Alex recalls a stinging reaction to a rector's sermon and then their message given personally to him and his partner at home.

She may even say I'm a sinner but I know I'm not. You can say that what I'm doing is wrong but I know that it's not. So, it very much – a strong self-identity that if there's confusion here, it's on your part, not my part, because I'm just living my life the best I know how and I do that through attempting to have a conscious contact with God.

In contrast, Lorenzo's experience of the rector of the church where he now attends is expressed in his reflection, "She's just like 'I'm here for you. I care for you and I care for Alex and you're in pain and I'm here'... and all of a sudden God is showing up in this church."

Religious Activities and Attributions

For those participating in this research, the concepts and categories of thinking about spirituality are rooted in the past and/or present within a broad brushstroke backdrop of Christendom and its Anglican expression. The influences that this particular super-ordinate theme subsumes include those activities experienced within this religious tradition as well as experiences described using religious or faith based manners of expression.

Religious settings and objects were identified as having significance either for their symbolic power in the experience of spirituality or, as in the case of religious edifices, for their power of being space in which spirituality was experienced (e.g., see Figure 12). This theme was expressed in one way or another in the contributory material nearly all of the participants. Words and phrases expressing the experience of

spirituality ranged from “serenity” to “security” and in this regard Alec’s comment captures this dimension of this theme, “Sometimes just being in the space has a spiritual connotation, mostly in old cathedrals in Europe... you walk through the door and there it is.” He further comments:

It’s a lightness, I feel lifted, so I’m floating, I don’t have the weight, the gravity that keeps you cemented to the floor. It lifts you and I get that feeling in a grand cathedral or in a forest...what really does it for me is the light.

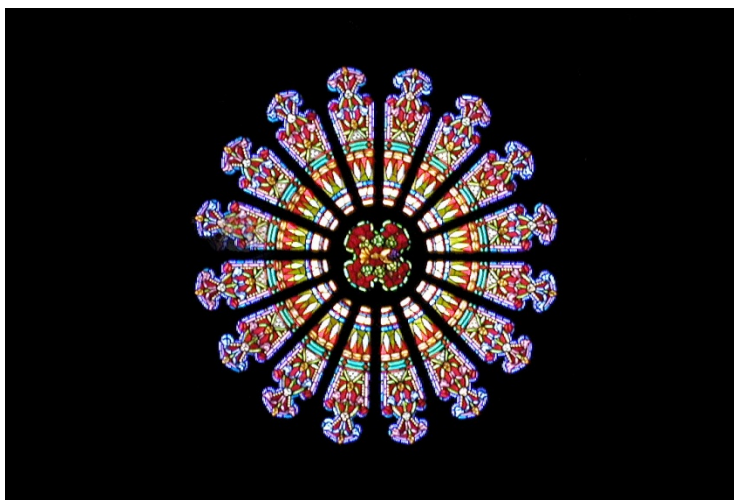


Figure 12. Religious activities and attributions: Church stained glass. “It represents a place that gives me great comfort and feeling and security.” Machal photo 5.

For most participants, the religious edifices referred to were Christian churches or cathedrals. For Andrew, going to a “recognizably sacred place” that contains recognizable sacred objects or religious representations is key. Because there, for him, is found “a link with some sense of learned doctrine of the Church” that, in turn, is pivotal to his understanding of his experience of spirituality. For example, he commented on one of his photos of the ambry in a church he frequently attends where blessed bread and wine from the Eucharist are kept or reserved for use outside of

services (e.g., for taking communion to the sick). Andrew reflected: “It’s an intersection between the world and heaven. There it is, right there. There’s the conduit... there’s also the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament there, and so you can feel closer when you are there” (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. Religious activities and attributions: Ambry sanctuary light. Andrew “I need to have a tabernacle in the church... the real presence of Christ... it’s also a focal point if you go into a church.” Andrew photo 3.

For Josiah, reflecting on Andrei Reblev’s Holy Trinity Icon is more than a touchstone with the scriptural story it portrays and the symbolic interpretation of that story in Christian circles of that being Abraham’s encounter with God as trinity (see Genesis 18). Josiah recalled words of a priest reflecting on the open space at the table depicted in the icon: “The reason why that’s there is because you are invited into the triangle of life.” Josiah further comments himself in saying that “the thing that I love about this icon, was, there’s space enough for someone else to sit down at the table... it was one of those moments of recognition” (see Figure 14).



Figure 14. Religious activities and attributions: Icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rublev. Josiah “Trinitarian theology is... really important to my spiritual journey.” © Anatoly Sapronenkov/SuperStock 1249-251-I-P32V. .

An interesting question for theme categorization and naming has come for me with the named experience of “God” in the lives of these participants. In this research references related with “God” are placed here under this theme. As will be seen, far from having a unitary descriptive characteristic, for some, such as Lorenzo, their speaking of “God” is clearly in terms that are personal and anthropomorphic and relate to God as a person. For others, this force or object of reflective discourse pointed to with the word *God* is characterized in terms such as Alec’s references to “the Universe.” Given that the purpose of this research rests within the purview of counselling psychology, questions about the ontological and epistemological nature of what is pointed to by “God” or similar referents remain beyond the scope of this discussion.

This experience of relation with God is one that Lorenzo often characterized with the phrase to “show up.” As he began the journey out of alcohol dependency, Lorenzo

related one time having “this extraordinary belief that God would provide, that God would be there, that whatever I needed and the children needed would show up.” The “showing up” is more than a mere presence, it is a personal and powerful presence that confronts and comforts, supports and guides, and challenges – and all the while rooted in respect for the freedom of the other in their decision making. For Lorenzo, “showing up” entails a courageous vulnerability and openness to the moment, to decisions beckoning to be made, and issues a call to grow into an unfiltered honesty regarding self and others.

The church, as institution, is experienced as space of spiritual growth and conflict that is pointed to in Dean’s use of the word *vocation* and his commitment to both his sense of vocation to priesthood in the church and his commitment to his partner.

But I spent years thinking, well I can’t have the relationship because I’m committed to my vocation and then I went through a period when I was like “fuck the vocation, I want the relationship” and now I’m like “no, both of those things are important to me, so in God’s own time they will come together or I am not meant to be the incumbent of St. Whatever.... Sometimes I don’t know if I’m angry at the church or if I am angry at myself.

For Dean, church is the space and place of articulating spiritual meaning.

I was preaching more and suddenly I was having to talk about the Gospel and I was talking about Jesus more, what I realized is that the Christian story, that narrative of the life of Jesus and it wasn’t just something that I had to teach as a priest but it was something that was in – had really got into my bones – over my life as being an Anglican and as a Christian and I thought, “ my God is an

incarnate God, and whatever I believe about the incarnation and the mechanics of it, the point is that for me this person Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is for me the fullest revelation of God.”

Dean further relates:

There’s always been those times when somehow God has reached out to me... something always manages to reach out to me – and learning to have faith in that... God loves me regardless of what messes I make and how many times I completely forget that God’s even there.... Trying to hold onto that belief has been really central to my spirituality.

For Josiah, who came to the Anglican Church from a Pentecostal Holiness tradition, his experience of church is a space of spiritual affirmation and welcome.

I’m welcome even if the Anglican Church of Canada says, in its institutional bullshit, that they’re not quite sure what to do with me yet, my experience has been – you are welcome in the house of God and you are welcome as a gay man and your relationships can be holy and a great deal of fun.

Both Andrew and Ron named Mary, mother of Jesus, as a person playing a role in their reflection on their experience of spirituality (see Figure 15). Ron stated that after once being hit by a car, he almost reflexively engaged in prayer: “I remember praying the Hail Mary, even though I hadn’t said the Rosary in many years so somewhere in there, Mary is still a factor, I guess, and the whole maternal aspect of God, if you want.” Ron also related that female and maternal dimension that he sees in Mary, to the wider community of gay men “the whole idea of Mary as caregiver, as

mother” and alluding that gendered aspect of the figure of Mary to the practice of gay men sometimes referring to one another as “sister.”



Figure 15. Religious activities and attributions: Mary, Mother of Jesus. Andrew: “It’s for me the story of the nativity but it’s the story of the importance of Mary.” Andrew photo 5.

Andrew was equally reflective on the feminine and Mary, and one of his photos was of a stained glass window depicting Mary. “She is first among human humans, if you like, so she is sort of halfway between Christ and us, in human form.” At another point, Andrew spoke of praying to the saints, referring to Mary’s place as being “an extra person in the royal family that you can have a personal connection with.”

Dean speaks of his spiritual life “deepening” as a result of his being “intentional about being a Christian and a person of prayer.” This intentionality is distinguished from talking “about” and is framed in a sense of creating space in time and directed effort.

I've talked a lot about God and I've inserted the word God into a lot of things I've written.... Being free of all the trappings of the church has allowed me to be intentional about my own personal spiritual life.

Identifying openly as both a gay man and as a practicing Christian, Dean reflects on the struggle that on the one hand seeks the affirmation of others: "I want to be gay and Christian, is that ok?" and on the other recognizes that "it's not up to other people to affirm that in me" because "it's being able to validate and affirm myself rather me needing other people to do that."

James's struggle was not to be found in seeking affirmation from others, but in his driven desire for "a relationship with the Creator. I wanted to know where I was sitting with the Creator, was I damned to the fires of hell: or was I just as who I was?"

My first experience of my spirituality.... I went from believing because I was told to believe by my parents, my grandparents and ministers and priests – to actually believing because the Holy Spirit wanted me to believe... I think God was challenging me – basically saying "I need you. I don't make mistakes. Deal with it"... [in church] I'm sitting near the front instead of the back and suddenly it dawns on me, I'm okay. You know, you have this sort of like [deeply exhaling] come over you and you have this... realization, or epiphany that I'm okay, that I am going to look upon the face of my Creator one day and there's nobody stopping me. It's just me and Him.

For both Murray and Andrew, particular artefacts or places within the church building had particular spiritual significance. Murray, for instance, brought a photo of his church's sacristy (see Figure 16).

Certainly, people think of Christianity as something that happens on Sunday morning and I don't – I think Sunday morning is the fuel for the rest of the week and that this is the preparation for Sunday morning. So that the altar flowers are cut and prepared here.... [as well as] the altar linens and cloths and assorted other paraphernalia.... that all happens here.



Figure 16. Religious activities and attributions: A church's sacristy. Murray: "I think the Sacristy, for me, represents the bottom of the iceberg, the stuff that's below the surface when it comes to how we express our faith – and how we worship." Murray photo 1.

Life Events

The events that occur in the course of living life become pivotal for some participants in their experiencing spirituality in their lives. The identification of one's sexual orientation was integral to participants' self-understanding, and with some participants, the initial process of coming out became a space for experiencing spirituality. Participants' experiencing entailing the specific linking of spirituality and life events included such things as health issues, experiences in educational processes, parenting, and encountering the spectre of death.

For some, like Chappy, the struggle around coming out was very much tied in with ideas of and having experienced messages of an angry and judgmental God who was totally unaccepting of same-gender sexual orientation. Chappy shared that in his last year of undergraduate work, he came close to committing suicide. In the midst of that struggle he stated:

I had that “Voice of God” experience – at the eleventh hour – you know, when I was all ready to do it and it was that voice that says “no, no, no – you are my beloved creation, just keep on as I’ve created you.”

As he now engages in the formal study of theology, Josiah’s books and reading continue to be fields of encounter with spiritual understanding and growth.

Books have always been key in my spirituality. I actually learned to read – or to enjoy reading – because I had an experience of being alienated from the community I was with because I didn’t read very well [in grade 1].... there’s a sense of integrating and coming together ... I’ve got queer stuff including some erotica... and the BAS and the Bible and philosophical hermeneutics.... there is a sense for me of all of these different strands and all these different books starting to come together in my live, imaginatively in a way that I find really helpful.

A key time infused with spirituality for Alec was having and taking a lead role in nurturing his children growing up. “There is an incredibly spiritual thing in creating children,” and speaking further of his firstborn, he stated, “Just being with him and watching him grow was very spiritual for me.”

Encountering or facing death, whether one's own as in the case of Chappy, or the death of others, opens for some of these participants a space of reflection, encounter, and continued spiritual understanding and growth. As a young adult, for James it was the occasion of his grandfather's death:

It was the first time I think I've actually knelt and prayed with a trueness of heart, saying "God, if you are there, help me"... and next thing you know, it was just like – I've described that experience to some people as it's as if it's the time the Holy Spirit comes into your night, rips the sheets off you and exposes you to the elements because you've had everything stripped away from you – your own personal belief, the security that you knew what you believed in, you've stripped away the knowledge that you believed there was a God, and everything else – and then the Holy Spirit spoke to you, "You're going to believe now because I want you to believe, not because you had a Minister or Priest who told you to believe" so, when I was actually kneeling there... that's when I started the process of coming into myself.

For Lorenzo and Teepee, the 12-step program of AA and the struggle with alcohol abuse has within it an experience of spiritual awareness and strength. Reflecting on experiencing current stresses, Teepee said about AA:

It is a spiritual program as well and it helps me be reminded to think about God during the day a bit and try to feel the serenity. This isn't a physical thing – like, God's presence isn't the land at [Ruby] Lake. God is in each one of us and I really believe that and so that's kind of where I'm finding spiritual connections, with my world, right now.

Mediating Activities: Creative and Expressive, Social and Introspective

This theme draws into itself those actions or activities which can, for the individual, themselves be vehicles for experiencing spirituality. These actions and activities can be broadly categorized as creative or expressive, alongside and somewhat overlapping the social or introspective.

Creative and expressive. Creative and expressive experiences in which participants reported experience spirituality range from writing, whether in a blog, a sermon, or in a journal, to painting, to working with clay on a potter's wheel, to singing.

For Alec, the sensual is the vehicle for experiencing spirituality:

I think that it is a feeling inside you which draws you closer to the universe through art, music, other people – it's to do with your senses so that all of them can give you a feeling of spirituality.... Spirituality to me I think most often is visual. I'm an artist. I paint. So in things that I create, I find spirituality.

The potter's wheel has a particular poignancy for James as he works with clay and reflects on the creative process working with this medium. Echoing references in the Hebrew scriptures using the imagery of the potter giving shape to clay as a metaphor for their understanding of God's creative activity (see, for example, Isaiah 64:8 "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."), James reflects:

Each glob of clay that you throw on the wheel can have its own personality and it's how you make it work to become centred.... And then clay almost becomes a living thing, you learn not to force the clay but let the clay do what it wants to do – and then when you open it up and start to form your vessels with it.... the clay

doesn't move unless you actually have your fingers forming it. And the fingers form the clay, depending upon the consistency of the clay and the dryness or the wetness of the clay....

For Dean, the expressive is found in his reflective writing (see Figure 17). “It helps me to see and reflect back on what I was thinking and feeling and doing but to sort of be able to put together a pattern and where God’s hand might be.”



Figure 17. Creative or expressive: Crafting with words. Dean: “A big part of my spirituality too, I realized, has always been sort of mental.... Reading is a huge thing for me and then I write a lot and I write my thoughts out so I do a lot of journaling and I do it here at the computer.” Dean photo 3.

For others, the expressive is found in music, whether in singing or in playing music (see Figure 18). Stone indicated that for him a spiritual practice is to chant, whereas Murray recalled the powerful impact in attending a worship service with 1,500 others at a national gathering of the Metropolitan Community Church: “I just felt this incredible power wash over me.”

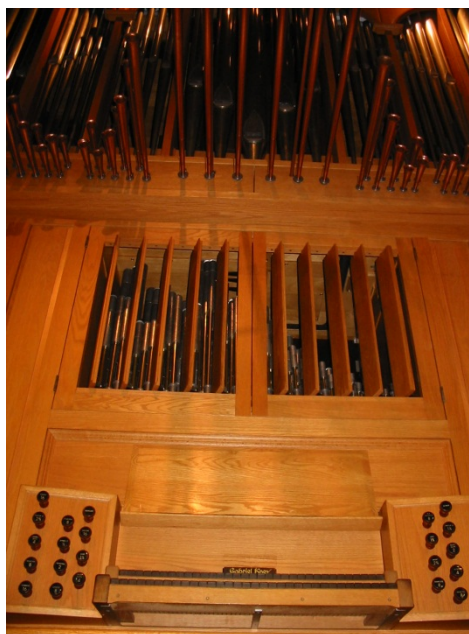


Figure 19. Creative or expressive: Making music. Alex: [the sound of the organ] “can represent the majesty of God, and the tiny miracles in our everyday world.” Alex photo 1.

Social and introspective. The social and introspective encompasses a range of experiences. The social is exemplified by friends gathering for a meal, or simply gathering, to “pushing the envelope” with regards to social justice issues, to sexual encounter and love-making. The introspective, on the other hand, is exemplified by participants’ self-talk and meaning-making learnings about their experiences of spirituality.

Sebastien comments: “I find one thing very, very, spiritual is when we entertain and have dinner parties and groups of friends in.... The sharing with others, that’s a spiritual experience.” He further reflected on the connection that marks his understanding and experience of spirituality:

I think spirituality is also the relationship you have with other people in context of daily life – professional life, church life, friendships, acquaintances, family....

spirituality for me is that connection with others, connection with the world you live in – to me. Spirituality is that connection.

Outreach and social justice activities contain those activities that work for the alleviating of human need and suffering – whether locally or far afield. It can be volunteering in a local aid agency, for example, meals on wheels, or participating in activities such as Habitat for Humanity in helping to build houses for the disadvantaged.



Figure 20. Social or introspective: Welcoming safe space. Chappy: “... not about the building but about the presence that’s there... to be that sort of welcoming and safe space....” Chappy photo 4.

For Chappy and several other participants, looking and working beyond the usual walls of church on matters of social justice, raising awareness, and working in pastoral care to effect change is a core understanding of experiencing spirituality. The challenge of social justice issues is something that strongly marked Chappy’s experience of spirituality. “Anyone doing a spiritual quest – I mean, that pushing the envelope is really important – it’s one of the main purposes of religion.” That spiritual quest is also

engaged in creating a welcoming and safe community (see Figure 20): “To be that sort of welcoming and safe space for everyone means you confront the injustice issues as well – you can’t create the safe space without doing that.”

Dean reflected on his experience of spirituality in the context of his relationship with a man he had been dating. Dean spoke of a time on a winter’s night following what he thought was a fight that would end that relationship (see Figure 21).

And so life felt totally dark and I was standing there and there was one street light over the bus stop – the street car stop – and that flickered and suddenly went out. Then all of a sudden, this light came on behind me and it was the light over the statue of Jesus and I looked up and He’s covered with snow and you could see this old cobweb and stuff and He looked very neglected but in the dark there was still this light and there’s Jesus pointing to His heart.... it was a reminder – right in the midst of the darkness and the worst times and the cold, Jesus is there.

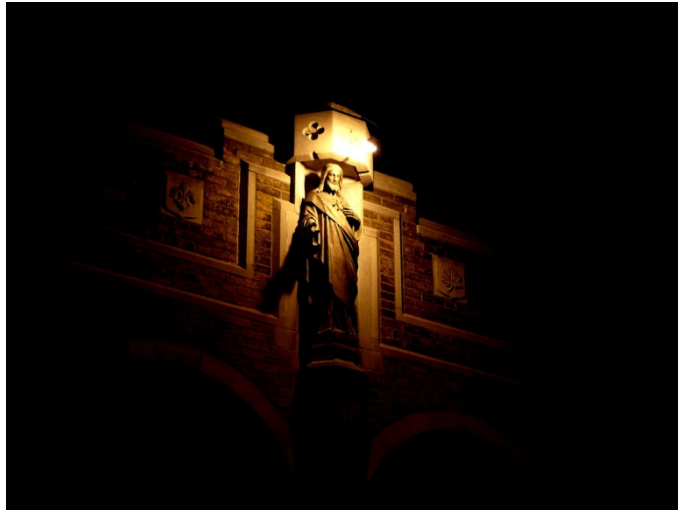


Figure 21. Social or introspective: In the midst of the darkness. Dean: “God is present in the world in our pain and our woundedness and our brokenness and he gets rejected just like us....” Dean photo 1.

More specifically relating to his relationship with his partner, Dean points to a Christmas photo of the two of them stating “in terms of spirituality, this picture speaks to me of the centrality of love but also that love costs.” The cost of love he refers to is, in this particular instance, the brokenness and rejection that can result through homophobic judgments being made, and specifically in terms of his partner’s father’s rejection of their relationship (see Figure 22).



Figure 22. Social or introspective: Love costs. Dean: “My relationship with him is very central to my life and it’s a big part of my spiritual life....” Dean photo 5.

With trusting certitude Lorenzo attributes Alex’ presence in his life as a God given gift. In the midst of a crisis in their relationship, another dimension of spirituality is hinted at, both: (a) in an inner experience that is relational (i.e., “love is about truly giving from the heart”); and (b) in its resultant emotional quality “if this isn’t the place you’re happy, by all means you have to do what makes you happy.”

The relational is also expressed in sexual encounters. As Ron commented:

Sexuality, spirituality – both begin with the same letter – and to me, they can be and quite often are intertwined.... The whole experience of spirituality can be a kind of total letting go, a total trust in God. The whole experience of sexuality or sex can be and quite often is a total letting go and a total thing of trust and I mean, Gerry kind of teases me because.... I can be kind of verbal and it’s like

“Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God” and so if that ain’t spiritual, I don’t know what is!

For these participants, the experience of spirituality is also reflected on in their own self-reflections, self-analysis, and emotional processing. For instance, Alex experiences a sense of self-confidence: “I’ve always been blessed in every aspect of my life. So, I think that gives a person a great deal of self-confidence.” Linked with that self-confidence is also, as he puts it, “a sense of surrender” which is summed up when he states: “If I’m on the wrong path, God’s going to get me back on the right path. I do my best and God does the rest.” These are also reflected in his experience of self-directed action that results in a renewed sense of spiritual energy and strength.

Whenever I do something that is just about being... reading a great book... and stuff like that... it’s not so much that that in itself is spiritual but that time to just do something for me, something that restores me and my energy and my strength, is a spiritual act.

Alex speaks of his reflecting being an active process of opening up:

Taking the time just to listen to nothing, to let my mind quiet... the whole range of life’s experiences are spiritual if I let them be spiritual ... just to be silent and to shut out the noise of the everyday world.... is a wonderful gift. I can open myself up to a spiritual connection with myself and with God.

The active nature of exploring and meaning making for oneself is particularly articulated in Ron’s words:

Spirituality, it’s that period between birth and death when I/we are struggling to learn what it means to walk and accept ourselves and others.... I’ve had to

question all the teachings and assumptions made by “The Church” through the lens of a gay man’s life and learn to jettison what was not true or appropriate for me.... I don’t give a tinker’s damn what the church is saying about me. It’s about what I have come to learn about myself, to integrate within myself, and to accept within myself, who I am, and that I am accepted and cared for and loved by my Creator.

Interpretative Engaging

In exploring the experience of spirituality in their lives, participants entered into an interpretative engaging with all the elements and influences that make up living life. Broadly speaking, this interpretative process both names what is experienced as destructive and negative, and identifies what is experienced as growthful and positive. It is out of this interpretative engaging that experiencing spirituality is named and identified in their lives.

Naming the Destructive

This theme serves as a container for those elements of living life that have been, or are being experienced as harmful, damaging, and unhelpful. This theme is experienced in different ways in the reported lives of these participants. It is experienced in compartmentalization and fragmentation of different aspects of a person’s life, some of which may be in conflict or at odds with other aspects of an individual’s life. The destructive is also experienced in states of fear, as well as experiencing a fear of action and acting, and a fear of risk taking.

Homophobia is a particular and pervasive destructive experience. Homophobia is a range of negative attitudes and feelings towards same sex attraction and behaviour,

and people who are identified as or perceived as being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, or queer. It is expressed as antipathy, contempt, prejudice, aversion, and irrational fear. It can be manifested by individuals, groups, and institutions. It pervades our culture and society. A spinoff of homophobia is often experienced more specifically in feelings of disenfranchisement and exclusion. This often results in a feeling and a reality of being isolated. Another aspect of experiencing these destructive elements is an experience of existential angst or anxiety that is the experience of struggle in one's life and relationships and in finding or creating meaning for oneself.

Dean, in reflecting on being “a huge compartmentalizer,” particularly in relationship to sexuality and spirituality, framed that reflection in terms of the Christian doctrine of incarnation about which he said, “I passionately believe in that – it's at the heart of my spirituality.”⁶

Then I take my little surgical tool and I start separating that flesh from whatever I think it's not supposed to have anything to do with.... it certainly is an ongoing struggle not to struggle with it. And being aware that that's something that I've done – and being Christian and being gay and living in the Western world as I do – I think all of those things kind of go against you in terms of just allowing yourself to be who you are.

The experience of pervasive powerful fear was expressed by Machal:

All the way through until I was age 50.... always constantly afraid that I would be cast out. I would lose some friends that I had, family, job, the whole ball of wax... lose everything that I had in my life, everything that had been built up. I

had 2 children, I had family, house, job and all that sort of thing. And I was constantly afraid that would all just go if I ever told anyone who I really was.

At a young age, James experienced homophobia and its impact was long lasting in his life. He remembers:

Being on a streetcar with my Grand-uncle who was very Pentecostal and we drove by down by City Hall, and I remember... and I'd only be about 8 or 9 at the time, the rant my Grand-uncle went on about homosexuals and doomed for the fires of Hell and everything else, because we could see, off in the distance, the [Pride] Parade going on – and that impacts an 8- or 9-year old.

TeePee reflected on dealing with homophobia in his current workplace and the tension that surrounds decision making on whether to confront those attitudes or not. Noting his own perspective that “the spiritual wounding that comes from homophobia is the deepest pain gay people suffer and it upsets me to no end,” he then narrated his own experience in working for a large company with offices in multiple sites. Noting that he is out to those in his local office, there are times that senior management visit from other sites. On the occasion of these visits and going out for meals with these individuals, “They will all sort of butch it up, if you will, and try and impress... with their redneck... and then twice it's turned to homophobic comments.”

When it involves career stuff, it's like, you know, this is about my welfare. This is about my paycheque. This is about my career. I am going to be careful about how I manage this.... If I lived with that kind of stuff every week, I'd have to deal with it straight on. But because it's infrequent, twice in 5 years, I'm okay. I'm offended but it's not keeping me up at night.

Machal related an experience of publically being made to not feel welcome. In a small village near where he and his husband live, there was an advertisement for a traditional Anglican service being held in a hall.

So we went, and there were – we walked up the stairs and there was maybe 12 people there – and they were very friendly... and I went up to introduce myself to the priest. And I said (and it was obvious that we were two men together and probably gay)... so I went to shake his hand and I said “I’m Machal “ and he just turned and walked away.... I’m not shy or retiring or anything like that, but I was just kicked in the shins, publicly too. So we never went back.

Identifying the Growthful

This theme serves as a container for those elements of living life that have been, or are being experienced as life giving, helpful, constructive, and that are identified by participants as being instances of or highlighting their experience of spirituality. This theme is also experienced in different ways in the reported lives of these participants. The growthful has an evaluative stamp of acceptance and affirmation. This can entail an affirmation of the goodness of one’s sexual orientation, sexual activity, as well as all the other characteristics that mark each individual person in whatever stage of life they may be. In terms of relating beyond the self, the growthful encompasses belonging, inclusion, and connectedness. This includes creating and finding spaces of welcome and community with others.

A third dimension of this theme is the experience of purposeful and grounded engagement with others and in living out one’s own life. This takes shape in embracing

hope for positive possibilities, in helping others, and in articulating in word and action a grounded trust and self-assurance in nurturing relationships and life goals.

Acceptance and affirmation. Affirming of self as good and right is captured by Alex in his assertion of being created in the image of God: “God is in all of it’s what I’m calling that greater consciousness that we strive to have greater awareness of and knowing that, if I was created in the likeness of God, then who am I am can’t be wrong.”

This affirmation in what was experienced in an intersection of spirituality and sexuality was also named by several participants. Lorenzo reflected, “I think everybody has their own journey – and for me, I wanted to welcome God in my bed... God lives in me in all areas of my life – and that includes my sexuality.”

Josiah brought a photo of a Positive Space sign that was posted on a university wall (see Figure 23)



Figure 23. Acceptance and affirmation: A safe space. Josiah: “A positive space. You will not be attacked here.” Josiah photo 5.

Reflecting on this photo, Josiah mused:

For me, the concept of incarnation and God particularly in Jesus Christ saying “you know, matter is good and the body is good and sex, aha, is good” so for me to find safe spaces like this and I am very good too, is how that connects and being able to celebrate colour and being touched and touching and listening to sound and all of this is good. I think that’s how – and all of this can be potentially shot through with the sacred too, if you look for it.

The experience of the spiritual as being embodied is more specifically focused on as Dean spoke of the photo taken in his apartment (see Figure 24):

[This] speaks to how important physical fitness and physical aspects of my life have become over the last few years and that, for me, that is important because it’s an embodied spirituality.... And I also think that, as a Christian, it’s important for me because it speaks to the whole incarnational aspect – that spirit is not just sort of an idea out there but it’s something that’s lived and in a physical and material way.



Figure 24. Acceptance and affirmation: Embodiment celebrated. Dean: “I think my spiritual life is something I’ve learned to integrate into every area of my life... it’s an embodied spirituality.” Dean photo 4.

Connectedness and belonging. Another aspect of identifying the growthful by participants is found in identifying the spiritual flowing from or within experiences that impart a felt-sense of connecting, not only more deeply within oneself, but connecting with others and the transcendent beyond oneself. This relational acceptance is simply stated by Ron when he said, “I may not be accepted by society or the church or whatever but He, as in God, accepts me.”

Connectedness and acceptance and his struggling journey to experience that in relationship with God is reflected on by James:

The spirituality concept was that it was an evolutionary process – and I think it’s as tangible as it is intangible, if that makes sense. It’s as much logical and illogical – when you can go from sitting in a pew thinking that you may never look upon the Creator’s face until you have that moment of Epiphany where you

feel like your soul's about to jump right out of you – and you are sitting in the pew looking at the altar thinking, yes, one day I will see my Creator's face. It's a remarkable journey of spirituality and it's a tough road to go through for anybody.

Identifying spirituality as infusing his loving relationship with his partner, Alec reflects on this as also expanding to and incorporating relationship with their friends as well.

We know each other – how each other are going to react to different things. If I need someone to talk to, he listens. I listen to him. We talk a lot – we just have a wonderful time together – and when we're apart for one reason or another, it's not right until we are back together again. So yes, indeed, there is an incredible spirituality to our relationship, sexually and in every other way. We both love to have people around. We both love our friends very much. We love to entertain. We absolutely need each other very much – yup.

For Stone, spirituality is not something that is possessed, spirituality “is not having as much as it is being within something greater.” There is a sense of belongingness that is all encompassing.

I think that there is Divine presence in everyone, and everywhere – and that's I think what I was referring to earlier when I said you can't just leave it behind – right? You are part of whether you want to call it the Upman or God or the Universe – however you want to identify it. You are part of it –

Dean reflects on an encompassing that spans time and those journeying on a similar Christian path:

People's stories are very important to me because then you do realize that other people have walked that path, whether 500 years ago or are doing it right now.... I'm part of something that lots of people have been and are part of in different ways and so I'm not alone on that and the church nurtures me – in its mystical body of Christ way.

As James reflected on a photo of his family's Loyalist homestead, the belongingness he experiences has roots in his past but also is infused with future hopes and growth. It is mirrored in the groundedness of nature's growthful rhythms (see Figure 25):

There's a lot in there... you can see it in the decaying stumps or the decaying fence rail...you go out to the homestead and... so it's roots – that, to me, speaks of spirituality. Because I actually had a lot of education from my grandparents and my grandaunt – and so it's a connection and I think it gives you some kind of grounding....



Figure 25. Connectedness and belonging: The new and the old. James: “it’s sort of like this year’s growth coming to an end and the world is going into reparative sleep and then it’s going to be rejuvenated the next year and that’s the whole promise there.” James photo 6.

Belonging is particularly experienced as spiritual when some participants spoke of the importance of their relationship with friends. In this regard Alec said: "... Community, we have a very wide circle of friends who... are a support and they are family... the love that you receive from your group of friends is very spiritual."

Chappy, in reflecting on the spiritual health of a congregation, reflected on the healing stories involving Jesus in the New Testament gospels. He noted that Jesus reached out to those who were disenfranchised from having access to the religious rituals of their day and in reaching out to heal them provided them an alternate way to experience wholeness. Extrapolating to the present day, he notes, "The genuineness of the community can be measured by how well it deals with the people on the margins.... It's very much about everyone coming to the party and no one being expendable in that process." It's about the importance of welcoming and in that welcoming experiencing a healthy spirituality.

Purposeful and grounded engagement. The experiencing of spirituality also is characterized in the lives of some of these participants by a groundedness, that is, a sense of self-assuredness which enables both the taking of risk in living confidently and with a sense of purpose. In this way, Sebastien comments on the photo of a 90-year old friend's hands:

I can see these hands and I can touch my history, I can touch my personal feelings about my history – about my past, my present, and I hope, my future... and I think it's the way she held them on a cushion – and they're also holding – even now, in that picture, they're holding me.... I think what I want to say is that God's not going to let me go

The theme of finding, celebrating, and living the message of hope is one that is core for Chappy.

It's all about hope.... and that... is the essence of the message, it seems to me, of the Christian message; that nothing can stop the hope. [There's] that great negro spiritual or political battle cry "Keep your eye on the Prize" and so either in this field of activity or in this field of activity, when you run across the nay-sayers, you say, well, fine – but they're not going to stop you. You listen to what they have to say, you weigh it back and forth but what is simply nay-saying, you say – it's all about the hope.

And that living out hopefulness for Chappy is one that has taken him into the political and social action arena. At one point he stated, "Every action must be a thoughtful action," and later reflected on one example of that experience of in his life

.... The dynamic tension of dealing of with the struggle within the church and within civil society and it's always an act in progress.... I withdrew from Egale after the common-law legislation went through.... to me, all the dominoes were laid up – the marriage thing was coming. We knew, it was unstoppable.... I remember sitting there watching when the vote was taken in the House of Commons and the tears streamed down my face and "Here, we got it!" I didn't think I'd live long enough to see this, so it does work! You know, it does work. You move people along.

For some participants, engaging with others is nurtured by grounding themselves in activities that are familiar and restorative. This is the case for Alex who stated:

I can accept that I have almost no control over anything in life but these few touchstones: taking time to read a book, getting my Christmas decorations up, having, living in serenity. Certainly if there's anything that's spiritual, it's our home.... It's typically immaculate, a place for everything, everything in its place.

Experiencing Spirituality

Experiencing of spirituality can be seen to have identifiable qualities. These qualities are not mutually exclusive, but are to be found in varying degrees in each of these participants' experience. These qualities are identified as (a) relational, (b) intentional, (c) directional, and (d) transformational.

Relational

The experience of spirituality for most of these participants can be described as *relational*. With reference to the present research participants, they most frequently mentioned a relational engagement with social justice issues. This ranged from Chappy's lobbying involvements in moving forward issues of inclusion and equality, to others participating in such efforts as assisting in building housing in a Habitat for Humanity project, and with others in their congregation's responsive outreach to those in need. Curiously, perhaps, while there was expressed a relational dynamic of church that can be characterized as social justice in nature, there were few direct references indicating a looking to the church as a source of personal moral guidance.

Many participants spoke explicitly about their personal relating with God, the Divine, or the Universe. On the one hand, James related sitting in the pew contemplating a future beholding of the face of his Creator. On the other hand, Alec narrated experiencing physical light in spaces that have a "spiritual connotation." For

him, this can trigger an experience of the sensation of floating: “I don’t have the weight, the gravity that keeps you cemented to the floor.” For Chappy, a personal relating with the Divine lies in beholding and being transfixed by the beauty of Monet’s paintings in Paris.

The relational dynamic was often clearly seen in references made to participants’ reflections about partners or same-gender spouses. Relationships for these participants mediated experiences of connectedness and spirituality. Both Dean and Ron brought photos of themselves with their partners. Commenting on his photo with Joe, Ron stated: “We’ve been together as a couple for – it will be 16 years this month.... He’s not a church-goer... but he’s a very spiritual man. And I know that he loves me unconditionally.... [that’s] forced... my own growth in spirituality.” Another aspect of the relational nature of spirituality was pointed to by Alec, as well as Lorenzo, which referred to the bond between father and child. Alec recalled rocking his son in the cradle as an infant, “and just being with him and watching him grow was very spiritual for me.”

But Josiah’s formative recollections paint a very different dynamic, illustrating the impact of a father-son relational experience. As a child, Josiah described the experience of his stepfather as being at times abusive. Josiah had contracted Cerebral Palsy at birth and he reports that his father was relentless in his pushing Josiah to walk. Josiah relates that experience with his thinking of “Father God” as an abusive father. “But the sense of terror, almost, was acute. And so Jesus was always OK, God the Father was not, and Holy Spirit was okay, because I hung out a lot with Pentecostals.” Josiah noted that as a child when fearful, particularly with his stepfather, he often would

sing religious songs. Asked as a young adult “Why?” by his stepfather, he responded “You know, Papa, that was because I was afraid but Jesus was safe.”

Through relationship with the earth and nature, others experienced the power of what they described as spirituality. For Alec, it was gardening. For Teepee, it was going to the mountains, and particularly to a site on which his parents had built a cottage, and which became a yearly place of visitation and renewal. For Alex, it was the relationship with nature and farming that marked his growing up. The rhythms and beauty of nature are important points of connecting, for finding his place in the universe, and in his experiencing spirituality. Speaking of the patterns of nature, he states: “there is a majesty to the growing season, and to our seasons and how things change, and the power of nature. And I think that’s one of the places where I can connect spiritually the most.” When he finds himself in the midst of nature

... everything else is set aside and you have a time and the opportunity just to be silent and to shut out the noise of the everyday world. So that in and of itself is a wonderful gift. I can open myself up to a spiritual connection with myself and with God.

Intentional

To be intentional means to be purposeful or deliberate. The articulated experience of spirituality was experienced by most as being intentional in its quest and in generating meaning making in participants’ lives. This intentionality was seen in a variety of ways – from deliberately setting aside time for reflection (see Figure 26), to engaging a healing process, to giving shape and form in creative artistic expressions.



Figure 26. Intentional: “My morning prayer.... it’s a good place to start your day.... it centres me and it grounds me. It just allows me to stop, breathe, and it gives me a transition point – leaving home, going to work, leaving home, going to wherever. And it’s just sort of stop, breathe, ground, connect.... It grounds and provides strength. (Murray photo 3)

For Lorenzo and Teepee, intentionality has to do with their attending AA meetings. Entering that 12 step program was articulated by both as having spiritual significance (see Galanter, 2007). For Lorenzo, this is closely intertwined with his very personal articulating of relationship with God – a God who “shows up” in his life in meaningful ways. For Teepee, the intentional attending AA meetings has a definite spiritual dimension. However, for Teepee, the intentionality that marks the experience of spirituality in his life is primarily evidenced powerfully in his regular journeying to the mountains. It is in the mountains that he powerfully experiences relationship with the divine, and he seeks for that with a palpable intentionality.

Another avenue of experiencing spirituality intentionally is through artistic expression. This was particularly evident in Alec’s words, who as an artist said “in

things that I create, I find spirituality. [And] things that other people paint or do gives me a spiritual feeling.” This was also James’ experience as he reflected on his work at the potter’s wheel. He spoke of the nature of clay, the formative power that exists between potter and clay, and the process of firing that gives the very fragile piece of clay strength. Drawing on scriptural images of a potter, James reflected:

each piece is unique and I think spiritually like that – going down to the potter’s shed, if you’re picturing almost like God being the potter, each piece – each one of us that he throws onto the wheel and forms is unique and different. There are never two pieces are alike. And we are as we are, and he’s been in there working with us with his fingers and moulding us as he wants us.

His use of this metaphor is interesting for it connotes a passivity on the part of the individual who is being open to the moulding action of God. Yet in his describing his struggle in coming out what emerges is a shift in reference point – from God to himself.

I was scared. I think my fear at that moment of confronting of who I am, and my relationship, and why am I like I am.... and your prayer is “ make me better; if not, take me now.” It’s just like that’s a very low point in a person’s life when you are asking God to end your life.... when you come to the realization that He is actually pushing you back, saying “deal with it. There’s nothing wrong with you”.... and I came to the realization ... there’s nothing wrong with me. So I went from being in fear... why did I come into life if I’m just damned to hell? I came into life to live life – and how I can redefine that life is up to me and how I live it is up to me.

In terms of spiritual practice Dean intentionally engages in prayer.

I have a covenant with God that I will show up. I will be there and we will have a visit and it may not be particularly exciting, and we might not have much to say to each other, but I'll show up.

Additionally Dean finds a number of other things supportive and reflective in his intentionality to deepen, integrate, and grow. His love of reading, particularly stories of people that aren't satisfied with the status quo.... they're always going to be searching and never quite satisfied in this life because they know that whatever they are searching for, they are never going to actually find here.... it makes me feel less alone in the search.

Thomas Merton is one of those loved lives and stories for Dean. Dean reads and then writes, blogs, and engages those inside and outside the inclusions and exclusions we and others erect. In that process he reflects that he experiences, once again, himself as priest, as engaging in ministry and witness.

Directional

The directional aspect of spirituality is found in movement, in finding a path – whether generally finding one's way in life's journey, or more particularly in working through challenges encountered along the way. For most of these participants their experience of spirituality was significant in providing direction in their lives.

Interestingly, though, the movement was not to a dependence on others or on an institutional authority external to themselves. If anything, it was a path engendering self-discovery and self-reliance (see Figure 27).



Figure 27. Directional: “The road for me represents my own journey—and as you look down this particular road, you can’t really see where it’s heading and so that’s kind of, again, where I see my spirituality... I’m not sure where this is all leading for me.... but the road is there and I’m kind of on it....” (Ron photo 2).

Direction can be a matter of engagement with a process, which in some instances can be equated with having an engaging conversation, particularly when that conversation has to do with matters of inclusion, with matters of justice. Chappy stated, “It is about dealing with troubles and people – [it is] about dealing with troublesome people who don’t agree on anything but had good intentions. That’s what the spiritual quest is to me.” Pointing to a photo of a river long used as the pathway for trade initially by First Nations peoples, “people have been travelling up and down this river – to get somewhere – and so that is very much a spiritual quest too – it’s all in the getting there – it’s not so much in the arriving as in the getting there that I find really intriguing.”

In this regard, Chappy commented on watching the film “Milk” – the story of Harvey Milk and his short but impactful influence through being elected as the first openly gay elected municipal official in the United States. Milk’s all too short time in office as a San Francisco Supervisor ended when he was shot and killed in 1978. One of the mantras that Chappy recalled Milk frequently uttering was “you’ve got to give them

hope.” Even the experience of Milk’s being assassinated did not have the power to stop the hope. For Chappy it is hope and the path to change that lies at the heart of Jesus message and life. Chappy reflected that Jesus ministry was with “the people at the margins.”

The people Jesus heals are people who have no access to the atonement ritual at the temple – that they were either unable to walk up the steps or they couldn’t get into the baths or out of the baths which would allow them to access the temple so first, he dealt with the infirmities that kept them out from that path, and second, he instituted an alternative so the atonement ritual was no longer necessary.

While the church has not for the most part been a safe space for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, that reality has not dissuaded Chappy from remaining in the Christian path.

I’m in the church because it gives me a language to deal with those spiritual issues. So I’m comfortable with the Christian moniker... I’m not just talking about God and Jesus, I’m talking about much deeper... it always made sense and I think it has motivated me most of my life to keep on some sort of even keel, like where do you fit into the universe and what is your role?... it’s not all about me. It’s about right relationship. The Hebrews have a word for that - which we translate as righteousness—which is a very misunderstood word in the Christian church but it’s about right relationship—and neither church or society is doing it right.

It’s that quest of “doing it right” that propels Chappy in his spiritual quest of action and engagement – a quest which is always an act in progress. It is an act that is

sometimes slow and tedious, but none-the-less in places both secular and celebrating the sacred “it does work” and you do “move people along.” In that grappling with issues, with those on the margins, with matters of inclusion and justice, the Spirit is engaged, in those matters the Spirit is encountered, and in those matters the Spirit is sought.

Transformational

Closely related to spirituality experienced as directional was the dynamic of spirituality as transformational—both in personal identity formation and in the forming of identity in relationship to a community (whether past or present).



Figure 28. Transformational: “I felt that this was transformation... very much going from darkness, if you want but going from left to right of this beautiful magnitude of colours... and I thought it was reflective of my life – of going from the darkness to the light, kind of thing.... I also like the path – the pathway is significant as well.” (Lorenzo, photo 5)

Lorenzo referred to his hopes for his own journey and struggles:

[At] the end of the day... I'm going to meet God. And I want to be at peace.

And if I look back at what I learned, what I've contributed, and how I've lived my life, I have a lot of integrity and I stand very proud and I've found who I am – and not just as a gay man but as a person.”

This movement was photographically illustrated with a fall scene of a tree whose colourful leaves were partly fallen to the ground (figure 28). The scene contains a monochromatic green-dominated left side with a path that winds into the horizon, moving into the right side with a multicoloured panoply of coloured leaves. It is a movement that he depicts as representing “from not being in the spirit to being in the spirit – to living spiritually.”

Significant transitional and transformational contrasts also mark Machal's life. For example, his coming out and coming into relationship with Alec, which he describes as being “the most meaningful thing in my life,” has brought a happiness and joy that stands in stark contrast to the acrimonious divorce process that marked that transitioning period earlier in his life. Whereas in the past the fear of being ‘found out’ cast an isolating barrier around him, “since Alec and I have been living together – relationships have become very, very, very important.” Commenting further on this transformation, he states:

I found that, [with other people] once you can break the ice and have something to talk about, the whole universe opens up and you find out that – well, they're just the same as I am – or I'm just the same as they are – and so on.

Coming out of a science, physics, chemistry, and math background, Murray experienced little need for “additional gobbledy-gook” to understand or live life.

Baptized as an infant, but only “dragged” to church by his grandparents on the odd occasion, religion and spirituality were not part of his world. However, a little more than five years ago, in an encounter with several others, there was something that in them that caused him pause. He noticed they had an “extra dimension to their personalities – they had a certain groundedness, unshakeability.... a sense of how they fit in to something bigger than them in size.” His desire for that something “extra” spurred a search which took him reading about and exploring various religious expressions, it was a search that in the end narrowed down to Christianity. After an intense evening of questioning and engaging in debate with a close friend who was Christian in belief and commitment Murray stated: “And so around 1 o’clock in the morning, I can remember asking God to walk with me—that night—and shortly after that, went on a bit of a search for a church and found one.”

Church was a continued presence in Ron’s growing up and life. And while church as institution was source of conflicting feelings for a man knowing he was gay from an early age, it was his experience of spirituality that was in not in any small way related to his experiencing the death of a friend when he was 10, his sister dying of rheumatic fever, his father dying, and then one of his brothers, also gay, dying of AIDS. This personal experience of death in his life also impacted his vocational decision to become a nurse and continue his interest in being with and working with the dying. Now retired, he continues to volunteer in a hospice. The conversations are imbued with spiritual impact:

and so when you are sitting with and chatting with be it a family or patients who are actively dying, it brings into focus your own sense of what you are, why you

are here, where you are going – all those kind of heavy questions.... [they are] kind of interwoven into my spirituality.

It was the prognosis of death in being diagnosed as HIV positive which propelled Chappy to find a church in which he anticipated his funeral would take place. This followed some his experiencing both very positive inclusive experiences and some very negative and rejecting experiences in several United Church congregations. At this point in his life, though, he found himself back in an Anglican parish with which he had been associated as a university student. And as he reflected, “I came here looking for a place to die and what I found... was new life and family.”

Summary

The experiences of spirituality pointed to in both word and image by these participants are discovered and discerned in the unfolding interpretative engaging that sorts, sifts, and makes sense of all the influences that make up life. As Alec stated, “In the end, spirituality comes from your investing yourself in something. You have to open up and let it come in – you can’t do it without exposing yourself.” Spirituality is more than sentiment, it is fundamentally relational. James adds:

In order to gain your true spirituality... you don’t need to hang it on a church’s wall. Because, when you think of it, buildings come and go, institutions come and go, but what’s going to live on is who you are with your personal relationship with the Creator.

The relationship that marks the experiencing of spirituality is both expansive and intimate. In speaking of being in the presence of the overwhelming beauty of nature in the mountains, Teepee also goes on to say that it is something that does not remain

external. “It’s a physical thing, it enters your pores. It’s in the centre of your bones. It’s a reminder of God’s presence in ourselves.”

Spirituality is also expressed as wisdom awaiting new discovery.

Spirituality, for me, is that ability to connect into that greater consciousness. If someone asks me what is God in my life, it’s that greater consciousness – it’s God inside of me – and it’s that part of me that has all the answers that I haven’t unlocked yet. (Alex).

These discoveries very much unfold from within the experience of life’s joys and its pains. Dean expressed this recognition this way: “I need my Jesus to have bird shit on Him and to look kind of lonely sometimes.”

The church, while looked to as a container of symbol and story connecting with the Christian tradition, is not looked to unquestioningly. Ron notes that he experienced a need to question and to come to his own judgment of what is true or not, particularly when the church’s words relate to judging individuals, their sexual orientation, and their decisions in relationship. “I’ve had to question all the teachings and assumptions made by ‘The Church’ through the lens of a gay man’s life and learn to jettison what was not true or appropriate for me.”

I don’t give a tinker’s damn what the church is saying about me. It’s about what I have come to learn about myself – to integrate within myself, and to accept within myself – who I am. And that I am accepted, and cared for, and loved by my Creator.... So that’s the integration that has taken place.

A further witness to self-determination is reflected by Stone:

I have to be self-sufficient.... It's so easy to be a victim.... So easy to just sit in the pew in the back row and feel sad and depressed.... And I just thought, "No, I don't need to do that. It's not my job," as I've said. My relationship with God is mine and I'm okay with that.

While there has been a range of experiences of the church which have been both destructive and growthful, for 12 of the 14 participants, there continues to be an engaged connection with the Anglican Church. A mark of this connection is that most of them report attending an Anglican worship service at least once a month. It is particularly interesting to note that only 3 of these participants named the Anglican Church as their denominational background. The other 11 participants migrated to the Anglican Church from other Christian denominations.

In their narratives three factors arise as being significant for the participants and their relationship with the Anglican Church: (a) the Anglican Church's style and expression in worship; (b) relationships with others and the search for and finding of community; and (c) social justice, that is, making a difference in the lives of those who are disenfranchised, whether socially or economically. As Alec commented, "I don't want to just go to church – I want to be part of it." Being a part of it entails finding there a place of meaningful worship.

And as a part of a more general picture, the worship is part of the welcoming community. As Chappy stated:

As long as... people can find a place to grow and that will nurture them, that's just fine. There are many ways of doing it. But being able to maintain that family relationship that we're all related and Uncle Fred may only come for

dinner once a year but we're all welcome at the table and at our best, we're good at that.

Anglicans may be "good at" setting the table, but the institutional Anglican church is also experienced as a place of, at times, experiencing frustration, conflict, and rejection. In the face of experiences like those, Dean recalled a conversation with his partner:

Why do you put up with something that makes you so angry and frustrated so much of the time? Like if you are always happy doing this then I'd be saying "great do it" but you're not. So why do you do it? And I go well it's kind of 'cause like you're family, you know? My parents tick me off, my sister gets on my nerves at times, but I can't just walk away and say I'm going to have a new family. They're still your family and I said I guess that's kind of the way I feel like with the church. I can't imagine replacing it with anything else....

Sebastien echoes this and expresses a loyal commitment to push for issues, such as fighting for full inclusion, to be resolved rather than leave in frustration.

I keep saying "Why am I still there? Why am I doing this? Am I such a masochist that I put up with this bashing all the time?" And I keep saying to myself "But if I and others are not there to fight for it, who will?" And that's why I stick around and why I have doctrinal issues and theological issues, I'm willing to work with them.

Experiencing spirituality for these participants has been relational, expansive, and intimate. In this experiencing, it is the individual who is empowered to be actively engaged in interpreting and crafting meaning and identity so that, in the end, as Josiah

articulates, “You are welcome in the house of God. And you are welcome as a gay man.

And your relationships can be holy, and a great deal of fun.”

CHAPTER 6 -- DISCUSSION

This research arose out of curiosity – an ongoing wonderment and interest that has deep personal resonance with my own experience and explorations as a gay man, and as one for whom spirituality is an important dimension in living life. “What is the nature and role of spirituality in the lives of Anglican gay men?” What are the kind of experiences these men had and have in naming and identifying the spiritual and how does that connect with other aspects of their living life?

This chapter begins with situating the experience of these participants *vis a vis* existing research exploring the lives and dynamics of gay men and spirituality. This discussion then will move to explore how existing research findings in the literature resonate with the model of themes and subordinate themes presented in the results chapter. These themes emerged from the interviews and photographs brought to this research by these 14 participants. First, as seen through the lens *Influences*, those named and identified influences that impact or form the participants’ named loci of experiencing spirituality will be noted, where present, in the literature. In a similar fashion the processing themes identified through the second lens, *Interpretative Engaging*, will be compared with previous research. As seen in this model, the *Experiencing of Spirituality* has four identifiable overarching qualities, and these too will be compared with previous research findings. Following this will be a stepping back and engaging in some personal reflection regarding this research from within my own experience and curiosities as the research process unfolded. This will provide further voice to my reflexivity as the researcher.

Some limitations of this research will be named, followed by an identifying of potential directions for further research. Concluding this chapter will be a consideration of the implications of this research. Implications will first be named for the practice of counselling psychology, for it is from within this disciplinary perspective that this research has taken shape. Secondly, there will be some reflective implications shared for those working within Anglican religious and pastoral frameworks of celebration and care. It is from within these frameworks that both participants and myself have emerged, and with which, in varying degrees, many of us who have participated in this research continue to have a relationship.

Gay Men and Spirituality

While there have been a number of published narratives articulating the experience of gay men and spirituality (see for example, Bouldrey, 1995; McNeill, 1998), a more specific focus on the experiences of spirituality in the lives of gay Anglican men has remained unexplored territory in both quantitative and qualitative research literature. Additionally, the use of photography as a data source in researching the lived experience of spirituality is a new contribution in exploring spirituality's experiencing.

In situating this qualitative research within the field of both qualitative and quantitative findings, the experience of the participants in this study confirms and gives further expressive texture to existing research which provides evidence that spirituality, and religion, is relevant to gay men. Further, I would offer that as Tan (2005) notes in reporting his quantitative study ($N = 93$) concerning spirituality's importance among

gays and lesbians: “These findings... discount the notion that gay and lesbian individuals are spiritually impoverished” (p. 141).

Three studies were identified as being of particular relevance as I approached embarking on my own research (Coyle & Rafalin, 2002; Rodriguez, 2006; Yip, 2002). Yip (2002), in reflecting on his quantitative research findings relating to the “Persistence of Faith Among Nonheterosexual Christians,” noted: “Individuals in late modern society have more social and psychological space and have become more skilled in adapting their religious beliefs and practices to their salient personal circumstances, which constitute their ultimate point of reference” (p. 210). This reflects the perspectives and stances of my research participants in their self-affirmation as gay men who seek to nurture the experience of spirituality in their lives despite the struggling with the church’s condemnatory messages. I note this most visibly witnessed in participants’ decision making and celebration of their relationships in the face of the church’s refusal to celebrate those relationships, or in many places to acknowledge them.

In a previous research study, Yip (1999) focused on the experience of gay men “who, because of their sexuality, are denied full acceptance in the Christian community” (p. 48). Yip found participants’ counter-rejection of the church as “a moral arbiter” was based on: “(1) the Church’s ignorance of sex and sexuality, (2) the Church’s ignorance of all sexualities as God’s creation, (3) the Church’s misinterpretation of biblical passages on homosexuality, and (4) the Church’s fallibility” (p. 47). The responses of my participants resonate well with Yip’s findings particularly as they reflect on their own struggles with the church’s traditional messaging about sexual orientation.

My research has taken a similar path as the qualitative study exploring Jewish gay men's negotiating their cultural, religious, and sexual identity undertaken by Coyle and Rafalin (2002). There are, however, significant differences, notably in that my research focused on participants' experience of spirituality rooted in an Anglican tradition and taking place in a Canadian context – a focus not present elsewhere in the literature. But perhaps one of the most notable differences for my research participants was the absence of cultural pressure, identified by Coyle and Rafalin, to marry and have children “to ensure the continuation of the Jewish people” (p. 24). The uniqueness of contribution of my research lies in its focus of capturing the flavour of spirituality's experience, and to do this not only in word but also in visual image through the use of photographs used as a springboard for further reflection on that experience.

Rodriguez (2006, 2010) focused his work on the intersection of religious identity and gay and lesbian identity formation. He noted that the research literature exploring gay and lesbian individuals of Christian faith is “quite fragmented... with small sample sizes that focus narrowly on a specific subgroup” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 8).

Acknowledging that the existing literature, theories, and research are marked by “richness and complexity,” Rodriguez (2010, p. 30) suggested that future research expand on theoretical work he reviewed regarding identity conflict and identity formation.

While I concur with the desire to further explore both the nature and role of identity conflict and identity integration, there is much to be said for exploring the experience of spirituality itself with greater depth. This can provide opportunity for a richer interpretative engagement with participants' narrated experiencing. While my

intention and research question specifically focused on the experience of spirituality, and not the experience of religious ritual or practice per se, these can be somewhat overlapping in lived experience as well as in some reported research. This was seen in the interviews and images of those participating in this research as well as in the published literature. An example of this is found in the qualitative portion of Halkitis's et al. (2009) study, "The Meanings and Manifestations of Religion and Spirituality among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adults." Participants ($N = 498$) were asked what spirituality and religion meant to them. Their responses were then coded and 10 thematic categories were identified as definitions for spirituality and 12 thematic categories were identified as definitions for religion. Occurring in both lists of definitions were such elements as "relationship with a higher power," "understanding self," and "meaning, purpose, understanding" (Halkitis et al., 2009, p. 255). Definitions, however derived, can frequently disconnect us from understanding the dynamic of what is being defined in the life of the one whose experience is being explored.

An impelling curiosity that fuelled my research question concerning the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay Anglican men was captured by Rodriguez (2010, p. 7): "How do some gays... not only live with two identities that are perceived by so many... as being completely incompatible, but thrive while fully embracing and combining them both?" In a more poignantly personal phrasing of this question, Boisvert (2007) states that the question can be raised as to "... whether the effort is worth it at all.... Why stay in when you are endlessly and quite vehemently pushed out?" (p. 42). For the participants in my research, not only is spirituality an important

dynamic in their lives, but for 12 out of 14 participants, they remain, to varying degrees, engaged with the Anglican Church.

Resonating Research Literature and Emergent Themes

Influences

Influences were identified that have had power to sway or affect the course of events on participants' thinking or actions. These are the raw materials, events, and actions, which are at the heart of experience. Identified influences in this research regarding the experiencing of spirituality clustered as: (a) places and objects; (b) people; (c) religious activities and attributions; (d) life events; and (e) mediating activities – creative and expressive, social and introspective. Each of these has been identified as being significant, to varying degrees, in an individual's experiencing of spirituality. Some are particular to GLBT experience.

Places and objects. Halkitis et al. (2009) identified “contexts” as one of the themes in their mixed methods research exploring spiritual and religious meanings and practices in GLBT adults. While “church” is cited as an example of this theme in their research, “places and objects” in my research also included such non-specifically religious locations as nature and home in addition to church settings that were identified by some, but not all, participants in their narrating their experience of spirituality. One of the most specifically identified locations in nature is Unruh and Hutchinson's (2011) research on gardens and gardening in which gardens as spiritual places are named as a subtheme. A prime example of this in this research is Alec's garden, which is experienced by him and others visiting it as a most spiritual place. In a broader frame,

the relationship between experiencing spirituality and nature is also explored by Heintzman (2010).

People. The experiencing of spirituality in relationship with people is noted in reported research (see for example, Day, 2010; Gold & Stewart, 2011; Prior & Cusack, 2010; Seegers, 2007). In my research, an interesting identification made by some participants, was that clergy were specifically mentioned, alongside friends and family members, as being significant in participants' experiencing of spirituality.

Religious activities and attributions. Approximately one third of the participants in this research identified the Eucharist, or more generally worship, as significant in their experiencing of spirituality. Eucharistic worship does not appear to be specifically identified in other studies. On the one hand, reflecting on the present research, it is not surprising given the centrality of the Eucharist in contemporary Anglican practice. On the other hand, given that fact, it is interesting that Eucharist was not more significantly noted by a greater number of participants. In concert, though, with this present research is the identification of prayer as a component of spirituality in the wider research literature (see for example, Halkitis et al., 2009; Ridge et al., 2008; Rostosky, Otis, Riggle, Kelly, & Brodnicki, 2008; Seegers, 2007).

Life events. In the current study, specific life events were not singled out for exploration. This provided an opportunity to see, even in this small sampling of Anglican gay males, what life events were named by the participants themselves as significant in their experiencing of spirituality. These life events included such experiences as parenting, death, health conditions in the lives of relatively few of the participants, as well as coming out or affirming a gay identity for which nearly each

participant related in various ways to their experiencing of spirituality. Reflection on these events in living relates more generally with Halkitis et al.'s (2009) identification of spirituality with “understanding self, accepting self, being in touch with self” (p. 256).

Mediating activities: creative and expressive, social and introspective. As event or action, mediating activities as a theme encompasses those influences which engage: (a) creativity, such as singing or painting; (b) community, such as eating together or sexual encounters and lovemaking; (c) volunteering, such as in helping the disadvantaged; and (d) reflecting, whether in conversation with others or by oneself. This theme is mirrored in the research literature from a variety of perspectives, including a reflecting on spirituality being expressed in creative actions (Tisdell, 1999), in sexual encounters (Prior & Cusack, 2010), through volunteering (Seegers, 2007) in prosocial activities (Halkitis et al., 2009), and in reflective abilities (Levy, 2012).

Navigating Influences and Interpretative Engaging

Influences and interpretative engaging go hand in hand. It is interpretative engaging with influences that processes both the negative, naming the destructive, and the positive, identifying the growthful, in making meaning of experiencing spirituality.

Naming the destructive. In addition to research exploring the overarching effects of homophobia in the lives of GLBT individuals (for example, Wright & Perry, 2006), there has also been more focused research that has explored homophobia and spiritual development or identity. Pertinent to the experience of participants in my research, Gold and Stewart (2011) noted that a theme of “irreconciliation” emerged from the responses of their 47 LGB university student participants. *“Irreconciliation*

indicated some form of strain, discomfort, or argument between spiritual identity and sexual identity” (p. 248).

There has perhaps been nothing as uniformly destructive in the experience of gay men, among many others, as HIV and AIDS. In the face of these destructive forces, research has also explored the experience of spirituality (Seegers, 2007; Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002). Qualitative research regarding spirituality and the destructive has also focused on spirituality as a coping mechanism for those living with congenital disabilities (Specht, King, Willoughby, Brown, & Smith, 2005). This is relevant in reflecting on this research, particularly on the experience of Josiah who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth. Three of the themes identified in their research around their participants’ experiences of turning points in their lives, were discovering (a) God as a guiding force, (b) inner strength, and (c) meaning in life. The interpretative engaging that embraces a naming of the destructive was also seen to flow into an identifying of the growthful in the narratives of my research participants. It is worth noting that participants’ naming the destructive, or having experienced destructive dynamics, did not ultimately entail their remaining in that negativity.

Identifying the growthful. Interpretative engaging also involves an identifying of the growthful. This theme focuses on an unfolding experiencing of (a) acceptance and affirmation, (b) connectedness and belonging, and (c) purposeful and grounded engagement. Those things individually identified as influences above (i.e., people, relationships, and named events), are here experienced in the relational context of living life.

Acceptance and affirmation, for example, can be seen reflected in Levy's (2012) identification of the theme "strength and resiliency" (p. 60). The literature is sparse in reporting research that has focused on affirmative experiencing of embodied spirituality in same sex sexual encounter. An exception to this is Prior and Cusack's (2010) retrospective reflective research regarding spirituality and gay bathhouse experience among patrons ($N = 36$) in eight of Sydney's gay bathhouses from 1967 to the early 1980's. The recent work of Hernandez, Mahoney, and Pargament (2011) breaks exploratory ground in its researching the "sanctification of sexuality." Surveying 83 opposite sex married individuals, they found "greater perceptions of sexuality as sanctified predicted greater marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual intimacy, and spiritual intimacy" (p. 775). They define sanctification as "perceiving an aspect of life having divine character and significance" (p. 775). Their research points to a linkage between spirituality and sexual expression. Of interest would be to extend this research direction to the experience of spirituality and sexual expression in the lives of gay men, whether non-partnered, monogamous, or non-monogamous (see Bonello & Cross, 2010; LaSalla, 2004). The naming of this connection by several of the present research

participants invites a further and more in depth exploration of participants' meaning-making articulation of this experiencing.

Identifying the growthful in terms of connectedness and belonging are reflected in Halkitis et al. (2009) identifying in their research participants' the thematic category of "interconnectedness between self, others and the universe, nature" (p. 255), which was derived from their construction of definitions of both spirituality and religion. Purposeful and grounded engagement again is referenced in Halkitis et al. in terms of both "manifesting goodness in the world" demonstrating "respect, compassion, kindness," and in "accepting self" (p. 255), which are category themes arising from their participants' responses to define spirituality.

Qualities of Experiencing Spirituality

In and through the experiences of spirituality shared by these participants, four qualities were identified: (a) relational, (b) intentional, (c) directional, and (d) transformational.

Relational. That spirituality is experienced as relational is widely attested to in the literature. Halkitis et al. (2009), reflecting on their participants' responses, noted "spiritual identities were more pronounced than religious ones, and this pattern may be explained by their understanding of the spiritual self in relation to prosocial engagement and interconnectedness with others, the world around them, and the universe" (p. 250). Heintzman (2010) provides insight into research and theoretical models exploring the relationship between nature-based recreation and spirituality.

Intentional. No focussed research that specifically explores the experience of spirituality as being intentional in its quest and generating meaning making in

individuals' lives has been identified. In many ways this is an underlying assumption. Intentionality marks an individual's engaging in self-reflectiveness and in their engaging in activities in or through which they indicate that they experience spirituality. Intention is related to motivation. In this regard, the contribution of Abraham Maslow is a significant one in terms of his contribution of his hierarchy of human needs. Koltko-Rivera (2006) amended what he termed is the "conventional description" of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, based on several unpublished works by Maslow. In this correction of the model, Maslow articulated a motivation toward a new construct, self-transcendence, which he placed at the top of the hierarchy, going beyond self-actualization. Koltko-Rivera noted that this is a seeking of "a benefit beyond the purely personal and seek communion with the transcendent... they come to identify with something greater than the purely individual self, often engaging in service to others" (p. 306).

Directional. The directional quality of spirituality identified in this present research is found in movement, in finding a path through life, in working through challenges encountered along the way, engendering self-reliance, and self-discovery in the process. One of the directions of published research pertinent to this theme is found in exploring factors that promote prosocial behaviour. The research of Pichon, Boccato, and Saraglou (2007) followed previous research findings showing that "priming a concept automatically activates related behavioral schemas." Their findings "indicate that religious concepts by themselves can nonconsciously activate prosocial behavioral schemas" (p. 1032). In a similar research direction, Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) set out to explore "the effect of God concepts specifically on selfish and prosocial behavior"

(p. 803). Utilizing a research design involving an anonymous economic dictator game, they found in two studies that “God concepts, activated implicitly, increased prosocial behavior even when the behavior was anonymous and directed toward strangers” (p. 807). One of the interesting facets of these studies is that there is a directional push toward prosocial behaviour even when God concepts are implicitly and not explicitly present.

Transformational. The experience of spirituality was also seen to have the quality of being transformational in the lives of these research participants.

Transformation has been a theme in the history of the psychology of religion since the beginning of the 20th century, and perhaps most notably marked by two lectures devoted to religious conversion by William James (2002) in the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh.

Hood et al. (2009) noted a shift in research focus distinguishing classic studies of conversion from a more contemporary emphasis on spiritual transformation. Spiritual transformation is marked in part by a gradual occurrence; the person experiencing it is “an active, seeking agent;” and also experiences a “self-realization” (p. 217). Park (2005) noted that “one of the most consistent findings regarding predictors of positive life change following life stressors or trauma is that religiousness... is a strong predictor of growth” (p. 309). Transformation marks the experience of spirituality in the lives of most of the present research participants, whether it was the transformation accompanying the experiences of coming out, or emergent from the process of resolving conflict resulting from affirming a gay identity while at the same time being confronted

with negative and condemnatory messaging from the Christian tradition and church institutions.

Participants' Use of Photographs

The use of photographs is a unique methodological contribution of this research to the exploration of spirituality in the lives of gay men. Weiser (1999), in writing about using photographs in exploring perceptions, values, and expectations, stated:

Any photograph presents selectively framed information. Each person encountering an image responds to both explicit and implicit messages, to the manifest and latent meaning, intention, and emotion embedded in its contents.... Viewing any photograph begins an associative and emotional process in each viewer, and each viewer sees a unique reality inside the photograph's borders. (p. 56)

This was reflected with each participant's sharing of their photographs. I was continuously reminded of the power of visual image. The visual image brings into the present moment an immediacy of captured expression. This immediacy is one which words by themselves can take much longer to point to, and sometimes fail to capture the fullness of an experience. The sharing of photographs in this research's second interview was frequently marked not only by reminiscence in contextualizing the image, but also at times stimulated a stirring of emotion – expressed not only with the occasional tear, but also in moments of silence, smiles, or laughter. One of Sebastien's photos well illustrated the last point (see Figure 29).



Figure 29. Use of photographs: Humour. “So this was a sort of an ‘aha’ moment in this journey of discovering what spirituality was all about... ‘Past Lives, dreams and soul travel’ – and I chuckled when I saw the 1-800-Love-God.” Sebastien photo 4.

Critical Appraisal of the Research Process

Thus far, the discussion has focused on how the material presented in word and image by these participants has addressed and illuminated the primary question fuelling this research: “What is the experience of spirituality in the lives of Anglican gay men?” The focus of discussion now turns to my experience as researcher, and articulating my reflections in and following the unfolding process of this research. This includes reflecting on how my voice comes and enters into this process of responding to the research question. Out of this will be the naming of some identified limitations of this research, articulating some potential implications of this research, and what might be some future directions of research.

In their exploration of the impact of researching topics that can be emotionally impactful, Woodby, Williams, Witich, and Burgio (2011) noted that researchers are expected to bring to their work a skill set that includes the capacity to create empathic connections with participants, as well as the ability to engage in

reflexive activity concerning the researcher's embodied presence and its impact on the production of knowledge. (p. 831)

One of the points of their work concerns the stressful impact of carrying out this kind of qualitative research. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2009) refer to this as "emotion work." Noting the truism that "a fundamental aspect of our humanness is our capacity to feel and to show emotion" (p. 61), they underscore the importance of taking note of emotions experienced and managing those emotions.

As researcher, I too experienced moments of emotional responding to the stories participants were sharing. In part, this was responsiveness to the emotionality expressed by many participants. Resonant chords were struck, particularly with those stories whose themes touched aspects of my own life story. At those moments of empathic connecting or reacting, it was important for me to internally acknowledge the feelings in my own heart, put them temporarily to one side, and to hold those for later processing.

Regarding the engagement of the researcher in qualitative inquiry, Gemignani (2011) comments:

Rather than being discovered in the Other, scientific knowledge emerges as an act of narration and participation... between the places of tension, the told and the untold, the center and the margins. In this relational place, qualitative inquiry develops through intimacy, empathy, and self-reflection, embracing the social and historical dimensions of its protagonists and welcoming the vulnerability and uniqueness of the researcher's subjectivities. The researcher cannot be separated from the researched and from the local fields of power and knowledge that created the possibilities of the inquiry in the first place. (pp. 706-707)

As I re-read parts of my research journal, one passage in particular resonated with these words of Gemignani and links as well to the urging of researcher self-care in Dickson-Swift et al.'s (2009) work:

[I] stand, breathe deeply and with awareness, release as far as possible distractions, bring my attention to the present moment (the Psalmist writes “Be still”), strike the singing bowl and let its sound resonate in my body, focus on the present and then intentionally engage listening and working with my participants and their material, and then with my reactions, and musings, and thoughts, regarding the same. (02/02/2010, 6:24 AM)

Personal Reflection on Spirituality

Not surprisingly, the research interest in spirituality and sexuality was a focus of personal exploration as well, incorporating both the intellectual and the experiential. During the time of completing the doctoral work, this personal exploration and experiencing has been touched by a number of factors and events. Significant in these have been (a) the death of my wife arising from complications with leukemia, (b) moving away from where I had been engaged in church work in Calgary to Vancouver to complete my pre-doctoral internship at the University of British Columbia's Counselling Services, and (c) growing into a deepening and significant relationship with a very beautiful man.

In the course of experiencing these major events and shifts in my life, I have been drawn to ponder both life's endings and beginnings, their connectedness, and the flowing of one into the other in the unfolding spiral of life. As Culliford (2011) noted, “it is hard to study spirituality without addressing one's own spiritual development” (p.

13). In the midst of this research and the events in my own life, I have grown in an intentional and mindful focusing in the present moment of attention and attitude. This focus has been one of nurturing both gratitude and compassion in my life and relationships. In this there is both a letting go and an embracing – not always easy, but in seeking to be in the groundedness of the present moment, freeing.

For me, Linda's death was both a losing of my best friend in life, and an opening to more fully explore and express myself as a gay man. Moving to Vancouver gave me the space to more freely explore my own spirituality and how to nurture that. Particularly in relationship to my spiritual and religious roots in the Christian tradition, I found that once again the questions of meaning, of words, of actions, which never have been far from the surface throughout my life, were able to be more creatively engaged.

Brokenness is a word I would use to describe my relationship with the church as institution – particularly as I began this research. I never take for granted the sharing of personal story, whether from a research participant, a client, or friend. In the sharing of story and reflection about the experience of spirituality in my participants' lives and with all their diversity, I was kept engaged in my own reflections about the sacred and about the ongoing process of weaving and celebrating my sexuality and my spirituality. In all of this, engaging with queer theology and a growing exposure to Buddhism has been refreshingly freeing and restorative.

In order to identify and assist my own processing and meaning making of my own experience, in the course of this research I spoke on several occasions with a spiritual director at the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) Centre in Calgary. In Vancouver, the reflective process was enabled in different ways by connection with

Christ Church Cathedral, and with a less frequent but nonetheless important contact with the Chinese International Buddhist Society.

As part of this process of researching spirituality, just as I had asked participants to take and choose photographs reflecting their experience of spirituality, so too I selected photos that for me spoke of my experience of spirituality as a gay man. Amongst these photos is one taken within hours of my grand-daughter's birth, Emma' (see Figure 30). It speaks to me of endings and beginnings, of new life, of possibilities and potential – the seeds of which are to be found in each moment of life itself.



Figure 30. Beginnings and endings: “Life is short. We do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So be quick to love, make haste to be kind.” Attributed to Henri Frédéric Amiel, 1821-1881.

Researcher and Participant Relationship

The relationship between researcher and participant has been addressed in varying ways in the literature. Before beginning this research, I had had no previous contact with 11 of the 14 participants. I was acquainted with the remaining 3 participants through my involvement with Integrity. As mentioned previously, Integrity

is a support and advocacy group in the Anglican Church for GLBT individuals and allies. Garton and Copland (2010) note two things in particular about acquaintance interviews:

... participants have to negotiate their new identities as interviewer and interviewee.... the interviewer can feel uncomfortable with an asymmetrical relationship which requires her to control the interaction.... The interviewee, on the other hand, is easier as being an expert whose opinion is sought and who can help his/her friend: there is less at stake. (p. 547)

Secondly, another difference

is that the shared worlds of the participants can be invoked and made relevant by either interviewer or interviewee and used as a resource to co-construct the interview.... Empathic comments abound and the question and answer sequence is often abandoned in favour of a more conversational style of interaction.... allow[ing] researchers access to resources that are not always available in more traditional social sciences interviews. (p. 547, 548)

The above certainly reflected my experience when engaging with several of the participants who had backgrounds in either ordained church life, or who were in the midst of theological studies. Being cognizant of sharing similar experiences in undergoing theological training and/or working within the institutional church brought a flavour to our interviews, marked by a kind of camaraderie and familiarity with ideas, words, and experiences. This posed temptation at times to be easily diverted from the describing of the experience of spirituality, to going down paths of tangential topics and

matters. It particularly required awareness on my part, with an occasional exercising of judicial steering of the conversation's flow.

I was very conscious that my previous public and professional role as an ordained priest and bishop could skew conversation and the contributions of participants. And so from the beginning, I made no reference to this role in communication with potential, and then recruited, research participants. It was interesting to note that not one person addressed me as "bishop," nor did anyone ask me about my experience of ordained life or other aspects of my personal life. As I encouraged their narrating their experience I certainly was aware of resonating sympathetic chords that were occasionally struck. I noted these in my research and personal journal.

Choice of Methodology

It was challenging to utilize a research methodology that is fairly new in research practice. However, the increasingly amount of written materials concerning IPA have been both accessible and clear. Given the exploratory nature of this research, its focus on exploration of experience, and the flexible structure of IPA's methodological process, in my opinion IPA was an appropriate choice of methodology.

As was noted in Chapter 3, I chose to use a qualitative research software program, NVivo, in carrying out this research. Over time, there has been no shortage of debate concerning the appropriateness of using qualitative research software. Frequently expressed have been fears that using such a tool would distance the researcher from the data. This also has marked discussion over the past 10 years in the Yahoo!

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Research Interest Group. This Internet

discussion group was established in 2000 as a forum to discuss IPA and its use in research. It now has a membership of over 1,700 individuals worldwide.

Along with several others in this forum, I utilized NVivo as a container and organizer for all the pieces and bits of data received from participants, as well as material generated in the course of exploring this data. As the research began and unfolded, included in this were the files I used to journal my research journey as well as journal my reflections on my own experience of spirituality. The program's powerful tools enabled movement around and exploration of what at times felt like an overwhelming amount of material – initially generated in a total of 27 interviews and 68 contributed photographs. Additionally, because of its capabilities of handling audio files as well as document and graphic file formats, on more than one occasion I was able to simultaneously listen to the recorded voice of a participant, read the corresponding transcript or excerpt, and view one or more photographs.

The learning curve for using this software, however, was steep and at times felt overwhelming. Of particular help, though, were printed training manuals, participating in an online webinar course offered by QSR, the program's publisher, as well as tapping into the experience with NVivo of several other researchers – online and in person – who generously offered assistance. One set of tools in NVivo that I did not find helpful for my purposes in this research were the tools and functions to create visual models. On my part I found that VUE provided both a flexibility and an ease of use that was easier to use in both concept mapping of each participant's material (including their photographs), and in developing a graphic representation of themes that emerged in the research material.

Working with photographs as part of this research material was also an exciting challenge. Before the research actually got underway, I was not sure what to expect and wondered initially whether taking photographs would be an incentive or a disincentive for perspective participants to participate. I was pleasantly surprised, and relieved. Thirteen of the 14 participants took photos and brought them as the focus of our second interview. While I have a personal love of photography and have been fortunate to nurture this interest in taking a workshop with the Canadian photographer, Freeman Patterson, this has not included utilizing photography in research. At different points, I had a haunting sense that I had missed identifying a technique or process that somehow would unlock further meaning. I then came to a point of stepping back and simply allowing them to come to life through the words of the participants.

A Composite Postscript

Reflecting on stories shared in photographic images and words spoken, I have pondered what might be said in summary about the experiences of spirituality regarding myself and the 14 participants. Our lives have been forever touched by the Anglican expressions of Christian faith and life.

While not every participant attempted to define what spirituality was, there were descriptors nonetheless. Spirituality was described as a “feeling inside you which draws you close to the universe,” “a sense of some sort of timelessness and greater purpose,” “unconditional love,” “something that centres you, gives you meaning to life... guidance.... it gives you hope,” it “has to do with nature.... our attempt to understand ourselves and our purpose and our essence.”

For all of us, there are many things that influence our experiencing of spirituality. For nearly two thirds of us, it is nature in its beauty and rhythms that open a sense of awe and wonder. Buildings and spaces for gathering were also significant. For some, the place was the gathering itself, while for others, it was the beauty and peacefulness of church architecture that mediated an experience of spirituality. For others, it is the creative act that gives access to the divine. Several identified places of anonymous sexual meeting as spaces of spiritual encounter.

Explicitly named by all but one was the importance and role of people in experiencing spirituality. For those in committed relationships, this often was their partner, but it could also refer to children, friends, and even a clergy person or two. This led as well to the naming of religious activities and gatherings as being significant, in different ways, to spirituality. Several named worship experiences, others reflected on religious texts, and still others spoke of visceral experiences of the holy.

Coming out as a life process event was named by some as significantly and actively intertwined with conflict, struggle, and then a sense of spiritual acceptance. For others, their self-identification as gay was the backdrop for their spiritual quest and experiencing. Other life events specifically named were raising children and the experience of life's ending, whether of relatives or friends. For nearly all, there was in the midst of living life the experience or images of creativity – whether of writing, painting, music, gardening, pottery, woodworking – that led to connecting with God or the universe beyond themselves. These were mediating activities, engaging and touching an urge to create. This creative mediational activity was also expressed by

some in active engagement, such as in meeting the needs of others, or through active introspection, such as through pondering their place in the universe.

Influences were never experienced apart from a process of interpretative engaging. Each participant sought to make sense and meaning of the various influences they encountered in narrating their experience of spirituality. This involved not only moving through the negative, whether of homophobic attitudes of others, or internalized homophobic judgments, but also the embracing of all those moments and movements of acceptance, affirmation, and newly discovered insights about themselves and others. There was a clear sense of belonging and connectedness for most; belonging as part of a greater whole, as well as belonging and having equal value regardless of the judgment or attitudes of others. None of the participants could be described as living lives of aimless disengagement. Their identifying experiencing the spiritual was one also imbued with purpose and future orientation – not just for themselves but also in their relationships with others.

The qualities that have been identified as running through the narrated and illustrated experiencing that comprised the data for this research are qualities that have been identified as (a) relational, (b) intentional, (c) directional, and (d) transformational. The naming of experienced spirituality, even in the most private of moments, points to a felt sense of relationship. It also points to an intentionality that infuses lived life. Spirituality is not something haphazardly instigated but often emerges from, and leads to, life-lived intentionally. With that experiencing marked by intentionality comes a concomitant sense that experiencing spirituality leads somewhere – it has a directional quality. There is something transformational about the experiencing of spirituality in

these men's lives. It may be the transformation of a brief moment in time, or mark a transformed direction in living life.

Experiencing spirituality has about it a sense of discovery, a discovery with consequences that are left to an individual's decision making and meaning making.

Lorenzo stated:

I can sit here and from a half empty cup, evaluate my worth based on what people say I'm supposed to be or I can choose to have a full cup to be spiritually connected to my God.... you are here for a reason. It is to make life better – leave a mark – do something ... don't just be unconscious.

Limitations

The number of participants in this research can be seen to be in and of itself a limitation in two ways. First, given the ideographic nature of IPA with its emphasis on the particular, utilizing a fewer number of participants would have enabled more detailed exploration and analysis of the particularities of those participants' experience (Smith et al., 2009). Secondly, if the desired outcome of research would be to draw probabilistic inferences concerning a greater population of interest, then the small number of participants in this qualitative research study would not provide a sufficient sample size for such a quantitative research design goal. Mixed method designs may hold a way forward in forming a complementary research design capitalizing on the strengths of qualitative research designs contributing to generalizable findings generated through quantitative methodologies. Smith et al. (2009), reflecting on the potential role of IPA can play in such a partnership, comment: "... IPA can offer insights into experiences of events and processes, and the personal meaning of various 'outcomes,' which can help

researchers to interpret their quantitative findings and to illustrate them for a diverse audience” (p. 193).

There are other possible limitations regarding the purposive sample utilized in this research. First, a limitation of the purposive sampling used here is that a wide range of age and cohort membership is represented in this research. With that, there could be an implicit assumption made that age and cohort membership would not be a significant factor in exploring the experience of spirituality in these gay men. Given the extraordinary societal and cultural shifts that have taken place in Canada over the past 40 years, the effects of cohort membership is worth exploring further (see Drasin et al., 2008).

Second, the socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic composition of this sample is uniformly middle class, male, and Caucasian. It would be interesting to additionally explore the experience of spirituality in the lives of ethnically-diverse gay males.

Third, this purposive sample of individuals reflects a narrow sampling from within the Christian tradition and the worldwide Anglican Communion. Further samplings of other streams of the Christian tradition in addition to other religious traditions, including the “spiritual not religious” stream, could expand our understandings of the experience of spirituality even further.

Fourth, the sample and focus of this research was on the experience of those self-identifying as gay men. Exploring the experience of spirituality in the lives of those self-identifying as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, would further our understanding.

Further Suggestions for Research

The following are some further suggestions for research. What might be the dynamics identified in this research, namely participants' experiencing of spirituality as marked by being relational, expansive, intimate, and empowering, in relation their experiences of coming out (to self, to significant others, in work environments, in religious settings)? Has this changed over time? As others, such as Halkitis et al. (2009) have suggested, there is a need for longitudinal research into the experience of spirituality in its living context in the lives of gay men and LBT individuals.

Many of the participants in this research migrated from one Christian denomination to an Anglican expression of Christianity. What are the events or situations that trigger or motivate such migration in the lives of gay men? Do their experiences parallel or differ from the experiences of spirituality in the lives of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals? Does this vary with cohort membership?

Another migration also occurs from one religious tradition to another very different tradition or migrating to non-identification with a religious tradition. For example, some have moved from a Christian framework to a Buddhist framework (see for example, Leyland, 2000). How do spiritual practices inform the experience of spirituality in these individuals? How are these chosen and if coming from differing streams of religious traditions, how are they integrated in the lives of these individuals? What of those who incorporate elements drawn from differing streams of religious expression, such as Buddhism and Christianity (see, for example, Knitter, 2009).

A majority of the participants in this research were lay persons. What is the experience of spirituality for clergy who identify as gay? How does this relate to the

degree and areas of life in which they are “out”? How does this relate to their past or present experience of the institutional religious organizations who authorize them (or not) to exercise ordained ministry? Are there any differentiating factors in exploring how the intimate interpersonal and sexual relationships relate to the experience of spirituality in the lives of these gay men?

Of interest as well is exploring the qualitative experience of those whose religious expression takes shape/ is nurtured in active and explicitly gay affirming environments. These religious environments may be denominational groups such as the Metropolitan Community Church. Or, they may be environments in those mainstream denominations in which congregations, or denominational GLBT supportive and advocacy groups, identify themselves as being explicitly welcoming for GLBT individuals (see, for example, the research of Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Included with this research could be a comparing of their experience with those in explicitly non-affirming denominational or congregational environments.

Another direction of research regarding the experience of spirituality could be to explore the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men who are counsellors. In what way or ways does the personal experiencing of spirituality impact the therapeutic process with clients? Does the personal experiencing of spirituality impact the establishing of the therapeutic alliance, or in shaping therapeutic interventions? Is the experience of spirituality one of integration or compartmentalization within the delivery of counselling services?

The teaching and use of evidence-based counselling interventions and treatments is a stated goal in much of 21st century counselling psychology (Babione, 2010).

Additionally, the challenge, opportunity, and need to incorporate cultural competency into the delivery of counselling services is both ethically and professionally important (Sue, Zane, Hall, & Berger, 2009).

Albeit far from ubiquitous, work has begun to be carried out with regards to the incorporation of graduate level teaching regarding the multifaceted dynamics of both spirituality (Rothman, 2009) and non-dominant sexuality (Alderson, 2004). However, little research work has been reported in the literature focusing on the intersectionality of cultural competency in both the areas of spirituality and non-dominant sexuality, along with evidence-based counselling interventions and treatments. This is an arena for future research and work. This has the potential to be valuable in not only in expanding and deepening effective treatment approaches, but also towards developing more effective counselling practices with men for whom both spirituality and non-dominant sexuality are markers of their lived and living experience.

Implications for Counselling Practice

Reflecting on the experience of spirituality in the lives of these participants, implications arise for consideration in therapeutic working with other gay men for whom spirituality is an important dynamic. First, spirituality is an area of experience which is open to be explored, and its exploration can itself be experienced as useful and welcomed. Second, spirituality can be experienced as an integral part of understanding one's place in the universe, in relationship with significant others, and in engaging in positive and transformative meaning making.

In counselling practice, therapeutic interventions may well benefit from accessing a client's positive experiencing of spirituality as a resource in ongoing

therapeutic work, whether with individuals or with couples (see Rostosky, Riggle, Brodnicki, & Olson, 2008). This can be a resource whether working, for example, within a narrative framework (e.g., McLean & Marini, 2008), or within a cognitive behavioural treatment framework (e.g., Pachankis, 2009). Bozard and Sanders (2011) offered a model of working with LGB clients around religious and spiritual issues so that “practitioners can help clients to process their negative experiences with religion toward the end of reclaiming the significant strengths to be gained through healthy spirituality” (p. 53).

One of the contributions of this present research is to highlight the potential use of images in therapeutic work. In a broader context regarding imagery, Hood et al. (2009) note the “return” of imagery in the psychology of religion. In this regard they note the move of study from behaviour to that of inner experience, and further state that “The spontaneous presence or cultivated facilitation of imagery is central to many religious traditions” (p. 313). They further note the exploration of images in Jungian, transpersonal, and object-relations research literature. Art therapy provides opportunity “for individuals to create images and objects with the explicit aim of exploring and sharing the meaning these may have for them” (Edwards, 2004, p. 4). In addition to art therapy, images – metaphorical, cognitive, and physical – are used in a wide variety of therapeutic approaches, including cognitive behavioural therapy (Hackmann, Bennett-Levy, & Holmes, 2011). However, as Reavey (2011) points out, “the visual has not been a prominent feature of methodological procedure... including social constructionist or more broadly qualitative approaches” (p. 10). Images “provide the opportunity for

participants to begin the research process by showing us how they have made their worlds, rather than answering our questions or beginning with an explanation” (p. 11).

The use of art therapy with GLBT clients in the coming out process is advocated by Pelton-Sweet and Sherry (2008). They state: “By nurturing and expressing the imagination, clients in the midst of clarifying their sexual and gender identities may be able to protect their physical and emotional health while learning more about, and ultimately becoming, their authentic selves” (p. 173). I would suggest that “nurturing and expressing the imagination” may well be a valuable supportive and exploratory resource throughout the life long process of coming out. In addition to being a resource, this is also an avenue of potential rich research possibilities.

Images created through photography that can be used to open up an exploration of spirituality in counselling. In addition, there are other sources of existing images that may be particularly facilitative in therapeutic working with gay men – as well as with others identifying with a non-dominant sexual or affectional identity. These images emerge from a queer reading, particularly of the Christian tradition.

Given the negativity towards same-gender desire and behaviour that has been well documented in the Christian tradition, another stream of positive and inclusive thinking and imaging has begun to emerge within the Christian tradition. A gay positive re-framing of Christian faith has increasingly been explored and expressed (Stuart, 1997, 2003). An emergent expression drawing on queer theory is being heard as queer theology (Cheng, 2011, 2012). Alongside these developments have been artistic expressions of faith produced by gay and lesbian artists. These images celebrate in visual form a re-discovery of acceptance and inclusion within the Christian tradition that

gay, lesbian, and queer theologians are now giving voice to (Cherry, 2007). These offer a source of images that can be useful in working with individuals identifying as non-dominant in their sexual/affectional orientation and for whom spirituality is important and who identify spirituality as a dynamic of potential or actual positive growth and strength.

Implications for Anglican Pastoral Work

There are several implications that can be drawn from this research that have particular relevance for Anglican pastoral work. First and foremost is a witness of a majority of these participants to their finding, or seeking to find, meaningful connections and spaces of community and celebration within the Anglican expression of Christian faith. This, however, is not without cost.

Obvious costs are experienced when one is “out” as an Anglican gay man. This may include overt demonstrations of homophobia that expresses itself either in acts of exclusion or of conditional inclusion. Not so obvious costs are experienced when the church continues to treat same gender relations as *less than* heterosexual relationships. The ongoing refusal to alter canon law to modify the current definition of marriage to include same-gender couples sends them a very clear message, one that devalues their relationship as unworthy of the church’s blessing or care. The practice of some dioceses to authorize only selected parishes to bless same-gender relationships misses the mark as well. Seen often by the diocesan bishop as a generous extending of pastoral care, this practice, while a welcome step forward of recognition and care, still provides a clear message that same-gender relationships are not equally worthy and must in some

dioceses undergo a scrutiny that in any other context would be interpreted as discriminatory.

A second implication of this research is one that affirms Yip's (2002) highlighting a widely held observation that today there is a shift in the perceived importance or authority given to religious institutions. As was stated earlier, this is a shift to a space where the "*self* of the believers, rather than authority structures, primarily steers the course" (p. 201). A challenge is to work with this new reality both pastorally and in teaching.

Listening to the narrations of these participants reminded me that the Anglican Church has no equivalent to, for instance, the American Psychological Association's (2012) *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients*. Such material would help educate and inform pastoral care, providing guidance in facilitating understanding of the experience of non-dominant sexually-identified individuals, and articulating needed guidelines for welcoming and resourcing GLBT individuals and their relationships. Just as Isacco et al. (2012) suggest for health care workers, the same could well be addressed to clergy: "health practitioners need to be active in examining their own feelings, biases, attitudes, and stereotypes related to sexual orientation, homophobia, heterocentrism, and homonegativity" (p. 57).

Ellsworth and Ellsworth's (2010) research identified aspects of congregational life and ministry that linked with parishioners' sense of wellbeing and spiritual growth. Their study analyzed over 12,000 surveys from 37 congregations. Several of the indicators used to measure wellbeing and spiritual growth in this study were individuals' responses to questions about attending services making a positive difference, becoming

happier and more joyful, experiencing assistance in affirming their own “natural (spiritual) gifts,” as well as teachings that were helpful “to handle difficult times better” (p. 135). These dynamics were identified by several participants in their narrating their positive experiences of being part of a church congregation in which they experienced support, affirmation, and opportunities to be of service to others. This is the kind of experience most of the participants in this present research have been looking for, and have not always found.

Summary

“I don’t think I’d ever said as much to anybody about, well, I’ve never spoken to anybody about spirituality before and it’s a great thing to talk about.” (Alec)

As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, this research arose out of curiosity, as does all research. Exploring the experience of spirituality in the lives of Anglican gay men has deep personal resonance with my own experience and explorations as a gay man, as one for whom spirituality is an important dimension in living life and who has, for most of my adult life, functioned in the Anglican Church of Canada as an ordained person. The goal of this research was exploring the experience of spirituality, and to this end a qualitative research methodology, IPA, was chosen as being an appropriate tool.

These participants were invited to participate in two interviews and in preparation for the second interview, to bring five photographs that reflected for them their experience of spirituality. Thirteen of the 14 participants completed the task of bringing the photographs and engaging in the second interview. In their words and images the influences that impacted or formed the locus of experiencing spirituality in

participants' lives were identified. Then the way in which participants interpreted and engaged these influences in relation to their named experiencing of spirituality was explored. Emerging from this interpretative engaging were four experiential aspects marking spirituality. These qualities marking their experiencing spirituality are named as being relational, intentional, directional, and transformational. Limitations of this research were discussed, along with identifying potentially fruitful avenues of future research. Implications for counselling psychology were also identified, not the least of which is the rich potential of using graphic images as tools of expression and exploration of experiential areas of life when words themselves fall short.

ENDNOTES

¹Bridges (Bridges, 2001) describes adult transitions stating:

In the ending, we lose or let go of our old outlook, our old reality, our old attitudes, our old values, our old self-image. We may resist this ending for a while. We may try to talk ourselves out of what we are feeling, and when we do give in, we may be swept by feelings of sadness and anger.... Next.... the neutral zone.... is a time when our lives feel as though they have broken apart or gone dead. We get mixed signals, some from our old way of being and some from a way of being that is still unclear to us.... Nothing feels solid. Everything is up for grabs.... Finally, we take hold of and identify with some new outlook and some new reality, as well as new attitudes and a new self-image.... No matter how impossible it was to imagine a future earlier, life now feels as though it is back on its track again. (pp. 5-6)

² It should be noted that for the most part, the psychological literature does not directly address underlying epistemological or ontological questions regarding spirituality—although the importance of doing so is emphasized by some (Miovic, 2004). Such issues are raised, however, when exploring the history of the relationship between religion and psychology (Eliason, Hanley, & Leventis, 2001; Fontana, 2003; P. Richards & Bergin, 1997), as well as in, for example, an emergent approach to psychotherapy known as theistic psychotherapy (P. S. Richards, 2005; Sperry & Mansager, 2004).

³ Membership in the Anglican Church of Canada is not well defined. For example, in the Canons of the Diocese of Calgary, the following definition is provided:

“Parishioner: A baptised person regularly attending Services of Worship and receiving communion in a Parish or otherwise receiving administrations of the Clergy of a Parish” (Synod of the Diocese of Calgary, 2011, p. 10). According to the Anglican Church of Canada’s Book of Common Prayer (1962), no person could receive Communion until they had also experienced the rite or sacrament of Confirmation. Membership is based primarily on receiving communion and there are conflicting definitions of who is welcome to do so—the definitional conflict centering on whether one needs to be confirmed or not. Baptism is understood to be the means through which an individual becomes a member of the church. Consequently Confirmation is in practice no longer a prerequisite for an individual receiving Communion. Confirmation, however, may be required for those presenting themselves for ordination, or to participate in the governing structures of the church. For this research, and somewhat reflecting the definitional question of who is an Anglican, the recruitment poster invited those who were “baptized and confirmed members of the Anglican Church” to participate. However if a person indicated that they self-identified as Anglican based on their participation in the life of an Anglican parish and were baptized, that was deemed sufficient for their being eligible to participate in this research.

⁴ These individuals included: Dr S Bong at Monash University–Sunway campus in Malaysia; Dr. Chang Kam Hock, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Nursing in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia, Sarawak, Malaysia; Guenther Kreuger, Ph.D., ASR consultant in Vancouver; as well as Blair McNaughton, Mai-Ann Sprung, and Terry Williams, of Maze Consulting in Calgary.

⁵ Alcoholics Anonymous (2012) describes themselves as follows:

Alcoholics Anonymous® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

⁶ The Christian doctrine of the incarnation is succinctly defined in the following way:

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation affirms that the eternal Son of God took flesh from His human mother and that the historical Christ is at once fully God and fully man. It asserts an abiding union in Christ's Person of Godhead and manhood without the integrity or permanence of either being impaired, and it assigns the beginnings of this union to a definite and known date in human history. ("Incarnation" *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2006)

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APPENDIX A:
Participant Recruitment Notice



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
FOR A UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
PHD RESEARCH PROJECT

The Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men

You are invited to participate if you:

- Identify as a gay man (18 years of age or older);
- Experience spirituality as an identifiable dynamic in your life;
- Are or have been an active baptized and confirmed member of the Anglican Church;
- Are willing to engage in two confidentially audio recorded semi-structured interviews; and
- Are willing to take photographs illustrating in whatever way you choose, your lived experience(s) of spirituality.

This aim of this research is to explore and then raise awareness of how gay men, with roots in the Anglican Church and tradition, experience spirituality in their lives.

Participation in this research is voluntary and all information about your participation will be kept confidential.

For further information about this research and participating please contact:

Barry C.B. Hollowell (403.874.0153 or bhollowe@ucalgary.ca) or

Dr. Kevin Alderson (403-220-6758 or alderson@ucalgary.ca), or

Dr. Tom Strong (403-220-7770 or strongt@ucalgary.ca)

APPENDIX B:

Participant Recruitment Script

The Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men

Dear Potential Research Participant,

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in my research. This research (and the data provided by its participants) will be the basis for my writing a PhD dissertation in the Department of Applied Psychology at the University of Calgary. The focus of this research is exploring "The Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men." This project has been approved by the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

A quick word about myself and who I am in this research process. My academic background includes degrees in Psychology, Pastoral Counselling, and Theology. I am an ordained Anglican clergy person, although at the present time I am not functioning as such. I am also a gay man, volunteering and participating in various gay organizations in Calgary.

The Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this qualitative study is to open a window of articulation and understanding of the lived experience and meaning of spirituality in the lives of gay men (age 18 or over) who presently, or in the past, identify as being, or having been, members of the Anglican Church.

The Anglican Church, in Canada and worldwide, continues to grapple with issues around sexuality and particularly in being both gay and engaging in Christian

faith and practice. This study's aim is to shed light on how gay men with Anglican roots live out their gay identity and how they experience and express spirituality in their lives.

My aim in this research is to raise awareness of how gay men, with roots in the Anglican Church and tradition, experience spirituality in their lives. This raising of awareness is important not only for those working in counselling psychology, but also for those who live and work in the church. The Anglican Church has made a commitment to listen to the stories of gay and lesbian experience, this is one opportunity for your experience to be expressed and shared. My hope is that this process will also be interesting and of personal benefit to those who chose to participate.

If spirituality (however you may wish to define it) is for you a part of your life and you have been, or are now, a baptized and confirmed member of the Anglican Church, I am interested in exploring your experience of making sense of spirituality in your life as a gay man.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in two interviews which may take up to 60-90 minutes each. I will ask your permission to digitally record each interview, which I will subsequently transcribe. These transcriptions will then be used by me in sorting and sifting out the essence and flavour of your, and the other participants, experience of spirituality. In the first interview I will ask some general and follow-up with some more specific questions to help me in learning about your experience of spirituality.

A familiar aphorism is that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Words are our most common way of communicating what we think and feel. Experience and feeling is also communicated with images and pictures. In preparation for our second interview

you will be asked to take photographs with a digital camera. The focus of this is to imagine that you are creating a photographic display depicting your experience(s) of spirituality. If you do not have a digital camera, one will be made available for your use.

This is not a test of your photographic skills! You may obviously take as many digital photographs as you wish. However, you will be asked to select five that reflect most clearly your experience(s) of spirituality. You may take a photo of anything that speaks to your experience. Approximately two weeks after our first interview I will ask for your electronic copies of your five selected photos and will have a set of prints made. These will be the jumping off point for our second interview.

Following these interviews and in the course of reviewing our interviews and the photos I will send back to you a copy of my reflections and understandings of what you have shared. This is an opportunity for you to correct or add any further clarifying comments. If you choose not to respond after four weeks, I will assume that there is nothing you wish to clarify or change. At the end of all of the research interviews and writing process I will be happy to send you, if you wish, a summary of what has been discovered.

What type of personal information will be collected?

If you choose to participate you will be asked for some basic information about yourself, such as your name, age, ethnicity, present and past religious affiliation and activity, and contact information. You will also be asked for a pseudonym which will be used to identify your input and help insure confidentiality of your identity.

What happens to the information I provide?

You will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used for identifying any interview or photographic material, and for use in reporting of research finding. Actual names and individual demographic data will be kept in a separate password secured electronic file in a separate directory and computer than the one storing the interview and other research data. No one except the researcher and his supervisors will have, if needed, access to this file. All other research materials will be stored in a password secured directory on the researcher's computer. Again, no one except the researcher and his co-supervisors will have access to any of this material. Quotes that may contain information that could reveal your identity will be altered to safeguard your identity. If in any of your selected photographs there are identifiable faces either permission from them to use their photos will need to be provided, or the photo will be digitally altered to ensure their remaining anonymous.

No one except the researcher and his co-supervisors will have access to the audio recordings or transcribed interviews. Demographic information will be summarized if needed for presentations or publication of results. The digital recordings, transcripts, and any other data, will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and his co-supervisors. Research data will be stored for three years on a computer disk, at which time, it will be permanently erased, and any hard copies of interview transcriptions will then be shredded.

Do I have to participate?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. During the interviews you may choose not to answer certain questions, and you are free to completely withdraw from this research at any point. If you choose to participate you will be asked

to give your consent for our interviews to be digitally recorded. In addition you will be asked to give your consent for your photos to be used in the reporting of this study's findings.

Are there any risks or benefits if I participate?

It is expected that the benefits to you in participating will outweigh any risks. However, due to the personal nature of this study's research focus, sharing sensitive information potentially could cause some distress. You are free to discuss with me any negative feelings and reactions that you may experience from participating in the study. In addition there are professional counselling services available for use. In the unlikely event that you experience an adverse reaction after the completion of the interview and information gathering process, short-term and on-going counselling services are available in the community.

If you are interested in participating in this research I will send you a written Consent Form for your signature. If you have any further concerns or questions, please feel free to raise those with myself or with my co-supervisors.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this invitation!

APPENDIX C:

Participant Informed Consent Form



Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Barry C.B. Hollowell, Faculty of Education - Division of Applied Psychology, 403-874-0153, bhollowe@ucalgary.ca

Supervisors:

Dr. Kevin Alderson, Faculty of Education - Division of Applied Psychology, 403-220-6758, alderson@ucalgary.ca

Dr. Tom Strong, Faculty of Education - Division of Applied Psychology, 403-220-7770, strongt@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project: The Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

This research, and the data from its participants, will be used for my writing a dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements for a PhD in Applied Psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary. The purpose of this qualitative study is to open a window of articulation and understanding of the lived experience and meaning of spirituality in the lives of gay men who presently, or in the past, identify as being, or having been, members of the Anglican Church.

The Anglican Church, in Canada and worldwide, continues to grapple with issues around sexuality and particularly in being both gay and engaging in Christian faith and practice. This study's aim is to shed light on how gay men with Anglican roots live out their gay identity and how they experience and express spirituality in their lives.

My aim in this research is to raise awareness of how gay men, with roots in the Anglican Church and tradition, experience spirituality in their lives. This raising of awareness is important not only for those working in counselling psychology, but also for those who live and work in the church. The Anglican Church has made a commitment to listen to the stories of gay and lesbian experience, this is one opportunity for your experience to be expressed and shared. My hope is that this process will also be interesting and of personal benefit to those who chose to participate.

If spirituality (however you may wish to define it) is for you a part of your life and you have been, or are now, a baptized and confirmed member of the Anglican Church, I am interested in exploring your experience of making sense of spirituality in your life as a gay man.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to participate in two interviews which may take up to 60-90 minutes each. I will ask your permission to digitally record each interview, which I will subsequently transcribe. These transcriptions will then be used by me in sorting and sifting out the essence and flavour of your, and the other participants, experience of spirituality. In the first interview I will ask some general and follow-up with some more specific questions to help me in learning about your experience of spirituality.

A familiar aphorism is that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Words are our most common way of communicating what we think and feel. Experience and feeling is also communicated with images and pictures. In preparation for our second interview you will be asked to take photographs with a digital camera. The focus of this is to imagine that you are creating a photographic display depicting your experience(s) of spirituality. If you do not have a digital camera, one will be made available for your use.

This is not a test of your photographic skills! You may obviously take as many digital photographs as you wish. However, you will be asked to select five that reflect most clearly your experience(s) of spirituality. You may take a photo of anything that speaks to your experience. Approximately two weeks after our first interview I will ask for your electronic copies of your five selected photos and will have a set of prints made. These will be the jumping off point for our second interview.

Following these interviews and in the course of reviewing our interviews and the photos I will send back to you a copy of my reflections and understandings of what you have shared. This is an opportunity for you to correct or add any further clarifying comments. If you choose not to respond after four weeks, I will assume that there is

nothing you wish to clarify or change. At the end of all of the research interviews and writing process I will be happy to send you, if you wish, a summary of what has been discovered.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. During the interviews you may choose not to answer certain questions, and you are free to completely withdraw from this research at any point. If you choose to participate you will be asked to give your consent for our interviews to be digitally recorded. In addition you will be asked to give your consent for your photos to be used in the reporting of this study's findings.

WHAT TYPE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?

If you choose to participate you will be asked for some basic information about yourself, such as your name, age, ethnicity, present and past religious affiliation and activity, and contact information. You will also be asked for a pseudonym which will be used to identify your input and help insure the confidentiality of your identity.

ARE THERE RISKS OR BENEFITS IF I PARTICIPATE?

It is expected that the benefits to you in participating will outweigh any risks. However, due to the personal nature of this study's research focus, sharing sensitive information potentially could cause some distress. You are free to discuss with me any negative feelings and reactions that you may experience from participating in the study. In addition there are professional counselling services available for use. In the unlikely event that you experience an adverse reaction after the completion of the interview and information gathering process, short-term and on-going counselling services are available in the community.

In Calgary:

- The Eastside Family Centre free of charge at 403-299-9696;
- The Distress Centre can be accessed 24-hours a day seven days a week for over-the-phone counselling services at 403-266-1605;
- Calgary Family Services at 403-269-9888 (<http://www.calgaryfamily.org/pages/adult-counselling.html>). Fees for counselling are based on a sliding fee scale, according to the client's ability to pay.
- Calgary Counselling Centre at 403-691-5991 (<http://www.calgarycounselling.com/counselling.htm#started>). This is a not-for-profit agency that offers services based on a sliding scale based upon the client's gross income.

In Edmonton:

- The Support Network Distress line at 780-482-4357;
- Connection with emotional and mental health agency information in Edmonton dial 211.

In Lethbridge:

- Lethbridge Family Services at 403-327-5724. This agency uses a sliding scale, but no one is turned away.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INFORMATION I PROVIDE?

You will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used for identifying any interview or photographic material, and for use in reporting of research finding. Actual names and individual demographic data will be kept in a separate password secured electronic file in a separate directory and computer than the one storing the interview and other research data. No one except the researcher and his supervisors will have, if needed, access to this file. All other research materials will be stored in a password secured directory on the researcher's computer. Again, no one except the researcher and his co-supervisors will have access to any of this material. Quotes that may contain

information that could reveal your identity will be altered to safeguard your identity. If in any of your selected photographs there are identifiable faces either permission from them to use their photos will need to be provided, or the photo will be digitally altered to ensure their remaining anonymous. The photographs you select for use, in addition to being used for display and publication in writing a PhD dissertation in the Department of Applied Psychology, Faculty of Education, at the University of Calgary, may also be used in printed format illustrating these research findings in journals and other published works, and may be projected as illustrations during verbal conference presentations of this research.

You may use photos I take for this research in reporting research results:

Yes: ____ No: ____

No one except the researcher and his co-supervisors will have access to the audio recordings or transcribed interviews. Demographic information will be summarized if needed for presentations or publication of results. The digital recordings, transcripts, and any other data, will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and his co-supervisors. Research data will be stored on a computer disk for five years following the final publication of research findings, at which time it will be permanently erased, and any hard copies of interview transcriptions will then be shredded.

SIGNATURES (WRITTEN CONSENT)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print)

Participant's Signature _____ Date:

Researcher's Name: (please print)

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date:

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Barry C.B. Hollowell

Faculty of Education - Division of Applied Psychology

403-874-0153 - bhollowe@ucalgary.ca

Dr. Kevin Alderson

Faculty of Education - Division of Applied Psychology,

403-220-6758 - alderson@ucalgary.ca

Dr. Tom Strong

Faculty of Education - Division of Applied Psychology

403-220-7770 - strongt@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email rburrows@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

APPENDIX D:

A Matrix of Question Options

(Adapted from Patton, 2002)

| A MATRIX OF QUESTION OPTIONS | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| QUESTION FOCUS | <i>Past</i> | <i>Present</i> | <i>Future</i> |
| Behaviors/experiences | What formal religious or spiritual practices/ ceremonies did you participate in growing up? Were there any private or informal spiritual practices that you engaged in? | What is your present religious or spiritual practice like? Has it changed since coming out? | What do you see your future religious or spiritual practice to be like? |
| Opinions/values | Looking back, what role or what value did you see in things spiritual or religious? | What role or value does the spiritual or religious have for you now? Has this changed over time? | What spiritual role or values do you see nurturing for yourself / others in the future? |

| | | | |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| Feelings/emotions | When you were growing up, what kind of feelings were stirred in you around things spiritual or religious? | What is your experience of spirituality today? What emotions surround that? Has this changed? How? | What sort of hopes, if any, do you have about your experience of spirituality in the future? How do you hope or expect that might feel? |
| Knowledge | What spiritual or religious beliefs did you have when you were growing up? | How would you describe your present religious or spiritual beliefs? Have these changed since or through coming out? How? | When you think of spirituality, are there things you would like to explore in the future? Directions you would like to explore? |
| Sensory | How did you experience the spiritual when you were growing up? | Do you experience the sacred, the spiritual in your life these days? If | How would you like to experience the spiritual or religious in the |

| | | | |
|------------|---|--|--|
| | Do you recall any particular or special experiences – what were they like? | so what is that like, if not, what is that like? | future? Are there spiritual practices you would like to engage in in the future? |
| Background | Has your experience of spirituality impacted (or been impacted by) your decisions to come out as a gay man (in the past, present, and/or anticipated future)? | How does your experience of spirituality impact other important people in your life? Has this changed over time? Do you have any future hopes? | |

Suggested wording of sample opening questions:

- What does "spirituality" mean for you?
- As a gay man what is your experience of spirituality?
- What's it been like to integrate (or not) your experience of identifying as a gay man with your spiritual or religious experiences and/or beliefs?

Other possible question prompts:

If conflict around spirituality is named:

- What is/was the experience of that like?
- How has this conflict been experienced?
- What kind of resolution of this conflict have you been able to arrive at?

Talking about spirituality:

- What sorts of conversations have you had with others about your experience of spirituality? What was that like for you?
- What, if anything, has been a barrier or a hindrance in your talking about spirituality with others?
- If you have had any of these conversations, has there been anything helpful for you in talking about your experience of spirituality?
- How has this conversation been for you?
- If there is anything from this conversation that you might consider further, what would that be?

APPENDIX E:

An Information Sheet for Participants

The Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men

An Information Sheet for Participants

CONFIDENTIAL

Please print the following information.

For purposes of contacting you:

Full name: _____

Address at which you prefer to be contacted:

Telephone number:

Day: _____

Evening: _____

E-mail address:

Information about yourself:

Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Level of Education & degree earned: _____

Present Occupation: _____

What word would you use to best describe your sexual orientation?

What name would you like to choose to use as a pseudonym in this research?

Formal Religious Affiliation and Involvement:

Relationship with the Anglican Church:

Baptized? No Yes (at what age? ___)

Confirmed? No Yes (at what age? ___)

Are you currently, or have you been in the past, affiliated with another faith or
Christian denomination? No Yes

If "yes" please identify the faith or denomination:

Involvement with religious/spiritual services or celebrations:

A. Over the past two years have you attended or participated in any Anglican religious
services or celebrations? No Yes

If "Yes," were these occasions:

Special occasions (e.g. weddings, funerals, etc.)

Sunday or weekday services

If you attended Sunday or weekday services, how frequently did you attend?

At least once a month

Sometimes

Once or twice a year

B. Over the past two years have you attended or participated in any non-Anglican
religious services or celebrations? No Yes Please identify the faith or

denomination:

If “Yes,” were these occasions:

- Special occasions (e.g. weddings, funerals, etc.)
- Sunday (or its equivalent), or weekday services

If you attended Sunday or weekday services, how frequently did you attend?

- At least once a month
- Sometimes
- Once or twice a year

Thank you again for providing this information.

Your personal identifying information will be kept confidentially stored in a separate secure file, accessible only to the researcher and his co-supervisors.

APPENDIX F:

Photo Publication Release Form

Title of Research: The Experience of Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men

Date of the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

(CFREB) Approval: 24 July 2009

All persons taking still photographs or videos for research publications must obtain a signed release form from anyone who is visibly recognizable in the photograph. Crowd scenes where no single person is the dominant feature are exempt. However if such 'crowd' photos are taken in situations/locations where there might be some reasonable expectation of privacy, it will be necessary to receive consent of all identifiable individuals in the photograph, if this is not possible the faces will be digitally blurred as appropriate to maintain anonymity

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

I am 18 years of age or older and hereby grant the researcher designated below from the University of Calgary permission to use photographs containing my likeness for publication for the above titled CFREB approved research only. My name will not be used in any publication. I will make no monetary or other claim against the University of Calgary or the researcher for the use of the photograph(s).

USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

The designed use of these photographs is for display and publication in writing a PhD dissertation in the Department of Applied Psychology, Faculty of Education, at the University of Calgary. The focus of this research is exploring "The Experience of

Spirituality in the Lives of Gay Men." These photographs may be used in printed format illustrating these research findings in journals and other published works, and may be projected as illustrations during verbal conference presentations of this research.

Printed Name:

Date:

Signature:

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name:

Date:

Signature:

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY RESEARCHER

Name: Barry C.B. Hollowell

Date: July 2009

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APPENDIX G:

Summary Response Invitation

The following is the text of an email sent to each participant following the transcription of interviews and two page summaries being prepared. Each participant's summary was then attached to this email and sent to each person's personal email and confidential email address which they had provided for this purpose.

Greetings [*name*]-

I trust this email finds you well. All the interviews for this research project exploring the experience of spirituality in the lives of gay men have now been transcribed! And, as I had mentioned in the introductory information about this research and how it would unfold, I stated that I would send back to you a copy of my summary of reflections and understandings of what you have shared. This is an opportunity for you to correct or add any further clarifying comments. If you choose not to respond after two weeks, I will assume that there is nothing you wish to clarify or change.

A copy of this reflective summary is attached to this email.

After this initial summary has been completed for each participant, and any feedback received, the next step will be an analysis of themes across interviews and participants. Be aware that what emerges from this may or may not reflect your own personal understandings! Upon final completion of this dissertation an electronic copy will be forwarded to you.

A very sincere "Thank you" again for your participation! It was an honour to listen and be entrusted with the stories and material you shared.

APPENDIX H:

NVivo 8 Screenshot—Participant Interview Transcript:
 Displaying Researcher’s Annotations & Coded Themes

The screenshot displays the NVivo 8 interface. The main window shows a transcript of an interview with several paragraphs of text. Annotations in red font are visible throughout the text. On the right side, a vertical 'coding density stripe' is shown, with colored bars indicating where themes have been coded. A legend on the right lists themes such as 'Dynamics - positive - Social-spiritual space' and 'Dynamics - positive - Resignation'. The left sidebar shows a project tree with folders like 'Sources', 'Nodes', and 'Sets'. A table at the top lists interview transcripts with columns for Name, Nodes, References, Created, and Modified.

| Name | Nodes | References | Created | Created By | Modified | Modified By |
|-------------------|-------|------------|---------|------------|----------|-------------|
| Alec Interview 1 | 28 | 93 | 11/27/2 | B | 8/14/20 | B |
| Alec Interview 2a | 2 | 2 | 12/22/2 | B | 7/7/201 | B |
| Alec Interview 2b | 23 | 83 | 1/26/20 | B | 7/7/201 | B |
| Alex interview 1 | 43 | 141 | 11/27/2 | B | 7/8/201 | B |

The contents of the transcribed text of participant’s interview are displayed in this “detail view” window.

Hovering over this “coding density stripe” will display all the nodes or themes coded for the data’s displayed content at that point.

Researcher’s annotations, comments, questions, and musings are entered in red font.

Coding stripes visually identify nodes or themes coded at particular locations in the “detail view” display of data.

APPENDIX I:

Illustrative Use of VUE

Creating Summaries of Individual Participant's Interviews

