

**Spirituality in psychodynamic  
counselling: An exploration of  
counsellors' understandings of  
and engagement with spirituality  
in practice.**

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is a continuing interest in spirituality, a fact that seems to fly in the face of claims that UK society is becoming more secularized. Although there has been increased interest and research in spirituality in counselling, there is little specifically concerned with psychodynamic counselling. This thesis argues that incorporating spirituality into psychodynamic practice, in response to client demand, may be harder than for many other counselling approaches. This is because of its roots in psychoanalysis, a field that has been consistently resistant to validating the spiritual dimension.

This study explores how counsellors understand spirituality within the theoretical framework of psychodynamic counselling, and employs a narrative methodology to consider how they understand their attitude to impact on their practice.

A key finding of the study is that there is an absence of spirituality within the psychodynamic profession, whose structures and training provides little impetus or encouragement to explore it. This research shows the complexities in working with spirituality and the need to work at the boundaries of practice. Because of the complementary nature of spirituality and psychodynamic counselling, this study demonstrates that spirituality is always a possibility in the work.

As a result, the research identifies the need to increase professional discourse, from the start of counsellor training, in an area consistently important to clients, so that understanding can be shared and counselling practice in this area more fully understood.

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# INDEX TO CHAPTERS

## CHAPTER 1

<b>SETTING THE SCENE.....</b>	<b>13</b>
1.0. Introduction.....	13
1.1. Origins of the work.....	13
1.2. What is spirituality?.....	15
1.3. What is psychodynamic counselling?.....	16
1.4. Initial explorations.....	17
1.5. The theoretical background.....	21
1.6. The research questions.....	22
1.7. Preview of the design of the study.....	23
1.8. Structure of the thesis.....	24

## CHAPTER 2

<b>SPIRITUALITY.....</b>	<b>26</b>
2.0. Introduction to the literature review.....	26
2.1. Introduction to Chapter 2.....	27
2.2. Spirituality in a post-modern context.....	28
2.3. Spirituality as a relational activity.....	31
2.4. The relationship of spirituality with religion.....	33
2.5. Spirituality as a multidimensional construct.....	36
2.6. The fundamental nature of spirituality to human beings.....	39
2.7. Definition of spirituality.....	40

## CHAPTER 3

<b>WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT SPIRITUALITY IN PSYCHODYNAMIC COUNSELLING: THE THEORETICAL LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>42</b>
--	-----------

3.0.	Introduction.....	42
3.1.	Understandings of psychodynamic counselling.....	42
3.2.	Factors militating against thinking about and engaging with spirituality in psychodynamic counselling.....	46
3.2.1.	The impact of Freud’s atheism.....	46
3.2.2.	The impact of the drive to establish the scientific credibility and professionalism of psychoanalysis.....	48
3.2.3.	The impact of the absence of spirituality in psychoanalysis on psychodynamic counselling.....	49
3.3.	Ways in which spirituality can be addressed in psychodynamic counselling.....	50
3.3.1.	Winnicott and transitional phenomena.....	51
3.3.2.	Bion and transformational ways of engaging within psychodynamic counselling.....	53
3.3.3.	Other psychoanalytic concepts that enable thinking about spirituality in practice.....	56
3.3.4.	Understanding psychodynamic counselling and spirituality as parallel processes and practices.....	60
3.4.	Summary.....	62

## **CHAPTER 4**

<b>    SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHODYNAMIC COUNSELLING: THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>64</b>	
4.0.	Introduction.....	64
4.1.	Clients’ needs in relation to spirituality in counselling.....	65
4.2.	How spiritual are psychodynamic counsellors?.....	67
4.3.	Organizational recognition of the need for spiritually inclusive counselling.....	68
4.4.	The preparation of counsellors for working with spirituality.....	69
4.5.	Empirical research about working with spirituality in practice.....	71
4.6	Summary.....	77

## **CHAPTER 5**

<b>METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....</b>	<b>80</b>
5.0. Introduction.....	80
5.1. Research questions.....	80
5.2. Locating my research- the development of a qualitative approach.....	81
5.2.1. Theoretical perspectives.....	82
5.2.2. Social constructionism.....	84
5.3. Methodology and methods.....	86
5.4. A narrative inquiry approach.....	87
5.4.1. The congruence of the narrative inquiry approach with social constructionism.....	88
5.4.2. Narratives.....	88
5.5. Obtaining the narratives- the use of interviews.....	94
5.6. Analysis of the narratives.....	96
5.7. Summary.....	98

## **CHAPTER 6**

<b>METHODS: REFINING THE METHODS AND CONDUCTING THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>99</b>
6.0 Introduction.....	99
6.1. Key points from the literature review and initial conversations with colleagues.....	99
6.2. The preparatory study.....	100
6.2.1. The development of the journaling tool.....	100
6.2.2. Trialling the journaling tool.....	102
6.2.3. The development of the interview method.....	103
6.3. The main study.....	106
6.3.1. Selecting an area for the study and sampling.....	107
6.3.2. Meeting the participants.....	110
6.3.3. Undertaking the interviews.....	110

6.4. Data analysis.....	113
6.4.1. The analytic method.....	113
6.4.2. Stage 1- The interview narrative- getting inside the personal narratives.....	114
6.4.3. Stage 2- The research narrative; developing a theorised interpretation.....	123
6.5. Summary.....	125

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **RIGOUR, REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICAL MINDFULNESS.....126**

7.0. Introduction.....	126
7.1. Rigour in qualitative research.....	126
7.1.1. Reflexivity and rigour.....	132
7.1.2. Involvement of colleagues in the study.....	137
7.2. Ethical considerations.....	138
7.3. Summary.....	143

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE GENRES IN THE NARRATIVES.....145**

8.0. Introduction.....	145
8.1. Introduction to the participants.....	145
8.2. The genres in participants' narratives.....	152
8.2.1. The use of the journal.....	152
8.2.2. The discovery genre.....	154
8.2.3. The clarity genre.....	158
8.3. Summary.....	164

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUALITY..... 166**

9.0. Introduction.....	166
------------------------	-----



9.1. Participants' reactions to Cook's definition of spirituality.....	166
9.2. The main ways of understanding spirituality.....	170
9.2.1. Understanding spirituality by linking it with religion.....	170
9.2.2. Understanding spirituality by separating it from religion..	173
9.2.3. Difficulties with understanding spirituality; a problematic concept.....	176
9.3. The difficulties in talking about spirituality.....	179
9.4. The innateness of spirituality.....	180
9.5. Summary.....	181

## **CHAPTER 10**

<b>SPIRITUALITY AND THE PSYCHODYNAMIC MODEL.....</b>	<b>182</b>
10.0. Introduction.....	182
10.1. Main themes in understandings of spirituality within the psychodynamic model.....	182
10.1.1. Theme 1: Relating spirituality to aspects of psychodynamic thinking.....	183
10.1.2. Theme 2: The use of religious constructs and understandings in the work.....	194
10.1.3. Theme 3: Understanding spirituality as beyond psychodynamic thinking and language.....	198
10.1.4. Theme 4: The lack of fit between spirituality and the psychodynamic model.....	200
10.1.5. Theme 5: The need for counsellors to be themselves and to know themselves; an essential part of practice.....	202
10.2. Summary.....	204

## **CHAPTER 11**

<b>THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHODYNAMIC COUNSELLING.....</b>	<b>205</b>
11.0. Introduction.....	205
11.1. Participants' preparations for meeting the client.....	205

11.2. Approaches to the client in counselling work and the need to respect their beliefs.....	206
11.3. Variations in the degree of explicitness in working with spirituality.....	213
11.3.1. Working in a boundaried way.....	214
11.3.2. Introducing spirituality into counselling work.....	216
11.4. The prevalence of a conscious sense of spirituality or spiritual encounters in the work.....	217
11.5. Examples of spiritual encounters in practice.....	219
11.5.1. Implicit spiritual encounters in practice.....	219
11.5.2. Explicit spiritual aspects to and spiritual encounters in counselling practice.....	225
11.6. Tensions in working with spirituality.....	227
11.6.1. Minimal tensions in working with spirituality.....	227
11.6.2. Aspects of the spirituality of the client.....	228
11.6.3. The denial of spirituality in the client.....	229
11.6.4. Aspects of the client.....	229
11.6.5. Conflict with the aims of organizations.....	230
11.7. The exclusion of spirituality in supervision.....	230
11.8. The continuing nature of the journey in understanding spirituality and psychodynamic counselling.....	231
11.8.1. The struggle of the journey.....	232
11.8.2. The on-going nature of the journey.....	233
11.8.3. The unknowing and uncertainty in the journey.....	234
11.8.4. The difference between ontological and phenomenological experiences in the journey.....	235
11.8.5. The loneliness of the journey and the need for support and self care.....	236
11.8.6. The privilege of the work.....	237
11.9. Summary.....	238

## **CHAPTER 12**

<b>REFLEXIVE COMMENTARY.....</b>	<b>239</b>
----------------------------------	------------

12.0. Introduction.....	239
12.1. The potential influence of my previous experience on the research.....	239
12.2. The potential influences of my experiences of the research setting and encounter.....	240
12.2.1. The research setting.....	240
12.2.2. The impact of participants' motivation to take part in the study.....	241
12.2.3. The nature of the encounter with participants.....	242
12.2.4. The impact of the research on participants.....	243
12.3. What has it been like to do the research? .....	244
12.4. Summary.....	247

## **CHAPTER 13**

<b>DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>248</b>
13.0. Introduction.....	248
13.1. The focus of the study and the nature of the sample.....	248
13.2. Participants' understandings of spirituality; making sense of spirituality.....	251
13.2.1. The absence of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling.....	256
13.3.2. The inclusion of love in understanding spirituality.....	260
13.3. Points of fit and points of tension between participants' understanding of spirituality and of psychodynamic counselling.....	263
13.3.1. Ways of making sense of spirituality.....	264
13.3.2. The lack of fit between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling.....	269
13.3.3. The person of the counsellor.....	273
13.4. Issues in working with spirituality in practice.....	274
13.4.1. Factors helpful in thinking and working with spirituality..	275
13.4.2. The limits in awareness of current research about spirituality in counselling practice.....	279

13.4.3. Working at the boundaries of practice; managing uncertainty.....	283
--	-----

## **CHAPTER 14**

<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>286</b>
14.0. Introduction.....	286
14.1. Revisiting the background to the study.....	286
14.2. Summary of the main findings.....	287
14.3. Implications and recommendations for counselling practice...	289
14.3.1. Enabling thinking about work with spirituality in psychodynamic practice; the need to see it as part of practice.....	289
14.3.2. Working authentically with spirituality.....	292
14.3.3. The complexity of working with spirituality; managing the challenges.....	294
14.3.4. The ever present possibility of spirituality in psychodynamic work.....	295
14.4. Recommendations for further research.....	296
14.5. Conclusion.....	296

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Participation information sheet.....	298
Appendix 2 Journal exercises and instructions.....	302
Appendix 3 Advert for the study.....	308
Appendix 4 Consent form.....	309
Appendix 5 Example of analysis of a narrative.....	310
Appendix 6 Framework for data analysis.....	315
Appendix 7 Summary of themes and subthemes.....	316

<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>319</b>
------------------------	------------

## **LIST OF DIAGRAMS:**

Diagram 1: Recruitment of qualitative sample.....	109
Diagram 2: Summary of the process of data collection from each participant.....	112
Diagram 3: Summary of the process of identification of themes.....	119
Diagram 4: Summary of the process of identification of genres.....	122
Diagram 5: Summary of the methods of analysis of narratives.....	124
Diagram 6: Summary of the processes of reflexivity and reflection used in the study.....	134

## **LIST OF TABLES:**

Table 1: Summary of the participants.....	151
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### **Note about the introduction of material from the interviews**

Examples of participants' narratives are provided throughout the findings and discussion chapters. They are referenced in terms of where the narrative is from, the first or second interview (01 or 02) followed by the line number from which the excerpt starts e.g. Hazel (01: 27) refers to Hazel's first interview starting at line number 27.



# CHAPTER 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

### 1.1. Introduction

In this chapter I describe how the research originated and its purpose. I introduce the concepts of spirituality and psychodynamic counselling, summarizing the definitions used in this study. The importance of undertaking this study for both counsellors <sup>1</sup> and clients is described. I explain my interest and expertise in this area, and demonstrate the appropriateness of me undertaking this work. I introduce the reader to the theoretical basis of the study, the research questions and the design and sample of the study. This chapter ends with an overview of the content of the thesis.

### 1.2. Origins of the work

Knowing where to start a thesis can be a daunting process in that there is much information to convey accumulated over years of study, in this case over six years. However it is important to recognize that this research evolved initially from uncomfortable experiences for me during my training as a psychodynamic counsellor. During this training I soon picked up that Freud's views about religion and spirituality were largely unchallenged by the profession and were given the status of 'truth'. In short religion and spirituality were viewed as infantile forms of thinking that needed to be worked through for good health. Early reading affirmed this; for example Rubin (2006) cites the examples of several psychoanalysts who understand therapeutic 'success' as the termination

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<sup>1</sup> Although I use the term counsellors, I understand this to also relate to psychodynamic psychotherapists. There is often confusion about differences between counsellors and psychotherapists. Recent distinctions between them have become more blurred such that they are used interchangeably. As a result the term counsellor, in this thesis, can also be read as psychotherapist. This reflects what goes on in practice (Scott 2011).

<sup>2</sup> For example the BBC has weekly programmes exploring spirituality including, 'Heart

of religious/spiritual beliefs. As a practising Christian I found this hard to understand. There were few means to explore this in my training other than in an optional seminar that I led on the subject of spirituality and religion. This was a confusing time for me personally. I wanted to work with people holistically, which meant integrating spirituality into counselling practice if clients needed to do this.

However the assumption of holistic practice was challenged early on in my clinical counselling practice. The third client that I saw as a trainee had had the traumatic experience of losing his only child. Early on during the course of our work he talked of his spirituality, about prayer, and the importance of this to him. My natural instinct was to bring this up in supervision and case discussions on the course. However although never explicitly told not to I soon learnt not to include spirituality in such discussions. While the systems for development and support during my counsellor training were largely helpful there felt no means of including or exploring spirituality. My experience was that this was a subject that was largely ignored during my counsellor training.

The absence of spirituality in my training was in contrast to my clinical experiences where clients, from a range of spiritual positions including atheistic stances, brought it into the work. My intuitive sense was that spirituality and the psychodynamic process were ideally suited to work together: they both sought to explore deeper meanings of self and the world and they both required relationships, space, talk, and silence to do this. This was recognized by others. Michael Jacobs (1993: 13) for example states that:

Counselling and religion, psychology and spirituality, theology and psychoanalysis, all have more in common than divides them...At the heart of all the arguments and theories is the attempt to understand, to live with, to experience and, in some sense, control, what it is to be a human being. Counselling and spirituality, East and West, share the same view that out of crisis comes opportunity and new possibilities; that experiences



of loss and death, appallingly painful though they may be, can give rise to new life.

My experiences and confusion led me to examine the literature about how spirituality can be understood within psychodynamic counselling and importantly how it can be worked with in practice. Before detailing these initial explorations, it is important to clarify how I understand spirituality and psychodynamic counselling.

### **1.3. What is spirituality?**

Spirituality is a concept that is almost impossible to ignore. It has touched almost every aspect of culture and occurs in almost all forms of media (King 2009).<sup>2</sup> However spirituality is a concept that is difficult to define and has been called a fuzzy concept that 'embraces obscurity with passion' (Spilka 1993: 1). This was my experience when I started to talk with fellow students and colleagues about spirituality; at times it was hard to have shared dialogue about it. What did not help with this was my recognition that spirituality is what people say it is. I understand that spirituality can relate to the whole of life, as well as that there can be spiritual moments in life. I also recognize the same to be true of counselling practice: that it can be seen as a spiritual process; and that there can be spiritual moments in it, when spirituality is discussed or the counselling relationship becomes or feels spiritual. I understand that spirituality can thus be an all-encompassing way of experiencing life as well as be experienced at specific moments in time.

Despite the openness of my understanding of spirituality I saw a need to put some parameters around it in order to enable dialogue and

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<sup>2</sup> For example the BBC has weekly programmes exploring spirituality including, 'Heart and Soul.' Its online news covers spirituality; for example an article posted on July 6<sup>th</sup> 2015 by Katie Hope explored the topic of company bosses who pray. Other publications covering spirituality in July 2015 include Science 2.0 (Vittachi 2015), and the Telegraph (Thackray 2015). The online resource, NHS Choices (2013), discusses the link of spirituality with mental health.

exploration. As Chapter 2 demonstrates this is not an easy task; spirituality is an elusive concept with multiple definitions and understandings. The most helpful one for this study was that offered by Chris Cook (2004). Although it was developed from a study looking at the ways that spirituality is used in the literature on addiction and spirituality, it arguably applies to other areas (Sims & Cook 2009):

Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as a relationship with that which is intimately 'inner', immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as a relationship with that which is wholly 'other', transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values.

(Cook 2004: 549)

#### **1.4. What is psychodynamic counselling?**

Psychodynamic counselling evolved from psychoanalysis, and while this too will be explored in further detail (in Chapter 3), some explanation of the term here is helpful. Psychodynamic theory has its origins in the ideas of Sigmund Freud and his work has been hugely influential in that he remains a key point of reference for many psychodynamic counsellors (McLeod 2003). Various aspects to these theories have inevitably been challenged and changed and it was from this that psychodynamic counselling emerged. This was initially to provide a less intensive form of psychoanalysis.

Michael Jacobs has been key in the development of psychodynamic counselling. His teaching in pastoral counselling skills<sup>3</sup> underpinned much of his thinking (c.f. Jacobs 1997). He defines 'psychodynamic' as:

the way in which the psyche (as mind/emotions/spirit/self) is seen as active and not static...The activity of the psyche is not confined to relating to people, or to objects outside the self. Activity also takes place within the psyche in relation to itself...These internal aspects (or 'objects', as they are sometimes called in psychodynamic literature) of the psyche are formed over the long years of a child's development, as counterparts of external relationships which predominated in early childhood, principally those with mother and father.

(Jacobs 1997: 26-7)

and counselling as:

..a way of helping others that stresses the gentle stillness of the helper in listening, absorbing, containing, understanding and reflecting back.

(Jacobs 1997:7)

## **1.5. Initial explorations**

My initial explorations of the literature revealed little empirical work about spirituality within psychodynamic counselling specifically. However there was clearly a growing literature concerned with spirituality within the world of counselling and psychotherapy generally. There was emerging empirical work exploring spirituality within psychoanalysis and within counselling generally as well as a proliferation of theoretical, conceptual and polemic literature in this field. Key texts and experiences which initially encouraged me were Nathan Field et al (2005) and David Black (2006), and attendance at a conference about spirituality in

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<sup>3</sup> Pastoral counselling is the practice of counselling that takes place within a religious setting and/or pastoral counsellors are those counsellors for whom religious faith is a major or important concern. It is not necessarily confined to religious matters, although these can often act as pointers to other concerns (Jacobs 1997).

psychodynamic practice <sup>4</sup> where key thinkers including Black, Neville Symington and Chris MacKenna engaged with this debate.

The empirical literature matched my personal experiences of the exclusion of spirituality from training, therapy and supervision (Simmonds 2003; Post & Wade 2009; West 2009). However most of the research that I encountered was either from a psychoanalytic or eclectic perspective, covering counsellors from a variety of counselling traditions including humanistic and behavioural approaches. Because of the development of psychodynamic counselling away from psychoanalysis, direct applicability of psychoanalytic research has to be questioned. Equally while research covering a variety of counselling approaches has usefulness, because of the commonalities between many of the main traditions (Clarkson 2002), my sense was that psychodynamic counsellors may experience more problems in this area than counsellors from other traditions because of its Freudian roots. Research focusing on counsellors from a variety of approaches may miss this nuance. Whilst there have been recent arguments for integrative and eclectic approaches to practice and research (Cooper & McLeod 2011; Faris & Ooijen 2012) most counsellors adhere to one of the main schools of thought. Single orientation also remains the predominant way of thinking, practising and commissioning within the counselling field (Cooper & McLeod 2011). For these reasons it felt important to focus on psychodynamic counsellors specifically in this study. There appeared to be minimal research examining how psychodynamic counsellors understood and worked with spirituality in practice. It felt important to fill this gap in the research. This was not just for my own interest but also for a variety of other reasons.

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<sup>4</sup> This was 'The Forgotten Fountain. Finding the spiritual in modern Psychodynamic Practice' a Wpf/FPC conference held on Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> 2007 at Imperial College, London, UK.

First, it is important to understand and help counsellors to work with spirituality because clients want to be able to discuss it in counselling work (Rose et al 2001; Lines 2002; Jenkins 2006). Secondly, what counsellors think about spirituality matters because of the importance of transferences<sup>5</sup> and counter-transferences<sup>6</sup> in psychodynamic work and what clients pick up in the therapeutic space. Counsellors may unconsciously communicate to clients their difficulties or uncertainties around spirituality (Wiggins 2009; Moodley & Murphy 2010). Clients in turn may experience this as an area to be avoided (Jenkins 2011). Because of the nature of unconscious communication, the person of the therapist, who they are and what they understand about spirituality in psychodynamic practice is thus likely to be central in determining if, and how, spirituality is managed in practice.

Thirdly, an interest in spirituality in psychodynamic counselling matches what is going on in the UK and beyond, across all forms of culture (King 2009). Although society as a whole is more secularized, people continue to look towards spiritual belief systems especially in times of stress (Swinton 2001). Lastly, spirituality is a means of helping to see the client as a whole person. Seeing people as whole people has been argued to be important for democracy (Nussbaum 2010) and social and political transformation (Rowson 2014). Nussbaum argues that democracy is built upon respect and concern for others, which in turn is built upon an ability to see people as human beings, not simply as objects or useful instruments. She goes on to argue that it is a soul that makes us human and that makes relationships rich. It can thus be argued that by enabling spirituality to be addressed within psychodynamic counselling the client experiences being seen as a whole person, a factor important to clients in their counselling relationships (Cook 2013).

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<sup>5</sup> Transference 'is a form of projection in which feelings, thoughts and experiences which belong to another person or situation are displaced onto the figure of the therapist and the relationship between the therapist and patient' (Spurling 2004: 97).

<sup>6</sup> Countertransference, like transference has undergone a change of meaning in the history of psychoanalysis but it is currently largely used to 'refer to the impact on the therapist of the patient's transference' (Spurling 2004: 112).

I felt prepared and able to undertake this study for a number of reasons. I brought with me a long held interest in spirituality and religion; my desire to work holistically with people; my counselling experiences and my research experience (in nursing) up to Master's level. With such experiences I felt that I had a desire to and an interest in working with people, an ability to facilitate trusting relationships to enable communication, an ability to note defensive actions and what is not said, as well as an ability to reflect deeply on the experience. This together with my belief that psychological and spiritual growth often go hand in hand propelled the study.

Before moving onto the theoretical background to the study it is pertinent to note that I experienced differences in the nature of knowledge and in the research approaches in the discipline of nursing (my previous professional background) and in the discipline of psychodynamic counselling (my current field). In a bid to establish itself as a profession nursing aligned itself to science and initially to the scientific method epitomised by logical positivism (Clarke 2014). Logical empiricism focuses on obtaining physical evidence and combines it with logical analysis. It seeks to derive general laws that correspondingly lead to a sense of truth (Alexander 1996). I experienced nursing research as an ever changing and adapting field. This contrasted with my initial experiences of psychodynamic counselling. With its origins in psychoanalysis much of the work I encountered in psychodynamic counselling was based on case studies, and the discussion and proposition of theories by eminent psychoanalysts. There was a sense of the knowledge being markedly more static in psychodynamic counselling. The lack of focus on research driven empirical methods was also reflected in the Department of Philosophy where one of my supervisors was based. Philosophy values empirical knowledge, that is knowledge derived from experience, and it values knowledge that can be applied to experience. However philosophy does not focus on traditional

scientific research methods rather on the discussion, exploration and the nature of arguments and theories.

Whilst I valued the development of knowledge that was rigorous, reliable and credible, as the scientific method sought, I needed an approach and methods that addresses the complexities and varieties of clinical practice with individual clients. The increasing development of qualitative approaches and methods in both nursing and counselling provides a way of bridging and valuing the differences within the different disciplines. Qualitative approaches provide a way of positioning that values aspects of the nature of knowledge and research approaches in the fields of nursing, psychodynamic counselling and philosophy. Importantly the use of a qualitative approach fitted with my understanding of the type of research and research approach needed to address the subject of spirituality in psychodynamic counselling. As will be argued in this thesis I understand the study to need to be empirically based in clinical practice and beyond an individual case. I also will argue that the research needs to be verifiable and credible and have an approach that recognises the need for the researcher to engage with counsellors in their understanding of the world. Such an approach would capture the essence of the individual nature of practice. It also values the discussion, exploration and development of existing theoretical ideas, and their use in both developing research questions and in making sense of research findings. My understanding of empirical research in this study is the use of research methods that seek to gather information that is observable by the senses and is obtained by direct and indirect observation and experience with the people and/or the subject being explored.

## **1.6. The theoretical background**

The focus of interest for this research is on how psychodynamic counsellors understand spirituality, how they make sense of and how they work with it in practice. My counselling and life experience have

taught me that the human mind is active in the construction of knowledge and that humans do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct it. These views are congruent with the social constructionist view of the world where meaning is seen as constructed through interaction between people, within social contexts (Denzin & Lincoln 2000), rather than something fixed and waiting to be discovered (Fay 1996). Within this paradigm language is seen as the way in which we express and realize a certain way of being in the world (Schwandt 2001). This felt particularly pertinent and relevant to counselling research with its primary focus on language and in particular for this research because of the need to use language to derive understandings of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling. Another branch of constructionism, constructivism was also used to inform the study. Constructivism emphasizes the personal meaning unique to individuals (McNamee 2002). Its use in the study reflects the overlap between constructionism and constructivism that is explored in Chapter 5.

An early task in the work was to do a literature review particularly around the empirical literature to set the research in a theoretical and research context. Ideas for initial research questions originated from my personal experiences in counsellor training but the literature review helped in shaping and developing them. This helped to ensure clarity and originality in the questions that I was asking, and that it was an area that needed to be explored (Mason 2002).

### **1.7. The research questions**

The research questions identified are:

How do psychodynamic counsellors reconcile their understandings of spirituality with their understanding of the theoretical framework of



psychodynamic counselling? How might this impact on their clinical practice?

The specific aims are to investigate:

- counsellors' understandings of psychodynamic practice and their understanding of spirituality within this
- points of fit and points of tension between their theoretical understanding of psychodynamic practice and their understanding of spirituality
- their understanding of how they work with these in their clinical practice.

### **1.8. Preview of the design of the study**

In order to address the research questions I felt that a qualitative design to the study was needed. This would enable a rich and detailed understanding of meaning-making by participants in the study and how they come to their understandings of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling.

My intention was to identify the current situation for counsellors in thinking and working with spirituality in psychodynamic counselling and any difficulties in this. By doing this I hoped to identify ways in which counsellors might be better prepared and supported in working in this area. The aim was to be able to inform educational providers, organizations and employers in setting up effective systems of support and thereby enable education, training and employment support to be improved in this area.

## **1.9. Structure of the thesis**

This thesis details the development of this research study. Although there is a linear feel in this reporting this does not reflect the reality of doing the work. There was much movement between different aspects of the study and a returning to previous work in order to adjust and review it in the light of new findings and literature.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of a range of ways of looking at and understanding the concept of spirituality in order to provide further explanation about the selection of the definition of spirituality that informs this study.

In examining the theoretical literature Chapter 3 explores a range of possible ways of understanding spirituality within psychodynamic counselling. It also details factors that may militate against thinking about spirituality in psychodynamic practice. Chapter 4 explores the empirical literature about spirituality and psychodynamic practice.

Chapter 5 details the methodology and design of the empirical study and provides a rationale for the decisions taken. Chapter 6 explains the development of the methods of the study and how it was conducted. The rigour, reflexivity and ethical awareness used in the research are described in Chapter 7.

Chapters 8- 11 reveal the findings of the study. Chapter 8 introduces the participants in the study and the genres uncovered in their narratives. Chapter 9 examines the main ways that they understand spirituality. The themes identified in participants' understandings of spirituality within the psychodynamic model are explored in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 examines the themes identified in participants' work with spirituality in their counselling practice.

Chapter 12 provides a commentary to illustrate the reflexivity in the study.

In Chapter 13 the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions and to key literature. The contribution to knowledge that this study has provided is demonstrated. Finally, Chapter 14 presents the conclusions of the study. Implications and recommendations for counselling practice are set out. The final chapter also includes recommendations for future research.

I believe this empirical study is timely because it seeks data about spirituality in a group not previously or explicitly researched in this way. I believe it to be of much interest to counsellors generally and to psychodynamic counsellors in particular.

The next chapter, which looks at the construct of spirituality, is the first of three, which reviews the literature that forms the basis of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### SPIRITUALITY

#### 2.1. Introduction to the literature review

The aim of the literature review was to examine the literature most relevant to the research questions. In order to be clear about how this was done the approach to the literature used in this study is described. The initial literature review preceded the main thrust of the research. The field of research about spirituality in counselling is large and constantly growing, and at times this felt overwhelming. In order to manage this I set time aside regularly, from the beginning of the work, to review the literature. I recognized that the aim was not to cite every text, but to explore key arguments in the field. This was to help set this study in a broad historical and cultural context. I used the services at Oxford Brookes University and Oxford University to access books, online databases and journals. The databases that I initially used included Medline, Cinahl and PsychINFO. In order to focus specifically on the research questions, I refined it to PsychINFO in the latter stages. In addition I used Google Scholar. This research sits on the cusp of a number of areas of knowledge. I defined the parameters of the literature through the key search terms. These were 'spirituality' in relation to 'psychodynamic', 'counselling', 'psychoanalysis', 'psychotherapy' and 'narrative'. The OVID and Mimas Zetoc auto alert systems were used to ensure that I kept up to date with current literature. I also used ProQuest and EthOS to access online theses. As my research is in the UK I tried to include European sources. Although American research has a tendency to quantitative studies, (for example Dyer Bilgrave & Robert Deluthy (2002) and David Smith & David Orlinsky (2004)), and this is a qualitative study, it was necessary to include American work. This is because it provides good background material. The same is true of other material included in this review, including from Canada and South Africa.

In order to manage the empirical literature yet ensure that I covered relevant material; I limited it from 1970's onwards. There were no date limits for the theoretical literature. The literature will now be explored in relation to spirituality.

## **2.2. Introduction to Chapter 2**

This chapter explores the concept of spirituality and the ways in which it is understood. It demonstrates that, because understandings of spirituality are dependent on the history and culture of the time that it is situated in, spirituality has functioned in different ways at different times (Carrette & King 2005; Wong & Vinsky 2009.<sup>7</sup> The development of current understandings of spirituality will be described; in particular its movement away from religion and the emphasis on the subjective and relational aspects of spirituality. The multiple levels of relating in current understandings of spirituality will be explored. This includes elements of the personal, relationships with others and the transpersonal. Swinton (2001; 20) summarises this well:

Spirituality is an intra, inter and transpersonal experience that is shaped and directed by the experience of individuals and of the communities within which they live out their lives. It is intrapersonal in that it refers to the quest for inner connectivity....It is interpersonal in that it relates to the relationships between people and within communities. It is transpersonal in so far as it reaches beyond self and others in the transcendent realms of experience that move beyond that which is available at the mundane level.

Understanding the relational aspects of spirituality is a precursor to the discussion in the next chapter which demonstrates how it is ideally suited to be explored in psychodynamic counselling, a practice that equally involves relating on multiple levels.

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<sup>7</sup> The evolution of the term 'spirituality' in the development of Christianity and of the changing understandings of the relationships between God, spirit, soul and body illustrates this effectively and is well detailed in Carrette & King (2005).

The difficulties in defining spirituality will be explored in this chapter, a point encapsulated well by Gyn (2014: 14): 'Spirituality is like a bird: hold it too tightly and it chokes; hold it too loosely and it flies away.' Factors important to consider in understanding spirituality are presented prior to the definition of spirituality used in this study.

First the emergence of current understandings of spirituality, away from religion, in a post-modern context, will be explored.

### **2.3. Spirituality in a post-modern context**

Spirituality has traditionally been associated with religion; conceptions of it as something separate from religion have a surprisingly short history (Sheldrake 1991; Wulff 1997). Historically the term 'religiousness' encompassed what many people today would define as 'spirituality.' Many people would be happy with William James's (1902: 31) definition of religion as a definition for spirituality: 'the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, as far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.'

From at least the twelfth century onwards understandings of spirituality were seen as something individual and interior (Carrette & King 2005).

These forms of understanding of spirituality were developed across different faiths typically as different forms of mysticism: in Judaism with the Kabbalah, in Islam with Sufism and in Christianity with the work of Meister Eckhart for example. (This is important in that mysticism is a way of understanding and engaging with spirituality in psychodynamic counselling, a factor that is examined in the next chapter).

With the erosion of the credibility and authority of the church and religion by empiricism, modern science and new understandings of reality,

spirituality began to develop away from religion.<sup>8</sup> There was belief that progress would principally be through reason and science (Swinton 2001). This led to societies no longer holding to metanarratives<sup>9</sup> of beliefs; monotheistic religions were not immediately seen as providing ways of integrating everyday life into the post-modern world. A multitude of competing belief systems, spiritual, religious and secular (West 2004; Taylor 2007) emerged and increased, with the growth in migration introducing additional diverse worldviews. In this climate and with the subsequent development of the New Age movement in the 1960's ideas began to emerge that people could be spiritual, including those who were non-believers (Roof 2001). Spirituality increasingly began to be seen as something that everyone possessed, while being uncoupled from a religious core (Casey 2013). Spirituality became equitable with the personal search for meaning, a creative response to a world that had lost its sacredness<sup>10</sup> and coherence (Rizzuto 2005).

The current focus in spirituality on personal meaning making and personal development, that is the subjective turn,<sup>11</sup> has resulted in an increase in both secularisation and some forms of sacralisation (Heelas et al 2005). In terms of sacralisation this is particularly forms of the sacred that emphasize the subjective and personal ('subjective-life spirituality'), in contrast to those forms of the sacred that emphasize conformity, rules and authority ('life-as religion'), which are declining in modern Western culture (Heelas et al 2005: 6). Under the framework of

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<sup>8</sup> This argument largely relates to the Western European culture. It has been claimed that the world is in fact becoming more religious and that one in three people on a global landscape are Christians 'of one sort or another' (Ross & Marks 2011:21). These authors thus argue that issues of faith and belief are not going away.

<sup>9</sup> 'Metanarrative or grand narrative or master narrative is a term developed by Jean-François Lyotard to mean a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events, experiences, and social and cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values' (newworldencyclopedia.org accessed 10.07.15).

<sup>10</sup> Sacred is defined as 'that which relates to the numinous (mystical, supernatural) or God, and in Eastern religious traditions, to Ultimate truth or Reality' (Koenig 2009: 283).

<sup>11</sup> Heelas et al (2005:2) understand this as a movement 'away from life lived in terms of external or 'objective' roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences (relational as much as individualistic).'

'life-as religion' truth is seen as external, paralleled by the view that the divine is transcendent rather than immanent (Psaila 2012).

Support for an increasing interest in subjective-life spirituality and a reduction in those identifying themselves as religious is reflected in both the numbers of people identifying themselves as religious and church attendance figures,<sup>12</sup> as well as in the expressions of interest and belief in spirituality among the population. The former show a reduction in absolute numbers and the latter that a spiritual current runs very strongly in the UK (Theos 2013).<sup>13</sup> Theos found that 59% of their sample had a belief in some kind of spiritual being, 30% in God, 30% in spirits, 25% in angels and 12% in higher spiritual beings. They identified that only 13% of adults and 25% of the non-religious agree that humans are purely material, with no spiritual element. Spiritual beliefs are found to run across all age groups, are not the preserve of religious groups, and equally found in those in non-religious groups. With an increasing interest in subjective-life spirituality, there is now a spirituality of seeking rather than a spirituality of dwelling (Wuthnow 1998).

The increasing interest in spirituality has been further driven by the realisation that science has not been able to address many fundamental human problems such as chronic pain, suffering or the search for peace. The underpinning of knowledge has been questioned: Einstein and other physicians had challenged Newtonian physics, including the realisation that the observer could not be separated from that which is observed.

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<sup>12</sup> The numbers of people identifying themselves in the Census as Christians in the UK fell from 71.7% in 2001 to 59.3% in 2011. However it is still the largest religion in England and Wales. The second largest group is Muslims at 4.8% of the population. There was an increase in those saying that they had no religion from 14.8% in 2001 to 25.1% in 2011. Tearfund (2007) state that 10% of the population attend a weekly church service, 15% attend a monthly service and that two thirds of the population have not gone to church in the past year. Davie (1994) does though warn that the use of statistics about religious practice can be misleading and that a decline in church attendance does not necessarily indicate a decline in religiosity. She contends that, through the use of the term 'vicariousness', attachment to religion is still robust; it is just not demonstrated in the ways that it had been in the past (Davie 2001: 106). This point is explored further later in this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Theos is a religion and society think tank with a broad Christian basis and the report is based on a sample of 2036 adults from the UK and representative of all adults (18 and over).



Philosophers and sociologists have come to recognize that science is never totally objective but is socially constructed, just like religion (Lines 2006).

#### **2.4. Spirituality as a relational activity**

The development of subjective-life spirituality identified by Heelas et al (2005) with a focus on personal meaning making and personal development stresses the relational aspect of spirituality. Subjective-life spirituality also highlights that it is not a spirituality that turns to individualism. Whilst it is true that the subjective turn sees individuals emphasising their personal experiences as their source of meaning, significance and authority, subjective-life spirituality is holistic. It stresses 'self-in-relation' to others rather than a 'self-in-isolation' (Heelas et al 2005: 11). The emphasis of this spirituality is on enabling one to be true to self and to significant relationships. With this understanding the true subjective 'me' is seen as the 'we of me' <sup>14</sup> (Heelas et al 2005), that is, self and subjective-life spirituality is relational. Spirituality is thus about relationship with other/Other and in relation to other people. Current understandings of spirituality, like psychodynamic counselling, can be seen to address the intra, the quest for inner connectivity as well as the inter, relationships with others including the transpersonal element of other/Others (Schreurs 2002). This point will be expanded in the next chapter on psychodynamic counselling.

Understanding spirituality as a relational activity is congruent with Hay's (2006) understanding of spirituality as relational consciousness. He argues that relational consciousness is the desire to reach out and connect with someone beyond one's self. He asserts that this is innate to humans and is not confined to religious people. This account is developed from the work of Alistair Hardy (1965,1966). <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This term was used by Carson McCullers (1973: 39).

<sup>15</sup> Hardy was interested in the scientific study of religious experience. He founded the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) in 1969, now based at the University of

Hay & Nye (2006) contend that spiritual awareness and religious experience have evolved through natural selection and are of survival value, understanding religions as richly varied cultural responses of human beings to their natural spiritual awareness. Hay & Nye (2006) understand spirituality as an awareness of one's intimate relationship with all reality whether of one's self, one's environment, other people or of God.

Scientists have seen the need to study spirituality<sup>16</sup> and there is empirical evidence to support the argument of relational consciousness. Swinton et al (2011) for example provide details of studies suggesting that spiritual awareness is significantly linked to genetic inheritance across cultures and that there is a basis for the experience of religious and spiritual experiences. There is also evidence from the neurosciences that shows that our nervous systems are in constant communication with other nervous systems and that our brains are fundamentally social (Cacioppo & Patrick 2008).

Capturing understandings and experiences of spirituality is important, particularly at the moment, where it is argued that there is a social deconstruction of spirituality. Hay & Nye (2006) assert that children soon experience a world destructive to their spirituality and their experiences of mysteriousness, wonder and strangeness. They argue that the current culture supports the social construction of secularism<sup>17</sup>. Hay & Nye understand secularism as a myth created by the western world that now

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Wales in Lampeter. The RERC has an archive of over 6,000 accounts of first-hand experiences of people across the world that has had a spiritual or religious experience.

<sup>16</sup> This study is an example of an empirical study about spirituality, one that is exploring at a deep level the nuances of spirituality in psychodynamic practice.

<sup>17</sup> There are different understandings of secularism. Taylor (2007) provides three: i) public spaces empty of God or of any reference to ultimate reality, ii) the falling off of religious belief and practice, and people turning away from God, iii) where belief in God is one of many options available for making sense of the world. Taylor (2007: 3) argues that this third sense of secularism is the context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place, and that takes us away 'from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one possibility among many others.'

appears to be the norm. Several factors assist in the construction of secularism. This includes that the uncertainties involved in enabling and sustaining spiritual intuitions are counter to a current culture that values control, the primacy of scientific knowing, mastery, rationality and the avoidance of risk (Sandel 2012; McLeod 2011). In addition, the difficulties in talking about spirituality and finding language to speak about it in terms easily understood by another (King-Spooner 2001; King 2009) does not help in understanding and communicating with others about this construct. Although spirituality is understood by many as a relational activity (Heelas et al 2005), perhaps ironically, developing one's personal understandings of it is often worked out privately with people doing it for themselves or in small groups. This is because culturally, spirituality is not often talked about (West 2011a) and British cultural attitudes around spirituality are often of reticence and distrust (West 2011).

This section has shown how spirituality can be seen as innate and a relational form of activity, one that involves relating with self, others and Other. It also argued that the current culture can largely be seen as one of the deconstruction of spirituality and the social construction of secularism. Despite this there are still many people who recognize and value spirituality and religion.

## **2.5. The relationship of spirituality with religion**

Although spirituality, since the Enlightenment period in Western societies, has increasingly been understood as something separate from religion there are still many people who see spirituality and religion as linked (Wong & Vinsky 2009). This is the case despite the negative connotations that religion has more recently acquired. This is in contrast to the more favourable connotations associated with spirituality (Turner et al 1995).

In some senses there has been a polarisation with regard to the terms spirituality and religion: spirituality is seen as something positive and religion broadly as something negative, as a hindrance to spiritual experience (Hill et al 2000). Spirituality has appropriated some of the elements formerly encompassed by religion. Whereas religion historically was a broad-band construct that included both individual and institutional elements, it is now seen as a narrow-band construct that has more to do with the institution alone (Zinnbauer et al 1999). Spirituality, as the more favourable term to describe individual experience, is identified with such things as meaningfulness or the loftier function of life (Pargament 1999) and religion is now more often associated with rigid or formal structures (Hill et al 2000).<sup>18</sup>

However the dangers of this polarisation have been recognized (Pargament 1999; Zinnbauer et al 1997; Swinton 2001; Moore et al 2001; Wong & Vinsky 2009). Many people continue to equate 'religion' with 'spirituality.' This is a point that will be returned to later in the study, since it is a factor important to several participants in this research.

The separation of spirituality from religion is argued to demonstrate a Euro-Christian ethnocentrism and individualism that does not make sense for many racialized ethnic groups (Wong & Vinsky 2009). Equally, equating spirituality with religion can do a disservice to those who see them as separate (Swinton 2001). These two aspects of the relationship between spirituality and religion are included in four possible groupings between religiousness and spirituality identified by Casey (2013).<sup>19</sup> She identifies the following:

#### 1. Spiritual and religious

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<sup>18</sup> Recent definitions of religion reflect this: Casey (2013: 25) in discussing religion sees it as encompassing adherence to a set of beliefs, practices and rituals, that are related to the sacred and to a particular tradition and that encompass belief in a personal God for most, although it is accepted that the Buddhist tradition does not necessarily imply belief in God.

<sup>19</sup> The model proposed by Casey emerged from the models identified by Koenig (2008) explaining the changing nature of the relationship between spirituality and religion.

2. Spiritual but not religious
3. Neither religious nor spiritual (the secular group)
4. Religious but not spiritual

The first group spiritual and religious represents the traditional relationship between them. The person in this group engages in the religious practices and rituals and adheres to the beliefs associated with the tradition 'as well as engaging in spiritual activities such as meditating, fasting and reading illuminating texts, sacred and secular' (Casey 2013: 27). In this group spirituality and religiousness enrich each other.

The second group described as spiritual but not religious is the newest group and tends to see religion in a negative light, be more independent of others, hold 'New Age' views and have mystical experiences (Zinnbauer et al 1999). Spirituality and religion are seen as non-overlapping constructs. 'Secular spirituality' is encompassed in this grouping. It is a form of spirituality that:

..typically is atheistic or humanistic but does not disavow the idea that some forms of experience, ritual or practice may be deeper or more meaningful than others; a perspective that still finds value in the term 'spiritual' as a way to encapsulate that understanding.

(Rowson 2014: 16).

The third group identified by Casey (2013), the secular group have not been much studied. If the meaning of spirituality increasingly expands to include feeling and mood states Casey asserts that this secular group will diminish since feelings and moods will become equated with spirituality and experienced as part of every day experience.

The final group, the religious but not spiritual, have not been mentioned in the scientific literature. Casey proposes a likeness between this group and the group identified by Allport & Ross (1967), as showing an

extrinsic religious orientation but not engaging in the spirit of it or its message.

A single grouping or understanding of the relationship between spirituality and religion is thus not tenable. In religious and theological circles there is an understandable tendency to equate spirituality with religiousness or, at least, with the sacred. As (Casey: 28)<sup>20</sup> notes 'this must now be seen as an oversimplification.' Indeed there may be more groupings than Casey (2013) identifies. Davie (1994), for example, identifies a group of people who have belief without belonging; they feel part of a religious community and have an active faith commitment but no longer belong to institutional religion. Davie (2001) notes that religious and spiritual involvement in Western Europe is more voluntary than the rest of the world. This grouping, belief without belonging, falls in between groups 1 and 2 that Casey identifies.

## **2.6. Spirituality as a multidimensional construct**

Spirituality is understood across many professional health groupings as a multidimensional construct (Helminiak 1996; Zinnbauer et al 1997; Miller & Thoresen 2003; Cook 2004; Crossley & Salter 2005, Gall et al 2005; Gurney & Rogers 2007). Commonly intra, inter and transpersonal elements are identified as important in understandings of spirituality. This is demonstrated below. Common understandings of spirituality across professional groupings are helpful in terms of identifying a definition of spirituality for this study.

Multiple dimensions of spirituality have been identified in nursing. Tanyi (2002) identified many aspects of spirituality in attempting to clarify its meaning. Through a review of scholarly articles over the last 30 years, she demonstrated that spirituality had intra, inter and transpersonal elements. This includes the claim that it is a personal search for meaning

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<sup>20</sup> An example of religiousness including spirituality and a search for the sacred is detailed by Hill et al (2000) and expanded on by Pargament (2011).

and purpose that may or may not be related to religion. Tanyi (2002) also found that joy and forgiveness of oneself and others, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence, were important components of spirituality.

Cook (2004) similarly reviewed the understandings of spirituality within the academic literature but this time in the field of addiction. He identified 13 conceptual components of spirituality. In terms of frequency of occurrence of components in the literature the most important ones were *relatedness* (interpersonal relationships) and *transcendence* (recognition of a transcendent dimension to life) followed by *core/force/soul* (the inner 'core', 'force' or 'soul' of a person and *meaning/purpose* (meaning and purpose in life). These too reflect the intra, inter and transpersonal elements of spirituality.

Further research emphasising the different levels of relating in spirituality is the work of Elkins et al (1988). In recognition that spirituality is about experiences and about people's personal understandings, they developed a phenomenological and humanistic definition of spirituality. This was based on a review of major writers in the field.<sup>21</sup> Having identified components of spirituality from the work of these writers they sought validation of the components by persons that they considered highly spiritual.<sup>22</sup>

The definition of spirituality that resulted from this work reflects the intra, inter and transpersonal elements of spirituality:

..a way of being and experiencing that comes through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterised by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be Ultimate. (Elkins et al 1988:10)

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<sup>21</sup>This included Jung (1933, 1964), Maslow (1962,1966,1970,1971), Otto (1923), Dewey (1934), Allport (1950), Eliade (1959) Buber (1970), Fromm (1950) and Frankl (1963). References for these can be found in Elkins et al (1988).

<sup>22</sup>They were drawn from the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish traditions.

The nine components of spirituality that Elkins et al (1988) identify are:

1. Transcendent element
2. Meaning and purpose in life
3. Mission in life
4. Sacredness of life
5. Material values
6. Altruism
7. Idealism
8. Awareness of the tragic
9. Fruits of spirituality

West draws on the work of Elkins et al (1988), Swinton (2001) and Rowan (2005), and his understanding of the relationship between spirituality and various levels of the self, in his understanding of spirituality. This again reflects the elements of the personal (intra), the relationship with others (inter) and the transpersonal (ultimate reality/Other/Divine/God):

- It is rooted in human experiencing rather than abstract theology.
- It is embodied.
- It involves linking with other people and the universe at large.
- It involves non-ordinary consciousness.
- That active engagement with spirituality tends to make people more altruistic, less materialistic and more environmentally aware.
- It deals with the meaning that people make of their lives.
- It faces suffering and its causes.
- It relates to God/Goddesses/ultimate reality.
- It often uses the word soul or 'higher self'.
- Techniques such as prayer, meditation, contemplation, mindfulness, yoga and Tai Chi are often used as spiritual practices.

(West 2011: 16-7)



In addition to the various levels of relating identified in different understandings of spirituality a further underlying theme is that of love. Aspects of love can be seen in some of the understandings of spirituality described above. For example the work of Elkins et al (1988) describes altruistic love and West's (2011a) understanding of spirituality describes how active engagement with spirituality can lead people to be more altruistic. Hay (2006) also asserts that spirituality, as relational consciousness is accompanied by a sense of altruism. If altruism is seen as 'an unselfish concern for another',<sup>23</sup> this can be seen as a form of love. Overt recognition of love being part of spirituality is rare. It is an underdiscussed element of spirituality (Rowson 2014). Rowson contends that love is a crucial element of spirituality, since it connects us at our deepest level. He argues that the concept of love deserves more recognition particularly the transpersonal level of love. Love as part of spirituality has correspondence with the love argued to be part of psychodynamic practice, a point developed in the next chapter.

## **2.7. The fundamental nature of spirituality to human beings**

Spirituality is recognized by some as fundamental to being human (Swinton 2001).<sup>24</sup> This is widely discussed (Frankl 1969; Wilber 2000; Rowan 2005; Thorne 2005, 2006; Hay & Nye 2006; McSherry 2007; Pargament 2011; Koenig 2009; King 2009; Swinton et al 2011).<sup>25</sup> Spirituality can, at one and the same time, be seen as that which is unique to the individual and that which is common to all humanity, as

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<sup>23</sup> Accessed via collinsdictionary.com on 10.07.15.

<sup>24</sup> Swinton (2001) demonstrates this through his exploration of the origins of the word spirituality. The spiritual root in Semitic and Indo-Germanic languages is 'breath' indicating something essential to life. The word 'Spirit' originates from the Latin 'spiritus' meaning breath. In Greek this is 'pneuma' and in Hebrew 'ruach.' They all have in common breath or wind and are linked to the concept of an energising life-force in human beings.

<sup>25</sup> Frankl, for example, an Austrian psychoanalyst states that the primary goal and drive for human beings is the search for meaning. He understands this as not a general meaning revealed to us but the way that an individual chooses to perceive an event. Spirituality in this understanding is a search for meaning, a will to do meaning (Frankl 1969).

well as that that is shared by particular traditions and social groups (Cook 2004).

Recognition of the fundamental nature of spirituality to human beings has led to many caring professions identifying spirituality as an important and fundamental part of their practice. This includes social work (Crisp 2010; Furness & Gilligan 2010; Holloway & Moss 2010), psychiatry and clinical psychology (Crossley & Salter 2005; Cook et al 2009; Cook 2013), nursing, (Ross 1995; Tanyi 2002; McSherry 2007; Clarke 2014) and counselling and psychotherapy (Elkins et al 1988; Clarkson 2002; Sperry & Shafranske 2005; Jenkins 2006; Thorne 2006; Gubi 2008; Ross 2010; Pargament 2011; West 2011).

Spirituality can also be seen as something that names an absence as well as a presence; if there is a need to say that spirituality needs to be included in any discipline we are in effect recognising that something is missing (Swinton 2011). While it is not possible to find a universally agreed way of defining spirituality the many attributes and dimensions that the literature names as spirituality have practical significance. As Swinton (2011) argues the aim is to develop strategies to fill the gaps.

The definition of spirituality used for this study will now be described.

## **2.8. Definition of spirituality**

The difficulties in defining spirituality have been well argued and illustrated (Swinton 2001, 2011; King 2009). Ways of meeting some of these difficulties is to recognize the value of vagueness, in order to avoid too tight a definition (Samuels 2004) and to recognize that spirituality is not a sign but a signpost (Powell 2014). Powell understands spirituality as a signpost to a search for meaning, sense of the sacred, the value of compassion, the experience of transcendence and the hunger for

transformation. Such factors are important in thinking about definitions for this study.

As has been demonstrated the understanding of spirituality that has emerged from the post-modern context and recognized across professional caring groups recognizes that various levels of relating are involved; at the personal level (intra; the personal quest for connectivity), the relational aspect with others and within communities (inter) and with the transpersonal element, that is experiences beyond the self. This chapter also recognizes that spirituality involves a sense of making meaning. In addition spirituality is recognized by many as innate and common across all humanity. In recognition of these points the definition of spirituality by Cook (2004: 549) is chosen for this study since it reflects and contains these key aspects:

Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as a relationship with that which is intimately 'inner', immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as a relationship with that which is wholly 'other', transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values.

As anticipated a definition of spirituality with overt recognition of love was not found. However the idea of love as part of spirituality was borne in mind throughout the study along with the factors identified in Cook's definition. As Chapters 5,6, and 7 discuss I remained open to see what factors emerged in participants' understandings and work with spirituality in practice.

It can be argued that the distinctive character of psychodynamic counselling offers an opportunity for thinking differently about the role of spirituality in therapeutic practice. This is explored in Chapter 3.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT SPIRITUALITY IN PSYCHODYNAMIC COUNSELLING: THE THEORETICAL LITERATURE**

### **3.1. Introduction**

Examination of the current literature indicates a lack of research about the place of spirituality in psychodynamic counselling. It seems that a discipline concerned to think about the unthinkable has not been able to bring a similar openness to a major area of human life and experience. This chapter explores the reasons for this. It also examines the theoretical literature that is used in psychoanalysis for thinking about spirituality to illustrate the wide and rich resources available to psychodynamic counselling. The applicability of these resources to psychodynamic practice is discussed. It will be argued that the activities and process of psychodynamic counselling make it, in many ways, suited to work with spirituality. In order to do this psychodynamic counselling as a distinct form of counselling will first be explored.

### **3.2. Understandings of psychodynamic counselling**

Psychodynamic counselling is a form of counselling that emerged from Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud (1923) used the word dynamic<sup>26</sup> when noting the conflict experienced with the unacceptable part of the self. 'Psychodynamic' and 'psychoanalytic' therapies are terms that are often used interchangeably (Jacobs 1994). However, there are distinctions between them that are discussed below.

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<sup>26</sup> ... 'dynamic' itself was borrowed by Freud from nineteenth century physics in order to convey the idea of two conflicting forces producing a resultant force acting in another direction. (Bateman et al 2010: 9).

First, an understanding of psychodynamic counselling is given. As noted in Chapter 1, Jacobs (1997), a key figure in the development of psychodynamic counselling, defines 'psychodynamic' as:

the way in which the psyche (as mind/emotions/spirit/self) is seen as active and not static....The activity of the psyche is not confined to relating to people, or to objects outside the self. Activity also takes place within the psyche in relation to itself...These internal aspects (or 'objects', as they are sometimes called in psychodynamic literature) of the psyche are formed over the long years of a child's development, as counterparts of external relationships which predominated in early childhood, principally those with mother and father.

(Jacobs 1997: 26-7)

and counselling as:

..a way of helping others that stresses the gentle stillness of the helper in listening, absorbing, containing, understanding and reflecting back.

(Jacobs 1997: 7)

Leonard Spurling (2004: 47), more succinctly, defines psychodynamic counselling as:

..a method of offering clients an experience of containment, that is finding both sanctuary from and meaning to their suffering.

Psychodynamic counselling is one of the major traditions within contemporary counselling and psychotherapy: there are currently 9,126 psychodynamic counsellors registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (2012) and they are the fourth most popular type of counsellor registered with the BACP after person-centred, integrative and humanistic counsellors respectively (BACP 2012).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> There has been recent growth in psychodynamic counselling literature in its own right for example there is now a journal in the UK, titled Psychodynamic Practice (formerly called Psychodynamic Counselling).

Reflecting its roots in psychoanalysis, the core principle of psychodynamic counselling is the belief in the role of the unconscious in developing conflict and disturbances. It is through the careful development of the therapeutic relationship, within a defined setting, that resolution of conflicts and disturbances can be achieved (McCloughlin 1995; Spurling 2004). The person of the counsellor and their self-awareness is key to practice: the counsellor needs to be open to emotional and psychological resonances within her/himself (Casement 1985; McCloughlin 1995; McLeod 2003; Shedler 2010). This is because of the focus on the 'dynamic' of the relationship with the client, that is, what is happening between the client and the counsellor, and the need to work with it. This is largely achieved through the agency of the transference and the countertransference dynamic, which enables a focus on the relevant issues in the counselling relationship (McCloughlin 1995). The importance of facing anxiety, defences and resistances central to psychoanalysis continue to be important in psychodynamic thinking (Jacobs 1997; Bateman et al 2010). The space is constructed intentionally for counselling work with no space for everyday conversation where the counsellor typically withholds talking about her/himself.

While psychodynamic counselling and psychoanalysis have a common dynamic core and some similarities as mentioned above there are also clear differences that make a distinction between them. First, because psychodynamic counselling focuses on the 'dynamic' between people and within them, unlike psychoanalysis, it integrates a variety of different models of developmental stages, and gender and societal issues. A result of the inclusion of various different models is that there is the possibility of dialogue between humanistic and integrative counsellors, unlike psychoanalysis (Jacobs 1994). Secondly, the intensity of the work can differ in that psychoanalysis frequently involves 4-5 sessions per week over several years, with the client lying on a couch, having no eye contact with the analyst (Higdon 2004). Counselling has sessions less

frequent than this, typically weekly and often for a shorter duration, making it a more accessible form of therapy (Bateman et al 2010). The client usually sits in a chair in counselling and has eye contact with the counsellor. Thirdly, historically there has been a different therapeutic attitude; in psychodynamic counselling the dynamic element between the client and the counsellor is the most important whereas in psychoanalysis there has been a stance of taking apart, of analysing and of close scrutiny (Jacobs 1994). Thus 'psychodynamic' refers to the way or manner in which personality is formed and functions, whereas 'psychoanalysis' refers both to a method of framing how personality is formed and to a method of treatment (Jacobs 1994). Whilst literature suggests that psychodynamic and psychoanalysis can be used interchangeably it can be seen that they also have distinct usage. This is important in terms of considering the applicability of psychoanalytic work to psychodynamic counselling.

The historical stance of psychoanalysis, especially the 'taking apart' approach has been challenged recently, and there has been encouragement within the psychoanalytic field to develop a more social and relational approach (Ghent 1989; Mitchell 2000; Eigen 2004). This is common practice in psychodynamic counselling (Jacobs 1999; McLeod 2003). This more relational, intersubjective aspect of psychodynamic counselling has emerged as a result of three main factors: the development of the object-relations approach,<sup>28</sup> the work of the British Independents Group<sup>29</sup> and the development of time-limited counselling. They have all contributed to the development of a more relational and active role for the psychodynamic counsellor as well as openness to new ideas (McLeod 2003). This approach to psychodynamic practice enables a sense of mutuality, equality and relatedness for the client and counsellor, one that can have echoes of Martin Buber's (1958) I-Thou

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<sup>28</sup> Object relations thinking recognizes that human beings are in the dual world of external and internal relationships (Gomez 1997).

<sup>29</sup> This group emerged from the 'controversial discussions' of the British Psychoanalytical Society in the 1940's. It set the foundation for openness to ideas of other groups (Rayner 1991).

encounters.<sup>30</sup> An open, intersubjective and relational approach provides an environment for potential new thinking about spirituality and how to work with it in practice. Such openness to new thinking may enable psychodynamic counselling to work from its roots (McLeod 1998; West 2000) and to care for the soul (Bettelheim 1984). Bruno Bettelheim argues that care of the soul is central to Freud's work. The literal translation of psychoanalysis is 'analysis of the soul.' Bettelheim argues that this point is often lost due to some misunderstandings in initial translations of Freud's work where 'psyche' is often used in the sense of the 'mind' or 'treatment of the mind' rather than the 'soul' or 'treatment of the soul' (p.73). This point illustrates the complex and mixed relationship that Freud had with religion and spirituality. This is often overlooked in thinking about psychoanalysis and its relationship with religion and spirituality; the dominant message from Freud is one of hostility to spirituality and religion. This point is now examined, as one of the factors that militate against thinking and working with spirituality in psychodynamic counselling.

### **3.3. Factors militating against thinking about and engaging with spirituality in psychodynamic counselling**

Although the original basis of psychodynamic counselling was about 'care of the soul' this message was lost with the focus was on the 'mind' (Bettelheim 1984). There are several factors that account for this and in turn for the difficulties in thinking and engaging with spirituality in psychodynamic practice. These will now be explored.

#### **3.3.1. The impact of Freud's atheism**

The dominant belief that has existed since the origin of psychoanalysis is that psychoanalysis and spirituality and religion do not mix. Freud

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<sup>30</sup> Buber (1987) argues that life is a balance of both I-It and I-Thou encounters. He sees relatedness as an essential aspect of humanity. The I-Thou encounter is the link to the eternal, an essential part of humanity that finds its expression through love and mutuality.



proudly saw himself an atheist and saw spiritual and religious experience as primitive, regressive or psychotic (Simmonds 2003). The text most commonly cited illustrating Freud's atheism is *The Future of an Illusion* (1927). Here he argued about the illusionary nature of religion, that it is based on infantile, wishful thinking and that the function of a belief in God is that it provides the strong father figure that we long for.<sup>31</sup>

A few years later in his *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) Freud went further in his rejection of abstract notions of God or Spirit and he refers to religion as explicitly delusionary stating that 'The religions of mankind must be classed among the mass delusions of this kind' (Freud 1930: 81). His arguments were based on monotheistic religion and as can be seen he mainly understood illusion as delusion (Blass 2006).

However these views mask the complex and paradoxical relationship that Freud had with religion and spirituality. There are a number of contradictions and wide ranging spiritual influences on Freud including: that he was a godless Jew brought up in a culturally Jewish but non-practising family (Jacobs 2003); he was brought up by a Roman-Catholic nanny (Gay 1988); he experienced anti-Semitism first as a child (Vitz 1988), then at university where he was expected to 'feel inferior' (Gay 1988: 27) and later when with his own family (Gay 1988); he was married to Martha, who was from an orthodox and religiously observant Jewish family (Jacobs 2003); he visited sites of religious importance and collected religious, pagan and mythological antiquities (Burke 2006); he had a friendship and correspondence with Pfister, a Swiss Lutheran pastor and psychoanalyst; and he had an early fascination with occultism (Freud 1925) and mysticism (Freud 1932). It has been demonstrated that Freud held a life-long interest in religion. He recognized that psychoanalysis would move beyond scientific and

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<sup>31</sup> In addition Freud argued that it helps us to deal with universal fears such as death and that with so many advantages it is no wonder that it has been so successful.

medical boundaries and that it touched spheres of knowledge beyond these (Freud 1913: 165).<sup>32</sup>

Despite Freud's complex relationship with religion and spirituality, a single psychoanalytic master-text existed (Bateman & Holmes 1995), that of Freud and his dismissive view of spirituality and religion. Freud's leadership tactics helped here; he bore pressure to retain an orthodox line expelling various psychoanalysts with dissenting opinions, including Carl Jung who was initially seen as Freud's 'favourite son' within the psychoanalytic circle.<sup>33</sup> Freud demanded adherence to his views including his atheistic and anti-religious attitude (Gay 1988).

### **3.3.2. The impact of the drive to establish the scientific credibility and professionalism of psychoanalysis**

From the beginning Freud sought to establish psychoanalysis as a profession through establishing it as a science. He valued the scientific paradigm and wanted to establish the scientific credibility of psychoanalysis. He thus sought to reject anything that did not fit this paradigm, particularly religion. There was a drive to make a clear boundary between the work of counsellors and the work of priests or ministers (Kovel 1981; Phillips 1994). This was important because difficulties could, and still can, be experienced in terms of distinguishing between counselling, pastoral counselling and spiritual direction (West 2000).

The focus on professionalism and scientific credibility appears to be continuing within psychodynamic counselling. This is exemplified in the

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<sup>32</sup> Freud established the journal *Imago* in 1921 as a means to enable dialogue between disciplines such as philosophy, literature, theology, anthropology and linguistics (Ross 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Jung, a major psychodynamic theorist, went on to help to develop analytical psychology which emphasises the primary importance of the individual psyche and the personal quest for wholeness, through the balancing of opposing forces within the psyche (Stevens 1994). It sits easily under the umbrella of psychodynamic therapy (Clifford 2005).

work of Peter Fonagy who, alongside others including Anthony Roth (Roth & Fonagy 2005), and Alessandra Lemma and Mary Target (Lemma, Target & Fonagy 2011), are using empirical research strategies to explore psychodynamic theory and practice, primarily in the area of early emotional development and the treatment of severe personality pathology. Empirical work often requires alignment with the values and worldviews that have driven the expansion of modern society. These include rationality, individualism and avoidance of risk and mastery (McLeod 2011). Such worldviews often reduce humans to objects and their encounters as instrumental and purpose driven (Nussbaum 2010; Sandel 2012). This results in aspects of humanity like spirituality being easily omitted in practice and research (Nussbaum 2010). Explorations of spirituality do not easily fit into the quantitative paradigm; spirituality is difficult to objectively measure since it involves individual and subjective experiences. This has not helped with raising awareness of spirituality in practice.

More recent developments of qualitative approaches and methods to research have provided a challenge to what is seen as science and what counts as evidence. Qualitative approaches provide a means of empirically exploring spirituality in practice, and enable the meanings of spirituality to be explored. This study is an example of this, and it is a way of helping to work towards the scientific credibility of the psychodynamic profession, without conforming to the main values driving modern society. (This point is developed further in Chapter 5).

### **3.3.3. The impact of the absence of spirituality in psychoanalysis on psychodynamic counselling**

As psychoanalysis developed it sought to accommodate new ideas. However in reality it was dominated by tensions and rivalries and pressure to conform to Freud's atheistic position (Parsons 2009). In such an environment spirituality was inconsequential in discussions. Despite an increase in interest in spirituality particularly since the 1970's (Jenkins

2006) it appears that the reductionist attitude towards all forms of spirituality and religion is persisting in psychoanalysis (Field et al 2005; Akhtar 2009). In the absence of minimal empirical evidence within psychodynamic counselling specifically (as the next Chapter discusses), it is reasonable to assume that this may be the case for psychodynamic counsellors. Certainly in object relations thinking there is not a significant spiritual element (Gomez 1997). Although there has been an increasing interest in spirituality with a steady stream of articles, books and conferences (Clark 2012) this is often from relatively small, marginalised groupings of people (Ross 2010). My experience of this literature is that much of it is not easy to physically locate, other than from specialist libraries. This adds to factors militating against counsellors thinking about spirituality in practice.

Although there are strong factors militating against thinking about spirituality in psychodynamic practice there are equally rich and wide resources that may help with thinking about it. This includes psychoanalytic concepts that provide ways of thinking about spirituality. In addition similarities and parallel processes between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling have been recognized and argued to be a means of enabling thinking and working with spirituality in practice. These will each be examined.

### **3.4. Ways in which spirituality can be addressed in psychodynamic counselling**

In this section I examine how psychodynamic counselling, as a pluralistic, relational and intersubjective form of encounter, can address and work with spirituality. A range of psychoanalytic concepts will be examined starting with the key work of Winnicott and Bion. It is argued that their work has been pivotal in enabling thinking about spirituality and the subsequent development of ideas and concepts in this area.

### 3.4.1. Winnicott and transitional phenomena

Donald Winnicott is arguably the most influential British analyst of the twentieth century (Jacobs 1995; Sayers 2003). His ideas have been adopted across the psychoanalytic world particularly in the UK, Europe and Israel. Through his extensive clinical experience with mothers and babies he developed a creative form of object relations theory that focused on the central ontological question of being and how a person develops into an integrated, independent self capable of intrapersonal, interpersonal and extrapersonal being (Winnicott 1971). He has been central to post-Freudian rethinking of the psychoanalysis of religion<sup>34</sup> (Jones 1991). He developed a number of concepts of particular significance for thinking about spirituality and religion. This includes the concept of transitional phenomena, illusion and the capacity to believe.

Winnicott is a key architect in transitional forms of engagement in psychodynamic thinking (Jacobs 2010). Transitional phenomena, transitional objects and transitional space are 'a hypothetical area that exists (but cannot exist) between the baby and the object' (Winnicott 1971: 107). This is 'an intermediate zone...a potential space.. a third area of human living, one neither inside the individual nor outside the world of shared reality' (Winnicott 1971: 110). This is a space that allows the baby to separate, to play and to create, both psychically and physically, in their inner and outer world. It is the foundation of a connection to culture, through experience of transitional phenomena such as music, art, theatre, religion and play (Ulanov 2001). Although Winnicott himself never suggested this it allows for a belief in an internal god/God and an external god/God without a false dichotomy (Ross 2010).

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<sup>34</sup> Traditionally psychoanalysis has engaged with religion rather than spirituality. Black (2006) argues that this is because religion has a definite status and identity that often attracts stereotypical and pathological response to psychoanalysis. As is demonstrated in this chapter the situation is changing with an increasing interest in spirituality.

The concept of illusion is central to Winnicott's understanding of the baby's ability to be alone, create and play; through the baby's experience of the idealised mother and the illusion of omnipotence s/he is able to replace this with disillusionment and the good-enough mother. Understood in this way, illusion is helpful in understanding both mothering and of thinking about the ontological transitions shown in religious symbolism, rituals, belief and practices (Jacobs 2000). With Winnicott's understanding of transitional space and illusion, the focus in psychodynamic counselling on the dynamic between the counsellor and the client, and the transferences and countertransferences between them, means that there is always the potential for engagement with the spiritual.

A further aspect adding to the possibilities for thinking about spirituality is Winnicott's addition of the capacity to believe. Religion for Winnicott is an intrinsic part of human nature based on the capacity to believe, trust and understand right and wrong. Although neutral to religion, he respected the beliefs of others. He sought to free people from dogmatism and fundamentalism (biblical or psychoanalytic); he argued that this robbed people of their inner creativity (Rodman 1987). The capacity to believe linked the person with another through an act of faith. Winnicott was always thinking of another; there is no such thing as 'a baby without its mother' (Winnicott 1975: 99). The capacity to believe is helpful for thinking about relating to other people and to relating to Other/God/god.

Winnicott's thinking thus provides concepts for engaging with spirituality and religion and as will be demonstrated is pivotal to subsequent engagement in this area.<sup>35</sup> Jacobs (2000) is an example here. He

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<sup>35</sup> Simmonds (2003) is a further example here. She introduces the ideas of bardo and liminality in potential space as a means of engaging with spirituality or the sacred. She argues that the concept of bardo used in Tibetan Buddhism is evocative of potential space, and demonstrates different levels of potential space. Liminality, or occupying a position at, or on both sides of a threshold, is argued to enable openness undefended by knowledge that Simmonds argues enables expansive and thoughtful ways of exploring spiritual experiences (pp 61-2).

provides a psychodynamic interpretation of thinking and belief based on Winnicott's concept of illusion. This, together with using his own experiences, led to the development of five modes of believing and knowing: intuitive pre-thinking and belief, authority-driven thinking and belief, objective reality thinking, personal and polymathic thinking and belief and un-knowing.<sup>36</sup> It is a fluid model such that it is possible to simultaneously occupy a variety of different modes depending on a person's experience. This is an accessible detailed model that intuitively makes sense. It is also one that needs empirically testing and developing by counsellors to determine its usefulness. Winnicott's ideas about transitional space opened up ideas for thinking about spaces for the psyche to play, be creative, aesthetic and real, and provide a potential space for I-Thou encounters.

#### **3.4.2. Bion and transformational ways of engaging within psychodynamic counselling**

Wilfred Bion has been a key figure in opening up thinking about spirituality in psychoanalytic thinking. As a psychoanalyst he worked extensively with schizophrenic patients, where he asserted that adult psychopathology originates through disturbances in symbolic thought as a baby. He developed a number of influential theories from this work<sup>37</sup> but the theme that links his work, of relevance to thinking about spirituality, is that of transformation and faith in the possibility of transformation (Ross 2010). This includes through his concepts of the projective mechanism of the container and contained, the alpha-

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<sup>36</sup> Jacobs (2000: 116) uses the hyphen intentionally in 'un-knowing' to signify that it is much more than its opposite, that is, knowing.

<sup>37</sup> This includes his thinking around projective identification. Bion (1963) argues that the baby communicates its fears to its mother who contains and transforms them from 'beta elements' into 'alpha elements'. These become available for use in later processes of symbolisation. What is too awful to be experienced is projected into another, typically the mother, where it is contained and transformed before being received back by the baby/patient for future psychic health and development. He develops a language to convey these experiences. Riesenber-Malcom (2006) provides an accessible account of this.

element/function and beta elements/function or phenomena and noumena experienced as O.

Bion's work is complex and demanding. He developed the concept of O or ultimate reality to describe transforming processes. Although the concept of O divided psychoanalytic opinions, it became central to Bion's later thinking. It influenced psychoanalytic understandings of the religious and mystical dimensions of the unconscious shown particularly the work of Eigen (1998), Symington (2008) and Grotstein (2000).

O stands for origin and has its roots in Platonic ideal forms. O can never be known or put into words or a picture yet is central to being human and part of the Cosmos.<sup>38</sup> Bion (1967: 272) argues that the role of the analyst is to focus his attention on O, 'the unknown and unknowable.' He used stories from his religious past and work from the Christian mysticism of Meister Eckhart and St. John of the Cross to illustrate his work, and to parallel the mystic encounter with the void and formless infinite of O.

Bion's understanding of mysticism is different to that in religious contexts. With Bion, the mystic claims direct contact with God/O in the form of transformation, and the mystic evolves ideas that are independent of O. In Christian terms mysticism captures experiences in words of encounter with God (by presence or absence). For Bion the thought O and the thinker are always separate. He evolved the idea of 'thoughts without a thinker' (Bion 1965: 139) to describe this. His ideas opened up the potential for the unconscious to be seen as beyond the individual self yet linked to the self, with the unconscious coming alive in relational encounter within self and beyond self and defined by the words and symbols: O/Other/god/God/Gods (Ross 2010).

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<sup>38</sup> 'I shall link the use of the sign O to denote, that which is ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself. O does not fall into the domain of knowledge of learning save incidentally; it can "become" but it cannot be "known".' (Bion 1970: 26).



The transformation of being exemplified through O, like the mystics, of going beyond words and full comprehension, enables engagement with spirituality and religion. Others have built on this work to develop ways of engaging with spirituality. Jacobs (2000) is an example here. He uses the concept of un-knowing as a way to psychodynamically understand thinking and belief. He describes un-knowing through the state of mysticism. Jacobs explains mysticism, through experiences of unity (sense of the sublime) and of negation (emptying the mind of thought, knowledge and beliefs). In doing this he provides ways of engaging with mysticism and forms of spirituality without the complication of religious belief, helpful in understanding how people think and believe.

Other psychoanalysts developing the mystical element to engage with spirituality and religion in practice include Marion Milner (2003). She argues that mystical oneness can equally be seen as God and as the id or the unconscious. Mysticism experienced in this way can be seen as a route to our deepest unconscious. Others see psychoanalysis as having mystical and sacred dimensions: Michael Eigen (1998) sees it as a form of prayer and holiness and James Grotstein (2000: 276) as a form of mysticism in its own right:

we can never meet the Godhead, but we can feel its shadow by our intuition of its presence as the Unconscious, which...is as close to God and Godliness as we are ever likely to reach.

Bion's work can thus be seen to be central to thinking about spirituality, particularly through the theme of transformation in his work and the concept of O. As illustrated, others have built extensively on his work and in so doing provide further resources that may be helpful for thinking about spirituality in psychodynamic practice.

### **3.4.3. Other psychoanalytic concepts that enable thinking about spirituality in practice**

Winnicott and Bion are not alone in providing resources for thinking about the spiritual in psychodynamic practice. There are a number of other psychoanalytic concepts that help here. These will each be examined.

#### **a) The experience of spirituality and religion through the maternal and interactions between the baby and the mother**

The 1980's saw a marked impact of feminist thought on psychoanalysis with British feminists engaging with the work of Winnicott and Bion (Perelberg 2005). This particularly enabled Winnicott's ideas on the internal object world and the external maternal world to impact upon spirituality and religion (Ross 2010).

The work of James Jones, Kenneth Wright and Julia Kristeva is of note here. Jones (1996) engages with feminist theology and affirmed both patriarchal and maternal images in transitional and transcendent I-Thou space. Wright (2009) argues that the pre-verbal experiences of the sacred are retained in the unconscious but find expression in psychoanalytic, mystical and poetic literature. He links religion with the attachment/relational axis of human development arguing that the sacred represents qualities of the maternal gaze and of maternal containment.

Kristeva adopts a positive attitude to spirituality and religion despite not being religious. Kristeva (1995) understands psychoanalysis as a maternal and mystical natural religion that involves secular mysticism and mystical atheism. She argues that it is these features that offer psychoanalysis a transitional and sacred space. She finds in female mystics a transition beyond religion that addresses the modern situation with 'its psychological poverty.. and artificial soul' (Kristeva 1995: 7). She, like Bion, demonstrates the usefulness of religious language in

conveying ideas about both psychoanalysis and spirituality, whether one is religious or not. Because her thinking is very complex the psychotherapeutic world with few exceptions (Sayers 2003) has failed to sufficiently benefit from her vision of seeing spirituality, religion and the mystical as normative and meaning bearing (Ross 2010).<sup>39</sup>

### **b) The experience of spirituality and religion through transference**

Stanley Leavy and James Jones evolve distinct but linked theoretical arguments of a belief in a transcendent God being directly experienced through transference. They focus on the objective truth of God and the sacred, alongside religious experience, as a source of engagement with religion and spirituality in psychoanalysis. Leavy sees psychoanalysis as a dialogue enabling revelation of hidden aspects of the other, in the spirit of the 'Thou' offered in the work of Buber (Rangell 1982). Jones (2001), in understanding transference as an empathetic, intersubjective encounter, argues that transference is the defining psychoanalytic paradigm for understanding religion. He advocates the synthesising of human and divine transforming encounters experienced in transferences in psychoanalytic, religious and spiritual contexts (Jones 2008). Randell Sorenson (2013) develops this work and this together with Leavy and Jones represents a link with experiencing incarnation as an actual experience. In doing this, the religious and spiritual dynamic is placed in the analytic, and psychodynamic, space so that it can be accessed in more immediate ways (Sorenson 2013).

### **c) The experience of spirituality and religion through the oceanic feeling**

The oceanic feeling is a psychological term coined by Romain Rolland in a letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 1927 to Freud. It was popularised by Freud. It describes a feeling of something limitless, unbounded and of the

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<sup>39</sup> Kristeva (1995) is equally aware that there can be religious pathology in her patients.

eternal (Freud 1930). In his letter to Freud, Rolland (1927) argues that the oceanic feeling is the true source of religion, and thus a way to experience spirituality and religion. Although Freud dismissed this in his early work, others supported it including Erikson (1958), Werman (1977,1986) and Kovel (1976, 1995). Kovel (1976: 203-4) notes that:

..it should not be argued ... that the mysticotranscendent state of consciousness has no validity of its own, that it is only an infantile aberration come back to turn the adult away from reality. The most that can be absolutely said is that the infantile experience is the first *occasion* of a kind of subjective enrichment that is potentially available throughout life.

Werman sees it as an adult phenomenon different to the infantile experience and thus supports Rolland's argument. Freud (1941: 300) later gives a second more supportive interpretation of the oceanic feeling describing it as the perception of the realm of the id, outside of the ego. In doing this it opened up the opportunity for thinking about spirituality; Jacobs (2000) for example uses Freud's later understanding of the oceanic feeling to explore aspects of un-knowing and mysticism in psychodynamic thinking.

### **c) The experience of spirituality and religion through regression**

Others argue that spirituality and religion can be experienced through regression.<sup>40</sup> Although Freud (1916: 342) sees regression in its general sense as 'a return from a higher to a lower stage of development' seeing it as a primordial and inferior experience (Simmonds 2003) others disagreed with this. This includes Kris (1950,1952) who argues that this state can be self-regulated for creative purposes and for accessing id material. Winnicott (1954) understood regression as a normal phenomenon and part of the healing process. Using this and the work of Brenner (1974) and Jacques (1982) Janette Simmonds (2003) argues

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<sup>40</sup> Regression is 'a retreat into a pathological organization that reiterates the past and evades the future,' (Britton 2001).

that fleeting regressions are a usual part of functioning and facilitative of integration. As such she argues that regression can enable creative and spiritual experiences.

#### **d) The experience of spirituality and religion through epistemophilic instinct**

Simmonds (2003) introduces epistemophilic instinct - wondering about our being- as a possible concept for engaging with spirituality in psychoanalytic work. As she notes Freud (1937), in a letter to Marie Bonaparte, stated that as soon as someone enquires about the value of life they are sick, that this is unsatisfied libido. Klein (1928) initially saw it as curiosity with the mother's body, although she later saw it as a good sign (Klein 1932). Several writers including Guntrip (1969) and Black (1993) argue the importance of seeing and participating in the process of seeking the larger picture in one's life. They see it as important in terms of fully getting one's bearings in life. Britton (1989: 11) argues that the epistemophilic instinct 'includes the components of exploration, recognition and belief.' This together with interest and curiosity is important in enabling a sense of belonging instead of alienation (Guntrip 1969). Simmonds (2003) recognizes the complimentary need in spiritual traditions of wondering about existence and of not taking existence for granted. This supports her claim; that of the usefulness of the epistemophilic instinct in engaging with spirituality in practice.

There are a number of psychoanalytic concepts that enable alternative ways of thinking about spirituality in relation to psychodynamic practice. In addition to these, it is helpful to look at the links between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. Other writers have identified parallel processes and practices between them. By parallel processes and practices I mean that language has been taken separately from the fields of spirituality and psychoanalytic/dynamic practice, to describe the same experience. In doing this, similarities and congruence are identified between them.

#### **3.4.4. Understanding psychodynamic counselling and spirituality as parallel processes and practices**

Parallel processes and practices can be identified between different religions and psychoanalysis including Judaism,<sup>41</sup> Hinduism,<sup>42</sup> Buddhism,<sup>43</sup> and Christianity. Two influential thinkers in this field have argued that psychoanalysis and spirituality are parallel processes; William Meissner and Ana-Maria Rizzuto who both hold a Catholic faith. They both valued the location of spirituality/religion and god/God in transitional space. Meissner (2001) felt that both areas enriched the other and encouraged a dialectical approach between them.

Both spirituality and psychodynamic counselling are processes that are relational (MacKenna 2008) working at intra, inter and transpersonal levels. Love is seen as part of both spirituality and psychoanalysis (Crichton-Miller 1924; Hoffman 2011). Through the desire to love and to be loved spirituality and psychodynamic counselling can be viewed as complimentary processes that enhance one another (Leavy 1998; Flintoff- Robinson 1998). They both involve mystery, and in so doing highlight the need to not over-interpret (Flintoff-Robinson 1998).

Counsellors and writers, in reflecting on the practices of spirituality and psychoanalytic/psychodynamic practice identify the common use of particular processes in, for example the use of free association (Coltart 1993). Rodney Bomford (2006) compared free-floating attention in counselling to Buddhist meditation and Christian contemplation, and Christopher MacKenna (2008) identified Freud's evenly hovering attention and Bion's suspension of memory, desire and understanding as similar to the form of prayer based on unknowing and found in the book *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Backhouse 1997). MacKenna thus argues that psychoanalysis and certain forms of contemplative prayer are alike in

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<sup>41</sup> In Judaism this has been undertaken by Ostow (1997, 2007) and Frosh (2006).

<sup>42</sup> In Hinduism this has been done by Akhtar (2005).

<sup>43</sup> Coltart (1993) has done this in Buddhism.

advocating an attitude of unknowing. He also noted parallels between the mind needed for meditation and the ability to simply be with the client. For these reasons MacKenna argues that psychoanalysis is a spiritual discipline. Beverley Clack (2013: 149) similarly recognizes parallels between Freud's understanding of how to reflect on and engage with fate, and those who use religious ideas to reflect on the nature of reality:

Freud's psychoanalytic practice, understood as a means of promoting the reflective inner life in order to live differently, shares a commitment to 'mindfulness' that defines the spiritual practices of many religious traditions.

Other parallel processes are recognized; Bomford, like John Cottingham (2013) argues that it is not possible to talk about either God or the unconscious at a deep level. In recognising the difficulties of language in talking about spirituality and about the unconscious, MacKenna (2008) sees 'remarkable similarities between the Attributes of God as described in traditional Christian theology, and Freud's description of the qualities of the unconscious' (MacKenna 2008: 481).<sup>44</sup> Despite the difficulties of using language for such encounters Cottingham (2013: 188) recognizes 'the primacy of praxis' and the long process of guided dialogue in both psychotherapy and spirituality.

Cottingham (2013), like Coltart (1993), argues that psychotherapy and spirituality have the same goal of enriching clients' self-awareness, allowing the subject to live more responsibly and develop a morally mature life in relation to themselves and others. Both are thus informed by the common teleology of 'how best to live a good and fulfilling life given our weak and conflicted natures,' Cottingham (2013: 189).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> MacKenna (2008: 481) gives the example of the quality of timelessness where in the unconscious there is not before or after. He argues that is similar to the idea of the eternity of God, who simply Is.

<sup>45</sup> Freud insisted that psychoanalysis had nothing to do with ethical or moral inquiry. However Clifford (2005) argues that this is untrue because as Freud claimed it is in the business of suffering. Clifford asks what can be more moral making than this, that of transforming hysteria into ordinary misery.

Along similar lines, Bomford (2006: 267) argues that both seek an 'understanding of life as a totality.' Neville Symington (1994, 2001, 2007) agrees with Cottingham, observing that psychoanalysis, in drawing on the wisdoms of all the religions, enables transformation of narcissism into concern for others. He argues that moral scrutiny, resulting in awareness of doing wrong, changes psychoanalysis from being a morality into a spirituality. He thus proposes that psychoanalysis is a natural rather than a revealed religion. This claim, that the moral is religious, is contentious, and moral conduct and well-motivated self-reflection is generally considered to be necessary but not sufficient grounds for 'mature' religion and spirituality (Simmonds 2003). However Symington's work has provoked a lot of debate and has enabled speaking on issues of religion and spirituality.

The parallel nature of psychoanalysis and religion and spirituality is well illustrated by Grotstein (2001) who argues that religion and psychoanalysis examine the same truths and realities but from different vertices. He states that:

Religion, particularly in its spiritual dimension, is more psychoanalytic than it ever suspected, and conversely psychoanalysis is more spiritual than it (particularly ego psychology) has yet recognized.

(Grotstein 2001: 325)

### **3.4. Summary**

The parallel processes and similarities between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling demonstrate that they are in many ways ideally suited to work together. At the heart of psychodynamic practice there is an intentional, relational and open space involving both conversation and silence. The opportunity to work in transitional space, with transferences and transforming experiences are frequent, indicating the potential for working with the spiritual. The focus in psychodynamic practice on the being of the counsellor and the need to be self-aware,



suggests that, in theory, practitioners are alert to all possibilities in the work, and able to work at intra, inter and transpersonal levels. This chapter demonstrated a range of psychoanalytic theories and concepts that may be applicable to psychodynamic practice, and that enable understandings of spirituality, and of the psychodynamic setting as a sacred place. The work of Winnicott and Bion is pivotal here. Further links were made between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling by identifying common processes and practices between them, using the language of each discipline. This includes: sharing the common goal of increasing self-awareness and understanding life as a totality; through common approaches such as the use of love and mystery; through common methods including the use of guided, relational dialogue, and through the use of common practices including the suspension of memory and meditative processes. It was shown that religious language is useful in understanding spirituality, both for those who are religious and for those who are not. Whilst recognising that spirituality and psychodynamic counselling are fundamentally distinctive (Shafranske 2005), it is argued that much learning can be generated by a dialectical exchange between them. It does indeed seem possible to think of spirituality as of value to the practice of psychodynamic counselling.

There are however factors that hamper the relationship between them. This includes the impact of Freud's dominant and hostile approach to spirituality and religion. Additionally the difficulties in defining and talking about spirituality do not help, especially with the focus of the psychodynamic profession on establishing its scientific credibility. Thus, whilst there are resources potentially for thinking about spirituality, there are factors militating against their use.

The theoretical literature does not tell us much about what happens in practice, how counsellors make sense of spirituality and if, and how, the theoretical literature is used. There is a need to turn to the empirical literature to see what is known about this. This is the focus of the next chapter

## CHAPTER 4

### SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHODYNAMIC PRACTICE: THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the empirical literature about spirituality and psychodynamic practice. Whilst there has been an increase in research in spirituality in counselling over the last four decades there is still a paucity of research exploring the influence of spirituality in the lives and practice of counsellors and their clients (Davis & Timulak 2009; Hofmann & Walach 2011). This is particularly the case with psychodynamic counsellors in the UK. Research in this area is largely about religion (Martinez & Baker 2000; Wyatt 2002) or is pilot work (Ross 2006). For this reason the empirical work explored in this chapter includes research from other counselling traditions. Work that relates specifically to psychodynamic counselling will be highlighted.

Through the examination of this literature, together with the previous two chapters, the rationale for this study will be made. It will be demonstrated that despite the increasing theoretical and empirical literature in counselling, there is little known about how spirituality is worked with in psychodynamic counselling. It is argued that it may be harder to work with spirituality in this form of counselling because of its Freudian roots and subsequent lack of attention to spirituality in its development.

The inclusion of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling is important for numerous reasons. These include that:

- Many clients see spirituality as the foundation to their life (West 2011) and thus need it to be addressed in the counselling process in order for healing to take place (Gockel 2011).

- Clients often turn to spirituality for coping with their lives (D'Souza 2002; Larson & Larson 2003) and for ways of helping to make meaning of themselves and of the world (Swinton et al 2011).
- Clients' spiritual beliefs offer the counsellor a portal into the ways they perceive themselves in relationship to others and to the world at large (Shafranske 2009).
- Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between spirituality, religion and client functioning including their physical and psychological health (Koenig 2004).<sup>46</sup>
- Through addressing spirituality in counselling practice the client has an increased ability to connect with their spirituality (Gockel 2011). This in turn may facilitate their 'faith development' (Fowler 1981).<sup>47</sup>
- Importantly if the counsellor is not sensitive in this area the client will feel that spirituality is missed (Jenkins 2006) and will not bring it up again (West 2000).

To set the context for this chapter, the current state of knowledge about clients' needs in this area are explored.

#### **4.2.Clients' needs in relation to spirituality in counselling**

Research into clients' views and experiences of spirituality in counselling is developing (Zinnbauer & Pargament 2000; Morrison et al 2009).<sup>48</sup> What is known is that in both secular and religious counselling settings clients see spirituality as an important ingredient in making them feel better (Arnold et al 2002; Morrison et al 2009) and want to discuss spirituality as part of the counselling process (Rose et al 2001; Goedde

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<sup>46</sup> However, rigid and undeveloped forms of spirituality can often have negative effects on health (Trenholm et al 1998). Equally there are some who argue that contemporary spirituality is harmful, and makes us miserable, for example, (Webster (2012).

<sup>47</sup> Fowler (1981) argues that people grow in faith terms throughout their lives and that new beliefs and values grow in tandem with psychological growth.

<sup>48</sup> Most of the research has been surveys (e.g. Rose et al 2001; Morrison et al 2009). While they provide an overview of people's interests and opinions there is little detail about counsellors' experiences and conceptualisations of spirituality in relation to counselling practice. This is slowly changing with more qualitative studies emerging, adding essential detail here (e.g. Goedde 2001; Jenkins 2006; Gockel 2011).

2001; Jenkins 2006; Morrison et al 2009). While most of the empirical evidence is from the US there is some further afield including Canada (Gockel 2011), Australia (D'Souza 2002), the Netherlands (Pieper & van Uden 1996) and the UK (Jenkins, 2006).<sup>49</sup> Chris Jenkins' (2006) heuristic research explored 16 clients who, despite their wishes, had experiences of spirituality being excluded from their counselling work. In all these settings and across all these cultures the overwhelming finding from such work is that the majority of clients see spirituality as integral to an effective counselling relationship.

Although clients want to discuss spirituality in counselling they often remain fearful and anxious about introducing it into the work. Clients fear being misjudged or ridiculed (Worthington & Sandage 2002; Goedde 2001) or fear that counsellors may try and alter their beliefs by undermining them or converting them to the counsellor's beliefs (Quackenbos et al 1985). Clients thus prefer a counsellor to support rather than challenge their beliefs (Morrow et al 1993).

Clients' fears about introducing spirituality into counselling were demonstrated in the work of Lynda Ankrah (2002) who explored the handling of spiritual emergencies in 20 clients in the UK. She found that her sample largely mirrored her personal experience of feeling silenced in counselling with regard to spirituality, and of being fearful of being pathologized within her own culture. This supports West's (2000) view that clients pick up the areas that counsellors are deaf to and avoid it, picking this up without being told.

Because clients want spirituality to be included in counselling it is important to consider how it may be incorporated into practice. I will now explore what is known about psychodynamic counsellors and their spirituality.

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<sup>49</sup> While some of this research explored therapeutic relationships in counselling settings, D'Souza's work explored patient views about psychiatrists, Pieper & van Uden's (1996) looked at patients views in mental health care and Jenkins (2006) work explored clients in a variety of settings including mental health settings.

### **4.3. How spiritual are psychodynamic counsellors?**

Current research demonstrates that the majority of counsellors personally value spirituality and have spiritual beliefs matching levels similar to the general population (Worthington et al 1996; Smiley 2001; Delaney et al 2007). This is true in the US (Bilgrave & Deluty 2002; Smith & Orlinsky 2004), Ireland (Davis & Timulak 2009), Germany (Hofmann & Walach 2011) and the UK (Ross 2006). In all cases the majority of counsellors and psychotherapists report spiritual experiences and beliefs and typically this is over two-thirds of the participants. Liane Hofmann & Harald Walach, for example, found that nearly two thirds of their sample of 895 German psychotherapists, from a range of theoretical orientations, had had a significant spiritual experience and that 57% describe themselves as spiritual or religious. Thus in the light of this evidence counsellors are not adamantly secular or critical of spirituality. Indeed some counsellors see their work as a vocation from a religious point of view (Coltart 1993; Benjamin 1997; Scott 2011). This makes the exclusion of spirituality even more interesting and hard to understand.

Alistair Ross (2006) found similar levels of reports of spiritual belief (52%) among the psychodynamic counsellors in his sample of 170 counsellors from a range of orientations. However this was a pilot study and sampling and actual numbers of psychodynamic counsellors are not provided. Recent research has shown that psychodynamic counsellors are likely to be less spiritual than humanistic and integrative counsellors and less likely to see spirituality and religion as important (Hofmann & Walach 2011). Others have argued that more humanist approaches are more spiritually inclusive than psychodynamic approaches (Psaila 2012; Thorne 2012). Ross's (2006) work affirms this in that despite 52% of psychodynamic counsellors personally valuing spiritual beliefs only 26% saw it as important in their work. This is in contrast to other work, for example that of Davis (2008) where 53% of her sample of a range of

therapists stated that spirituality was always or often important in their work. Thus while counsellors in a generic sense may be as spiritual as the populations that they serve it may be that this is reduced for psychodynamic counsellors. With the well-known atheistic stance of Freud and the lack of subsequent attention to spirituality in the development of psychodynamic counselling it may be that consciously or unconsciously psychodynamic counsellors are attracted to a form of counselling that is not likely to overtly value spirituality. West (2004: 55) captures this thinking through his comments about therapists as they age; he suggests that therapists either become more psychodynamic or more spiritual and that: 'A few rare brave souls go both psychodynamic and transpersonal.'

#### **4.4. Organizational recognition of the need for spiritually inclusive practice**

Organizationally the counselling profession recognizes the importance of including spirituality in counselling. The need for respecting clients including their spiritual and religious beliefs is clearly stated. This includes in the UK (Harborne 2008) and in the US (American Psychological Association 2002, American Counselling Association (ACA), 2014). The BACP has a spiritually inclusive stance to counselling where it is seen as any other client material and requires acceptance, empathy, the suspension of judgement and a willingness to enter the client's frame of reference (Harborne 2008). The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) (2009) also recognizes the importance of exploring clients' beliefs alongside their thoughts, feelings and relevant events. Because of the recognition by the professional bodies of counsellors, of the need to respect and to be inclusive of clients' spiritual beliefs, it is unethical not to include spirituality in the

work if the client wants this. In the US competencies for working in this area have also been identified and endorsed by the ACA.<sup>50</sup>

Organizationally there is recognition of the need for spiritually inclusive practice. However this stance is not reflected in how counsellors historically have been prepared for this aspect of their work.

#### **4.5. The preparation of counsellors for working with spirituality**

There is wide ranging research to show that counsellors generally have not been prepared for working with spirituality. Despite repeated requests (Worthington et al 1996; Jenkins 2006) spirituality and religion has rarely been included in the education, training, therapy or supervision of counsellors (Shafranske & Maloney 1990; Post & Wade 2009; Scott 2009; West 2009). Counsellors often feel ill prepared for this work, with their thinking and feeling about it unexamined (Simmonds 2003). Sheila Martinez & Martyn Baker (2000) in examining the experiences of 8 psychodynamic counsellors found that they experienced changes in their personal faith during their training and personal therapy. However, that there was no space in training, therapy or supervision to discuss this, causing them points of tensions. Jonathan Wyatt (2002) in his sample of 5 psychodynamic counsellors with religious faith found, like others (Cohen 1994; Tillman et al 2013), that the consequences of the lack of preparation for working with spirituality and religion is that counsellors can experience discomfort, helplessness and shame in their work as well as pressure in maintaining their faith and theoretical integrity.

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<sup>50</sup> The Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) created a set of competencies for addressing spiritual and religious issues in counselling that was endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ASERVIC 2009).

Calls have been made for increased training on spirituality (V.Swinton 2007). This is important because counsellors have to submit to the standards of their training bodies. As has been argued training processes exclude spirituality. As a result it seems likely counsellors will pick up that this is not an important area of practice and in turn reinforce Freud's historic ambivalence to spirituality. Unless personally motivated to explore spirituality this stance may be likely to continue. Although once qualified, counsellors have the opportunity to adapt their theoretical knowledge to themselves and their own way of practice, this is not an easy process (Williams 2002). Counsellors learn from their experience (Ogden 2009) through 'theories in use' (Argyris & Schön 1978) and/or by forming tentative identifications (Fitzpatrick et al 2010).<sup>51</sup>

'Theories in use', as opposed to espoused theory,<sup>52</sup> are a way of understanding how psychodynamic counsellors develop their practice. The concept of 'theories in use' recognizes the need to see each client as a universe of one, with their own unique pattern of experience. Making sense in this way has artistic truth and pragmatic utility (Spence 1982) and is arguably essential because like psychoanalysis, psychodynamic counselling cannot be taught but only learnt (Sachs & Shapiro 1976).

Key in developing one's practice with regard to spirituality is having some knowledge and experience of exploring it (Bartoli 2006). Because of the absence of spirituality in training, therapy and supervision, for those who have done little thinking about spirituality, developing this aspect of their practice may be difficult. This is particularly the case because of the difficulties in thinking and talking about spirituality (King 2009). Also because counsellors and their trainers often do not read research (McLeod 1999; Fitzpatrick et al 2010; West 2011) it is unlikely

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<sup>51</sup> Fitzpatrick et al use the term 'tentative identifications' to describe how student integrative counsellors made provisional identifications with theory in order to develop their practice.

<sup>52</sup> Espoused theories are those that are used to justify and explain behaviour. Theories in use enable thinking and learning together with others, including about personal and sensitive matters. They are often tacit (Argyris & Schön 1978).



that they are familiar with the increasing theory and research about spirituality. It seems likely that those who are personally motivated to explore spirituality in their practice are likely to do so (Bartoli 2006; Tillman et al 2013). For those who do not have this impetus or find difficulties in exploring spirituality in their work, this is likely to be a neglected area of thinking and practice. Because there is little research that has a psychodynamic focus there is a gap here, one that needs exploring: are psychodynamic counsellors still not prepared to work with spirituality in practice? And if so how do they make sense in this area?

Another reason to include spirituality in training, theory, supervision and continuing education is because spiritual problems are often found in counselling (Lukoff et al 1998, Davis & Timulak 2009). Studies typically find that at least one third of the counsellors surveyed report that spiritual/religious issues are involved in counselling often or a great deal of the time, and/or are important in the work with many or all of their clients (Bergin & Jensen 1990; Shafranske 2001; Johnson & Hayes 2003).<sup>53</sup>

As has been argued there is increasing research which, whilst largely not psychodynamically focused, may help with understanding and working with spirituality in psychodynamic practice. This will now be explored.

#### **4.6. Empirical research about working with spirituality in practice**

Historically there has been a lack of theoretical frameworks for work in this area (Golsworthy & Coyle 2001). A pluralistic philosophical approach has been argued to be preferable when working with spiritual issues together with a hermeneutic of inclusion (Zinnbauer & Pargament 2000).

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<sup>53</sup> The frequency of spiritual and religious issues in counselling led to the development of 'religious or spiritual problem' as a V code in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5<sup>th</sup> Edition, American Association 2013). This category is used when the focus of clinical attention is on a religious or spiritual problem.

While there has been an increasing volume of research about working with spirituality in counselling practice generally, there is little about psychodynamic counselling specifically. Although research about counselling from other theoretical orientations and cultures may help to inform psychodynamic practice, there are limitations in this. These limitations are now discussed.

There are a number of psychoanalytic studies exploring spirituality and/or religion including the work of Peter Cohen (1994) and Eleonora Bartoli (2006). Cohen (1994) explores how 12 religiously committed psychoanalysts integrated their faith into their practice and Bartoli the religious and spiritual perspectives, and clinical work, of training analysts. While providing useful detail Cohen (1994) focused on religiosity only, and both studies were undertaken in the US, a country with different religiosity to the UK (Swinton 2001).<sup>54</sup> Careful evaluation is thus required regarding the appropriateness of US literature.

Simmonds and Ross also explore psychoanalysts work with spirituality and/or religion. Simmonds (2003) focused on whether there is space for spirituality in psychoanalysis and Ross (2010) on the emergence of spirituality and religion in psychoanalysis. Their samples were psychoanalysts and/or psychoanalytic psychotherapists, and all were experts who held an interest in spirituality and/or religion (n=25 and 11 respectively).

Because Ross (2010) develops an interpretive framework for working with spirituality in practice his work may be of particular relevance to this study. He focused on the narrative themes of interviews with analysts well known in the field of religion and spirituality in psychoanalysis. He

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<sup>54</sup> Most Americans attend Christian church regularly (compared to 10% In the UK-Tearfund 2007) and 54% see religion as very important in their lives (Pew Research Centre\* 2014, accessed on 07.09.15 at [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)). Thus although there is separation between the church and the state in the US it appears that it is still the social norm to have, at the least, an outward expression of faith. (\*Pew Research Centre is a non-partisan American think tank based in Washington D.C. that provides information on social issues, public opinions and demographic trends shaping US and the world).

developed a means of understanding the integration of spirituality and religion into psychoanalysis that does not require a spiritual or religious belief in the analyst. Through understanding the narratives of translation, transition and transformation Ross argues that it is possible for each analyst to situate her/himself within the interpretive frame and understand their experience of spirituality and religion. The flexible interpretive framework consists of four different elements: God/Other/Thou, religion/spirituality, unconscious/mystical/O and psychoanalysis. Different balances between these four elements represent different individual frameworks. The processes involved in reaching the various positions within the frameworks, that of translation, transition and transformation are themes that Ross identified both in his sample and throughout the theoretical and empirical literature. The need for translation of understandings of language particularly is a point commonly identified (Meissner 2001; Wyatt 2002; Rizzuto 2005; Scott 2011). Transition as a theme is grounded in the work of Winnicott as a place for engaging psychoanalysis and psychodynamic thinking with spirituality and religion. Lastly transformation is often used to describe the encounter between spirituality and religion and psychoanalysis (Bollas 1987) and counselling (Scott 2011; Psaila 2012). This model is inclusive and easy to apply though its usefulness to psychodynamic practitioners has yet to be assessed especially since it is based on a small sample (n=11).

While both Simmonds and Ross are deeply informative they provide minimal detail about how 'non-expert' analysts work with spirituality, that is those who are not informed or who may not have given a great deal of thought about spirituality. Also while psychodynamic counselling has a common theoretical base with psychoanalysis, as argued in Chapter 3, there are differences between them. The applicability of the findings thus needs further empirical testing. Both Simmonds and Ross used a narrative method but different methods of analysis. Although their work included UK analysts, it also included analysts from the US and/or Australia.

There is a wide range of research exploring spirituality within counselling and psychotherapy with samples that include different types of practitioners, from a variety of different modalities. This includes the work of Ann Davies and Laco Timulak (2009). They explored how religious and spiritual issues are worked with in psychotherapy in Ireland. Their sample includes psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists; 16% were psychodynamically orientated. Again their work is in a different culture to the culture in the UK<sup>55</sup> and the small psychodynamic element raises questions of its applicability to the psychodynamic mode of practice. These arguments are also levelled at the work of Claudia Psaila (2012). She examined the experiences and perceptions of the spiritual dimension in psychotherapy in 11 Maltese practitioners. She used focus/study groups with a range of counselling practitioners, only one of which was psychodynamic.

Other studies of therapists/counsellors working with spiritual problems include the work of Chad Johnson et al (2007) and Douglas Tillman et al (2013). Their samples include practitioners from a variety of theoretical orientations. A higher proportion of Johnson et al's (2007) study was psychodynamic (5 out of 12) although only one was a counsellor (8 were psychologists, 2 social workers and 1 a family therapist). The sample in Tillman et al's (2013) grounded theory study of 12 counsellors confident in working with spirituality, were all Christian. The nature of the samples of both Johnson et al and Tillman et al's studies together, with their work being based in the US, raises questions about their applicability to psychodynamic counsellors in the UK. In reviewing the research about spirituality that includes a range of theoretical positions, the majority of counsellors, are humanistic and/or transpersonal. These approaches are much more likely to be spiritually inclusive (Psaila 2012). This cannot be assumed to be the case for psychodynamic counselling.

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<sup>55</sup> Census levels in 2011 show that despite a large increase in people who describe themselves as not religious in Ireland, just over 84% of people define themselves as Roman Catholic. This is in contrast to just over 59% of people in the UK defining themselves as Christian.

Otilia Brown et al's (2013) focus group study of 15 clinical and counselling psychologists, provides details about the enablers and barriers to incorporating religion and spirituality in psychotherapy. Its focus on psychologists and its location in South Africa, however, raises questions about its usefulness in informing psychodynamic practice specifically. This argument can also be made with the work of Jon Crossley & Denis Salter (2005); they provide detail about addressing spirituality in therapy in the UK but from the perspective of clinical psychologists only.

There are well-detailed studies of clients' perspectives of working with spirituality in counselling (Knox et al 2005; Gockel 2011). Both these studies are based in other countries (Knox et al in the US and Gockel in Canada). Other studies of counsellors focus on religious samples only including Tillman et al (2013) and Ann Scott (2011). Scott, in a heuristic study, explored 22 Christian counsellors' experiences of integrating their faith into practice. Scott (2011) found that her sample varied in the level of attention that they paid to integrating their faith. She had a varied sample of counsellors with only one identifying themselves as psychodynamic, and 3 recognising that they have some psychodynamic understanding of their work. The model of integration of Christian faith into counselling practice that Scott proposes can potentially inform psychodynamic work but the small psychodynamic element and its focus on religious clients means that its applicability to spirituality in psychodynamic counselling may have limitations.

With the increasing interest in spirituality it is not surprising that spirituality integrated interventions that combine spiritual or religious beliefs and practices are increasingly being developed, and tested for integration into counselling (Worthington & Sandage 2002; Richards &

Bergin 2005; Sperry & Shafranske 2005; Pargament 2011).<sup>56</sup> This is typically US based work that will need testing for applicability for the UK. Research based in the UK is developing; for example, Peter Gubi (2004) has demonstrated the wide use of covert and overt prayer, as a spiritual intervention, in mainstream counselling work in the UK. Although he identified wide concerns about introducing prayer into practice he argues that it is no more problematic than any other intervention. He recognizes the need for good supervision to enable this. However Gubi's (2007) research revealed counsellors' were reluctant to explore this in supervision, endorsing research demonstrating the absence of the discussion of spirituality in supervision (see Section 4.4.).

It is helpful in counselling practice to consider culture when thinking about spirituality. This is not just to examine the relevance of research from other countries and cultures to practice in the UK but because belonging to a faith or spirituality is just as much a 'culture' as a specific nationality or ethnicity (Scott 2011: 64).<sup>57</sup> Culture affects the understanding and expectations counsellors and clients have of one another (Richards & Bergin 2005; Totton 2008). There is a body of evidence that clients do better with cultural matching (Laugani 1997; Lowenthal & Rogers 2004; West 2011) with the counsellor's belief system being a significant factor in the counselling relationship (Bartoli 2006; Christodoulidi 2011).

However it is important to note that even when cultural matching occurs sometimes there is not a shared language when talking about spirituality (Laugani 2004). In such cases it may be difficult to talk about spirituality in a way that can be understood together by the counsellor and the client (King-Spooner 2001). Assumptions can be based on culturally

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<sup>56</sup> There are a number of spiritual assessment tools that have been developed including the Spiritual Assessment Inventory and Spiritual Health Inventory (Frame 2003 details these).

<sup>57</sup> Spirituality is often recognized within counselling as an element of culture coming under the rubric of multicultural competence (Wheeler 2006; V.Swinton 2007; Zinnbauer & Barrett 2009).

embedded use of language; understandings of this may differ even among those with the same faith or spiritual beliefs (Laugani 2004). Awareness of such issues and adopting a culturally sensitive framework, through understanding the worldviews of culturally different clients, has been argued to enable spiritual issues to be dealt with effectively and respectfully (Zinnbauer & Barratt 2009).

Research directly applicable to psychodynamic practice is developing and there is some psychodynamic research in this area notably Martinez & Baker (2000) and Wyatt (2002). However both of these studies explore religion only; Martinez & Baker examine the interplay between religion and the professional experience of 8 psychodynamic counsellors and Wyatt uncovers how 5 psychodynamic counsellors respond to clients' expressions of faith. Given the understanding of spirituality as broader than religion, argued in Chapter 2, these studies have limits in addressing how spirituality is understood and worked with psychodynamic practice. What is clear from both studies however are the difficulties and lack of support and opportunities in integrating counsellors' faith into their practice. What is also apparent from the exploration of empirical work into spirituality in counselling practice is the lack of research specifically about psychodynamic practice, a point that is developed in the next section.

#### **4.7. Summary**

Chapter 3 illustrated that there are ways of thinking about spirituality in psychodynamic practice. This chapter asserted that psychodynamic counsellors may be less spiritually minded than counsellors from other theoretical approaches, and may have additional difficulties in integrating spirituality. The findings that counsellors have historically not been prepared in their training, therapy or supervision for this area of the work raises questions about how psychodynamic counsellors make sense for themselves about spirituality in practice. Although there is the

opportunity, post- training, to develop and adapt their own practice in the light of their personal experiences, it was argued that this is a difficult process of learning particularly if they have learnt from their training organizations that spirituality is not an important part of their practice. It was argued that counsellors are unlikely to make sense in this area unless personally motivated to do so.

This chapter demonstrated the limitations of current research exploring spirituality in counselling practice. While the amount and breadth of research in this area is increasing, there is little that focuses on psychodynamic practice. Research is either from a psychoanalytic perspective or encompasses counsellors from a range of theoretical orientations. In the latter research there are typically few psychodynamic counsellors and the majority are humanistic and/or transpersonal. Therefore it is not always clear how the findings relate specifically to psychodynamic counsellors. It is thus important to know how the increasing theoretical and empirical literature reflects psychodynamic counsellors' work with spirituality. It is important to know the similarities and differences between psychodynamic counsellors and other types of counsellors in relation to this literature. There is little research focusing on practising psychodynamic counsellors and those who are not expert in the fields of spirituality and religion. Equally there is little research focusing on spirituality specifically and in a UK context. This research aims to address these gaps. This is important because it has been shown that clients want spirituality included in counselling and there are benefits for them in doing so. Equally addressing this area would enable psychodynamic counselling to be in step with the interest in spirituality in mainstream UK culture. This thinking led to the development of the research questions that are discussed at the start of the next chapter examining the methodology and design of the study. The review of the research in this chapter informed the development of the methodology and the use of a qualitative stance. As the next chapter discusses, a qualitative approach is helpful in gathering data for this study, particularly



with participants who may not have had the opportunity to develop their thinking about spirituality in psychodynamic counselling.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The review of the literature in Chapter 3 and 4 demonstrated the limited amount of research about psychodynamic counselling specifically. It showed that often research with samples of counsellors from a variety of theoretical orientations had limited numbers of psychodynamic counsellors. The applicability of this research to the psychodynamic field has to be questioned. It is timely for research to explore psychodynamic counsellors specifically. In order for research to be of use to practising counsellors it is important to not only understand how psychodynamic counsellors understand spirituality in their work but also to discover how they work with it in practice. These factors led to the development of the research questions that are described below. This chapter also discusses the use of a narrative methodology in this study, the underlying reasons for this choice and how this method enables the research questions to be addressed.

### **5.2. Research questions**

How do psychodynamic counsellors reconcile their understandings of spirituality with their understanding of the theoretical framework of psychodynamic counselling? How might this impact on their clinical practice?

The specific aims were to investigate:

- counsellors' understandings of psychodynamic practice and their understanding of spirituality within this

- points of fit and points of tension between their theoretical understanding of psychodynamic practice and their understanding of spirituality
- their understanding of how they work with these in their clinical practice.

### **5.3. Locating the research- The development of a qualitative approach**

In developing this work I sought a methodology capable of exploring the ambiguities of the concept of spirituality and one that was compatible with exploring psychodynamic thinking and practice, doing justice to the riches of the subjects and concepts involved. This pointed to qualitative research with its emphasis on exploring the meaning of an area of human experience and its primary aim of developing 'an understanding of how the social world is constructed' (McLeod 2011). As McLeod (2011: 3) makes clear:

the notion of the world being 'constructed' implies that we inhabit a social, personal and relational world that is complex, multi-layered and can be viewed from different perspectives.

A qualitative approach would enable a depth and breadth of exploration of counsellors' understanding of spirituality and the complexities of relating and working with this in their psychodynamic practice.

Qualitative research has developed considerably and emerged more frequently as an approach to research in general. Currently, there is rhetoric of methodological pluralism within counselling and psychotherapy (Haverkamp et al 2005, Cooper & McLeod 2011; McLeod 2011) and within this a culture of encouragement for qualitative

research.<sup>58</sup> In essence I want to uncover and to describe how psychodynamic counsellors construct their understanding of spirituality within the context of their professional relationships and social and historical contexts, how they come to this understanding and how it impacts on their practice. I wanted to do this in a robust and credible way and in a way that contributed to developing counselling practice. A qualitative approach is a legitimate way of exploring the sensitive area of spirituality, and a legitimate way of seeking to understand participants' constructions of it, and of spirituality in psychodynamic counselling practice.

Having decided on a qualitative approach for this study it was important to be clear about the theoretical perspective of the research, what guided its thinking and its understandings.

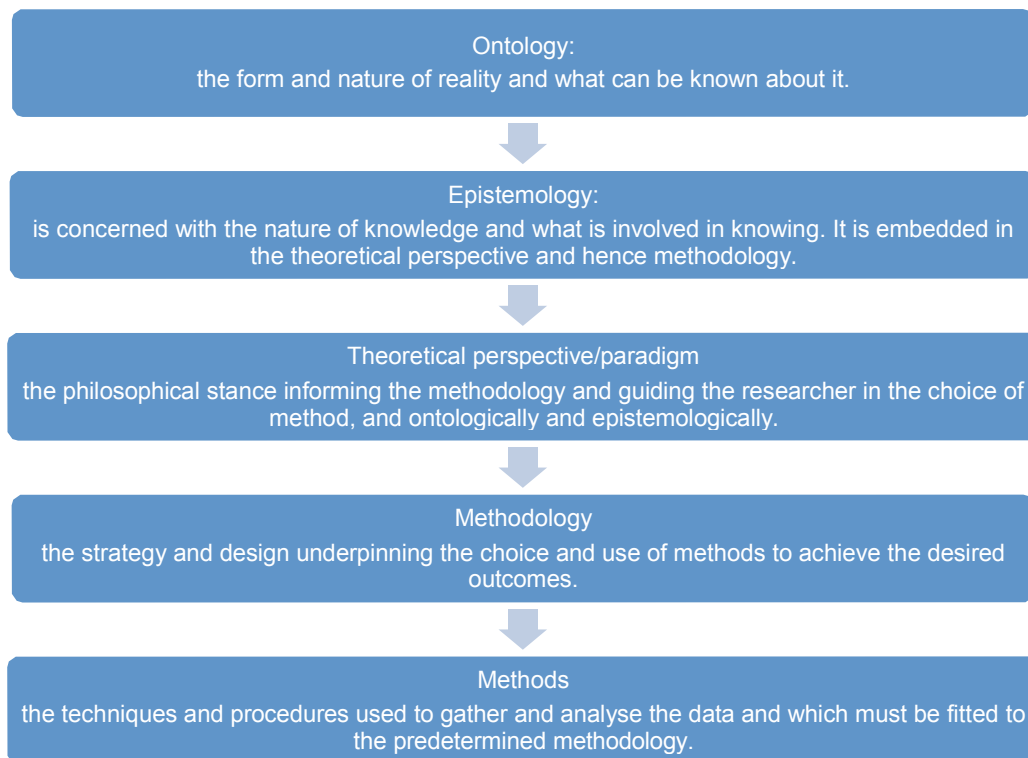
### **5.2.1. Theoretical perspective**

While the methods and methodological approach are important my research needs to be grounded within a theoretical approach and conducted in a way that is congruent with the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the methodology and my beliefs as a researcher (Denzin & Lincoln 2005; McLeod 2011). The importance of this cannot be overstated and it is a process that is easily misunderstood (Grix 2001). It is the underlying ontological and epistemological principles that inform and guide the theoretical perspective and thus decisions relating to the methodology and methods used.

These essential elements of the research process are represented below:

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<sup>58</sup> Two UK psychotherapy journals actively encourage their publication: *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* and *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*.



(Adapted from Guba & Lincoln 1994, Crotty 1998, McLeod 2011)

It required a personal consideration as to what I considered to represent reality and truth (Crotty 1998). In terms of the research questions and from an ontological perspective I wanted to know ‘what is the reality of being a psychodynamic counsellor thinking and working with spirituality? And ‘what counts as knowledge about how counsellors understand spirituality and work with it in practice?’ In terms of epistemological beliefs I saw the accounts provided by the participants as knowledge of this area. The process of inquiry was to seek understanding rather than an objective truth. It became clear that the nature of the knowledge that I was seeking resided in the meaning and understanding counsellors have about spirituality and how they work with this in practice.

In considering the paradigm<sup>59</sup> that was needed to answer the research questions I was aware of the need for it to accord with my own

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<sup>59</sup> This is ‘the net containing the researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological premises’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 19).

ontological and epistemological beliefs. I understood the nature of knowledge and the production of meaning as coming about through interaction and relationship with others. In philosophical terms this way of thinking is called social constructionism (Gergen & Gergen 1991).

### **5.2.2. Social constructionism**

Social constructionism understands people being actively engaged with others as a means of making sense of experience. This is largely achieved through language (Gergen & Gergen 1991). Meaning is thus constructed in the process of experience, rather than being there in a fixed state waiting to be discovered. As such the development of knowledge and understanding is a relational activity achieved in relationship with others (McNamee 2002), as a form of 'joint action' (Shotter 1993). There is a social dimension to this perspective in that meaning is understood in the context of the culture in which we have grown up and which we are a part of (Crotty 1998). This is a continuing process where the person is seen as a function of relationships with others, drawing on past and present relationships (Burr 2003). This understanding fitted well with my life experience and is ideal for this study with its focus on counsellors' understandings and meanings of spirituality in the context of relationships they have in the world including with their profession, professional colleagues, and wider influences such as their culture and personal history. Using this perspective and focusing on counsellors' constructions of spirituality in their practice is thus a means of accessing understanding of their relationships with others and wider social and historical discourses. It is through my engagement with the participants that such meanings will be constructed.

Another branch of constructionism known as constructivism also informed the study. Constructivism places emphasis on the personal meanings unique to each individual (McNamee 2002). Like constructionism it shares the understanding that human beings construct the realities in which they live (rather than determined by outside forces)

but differs with its focus on cognitive processes. The inclusion of the constructivist position is the recognition of the overlap between this and constructionism; that social constructionism always involves an individual or cognitive aspect just as individual construct systems always exist within a social world.

Within such constructionist/constructivist thinking there is no one 'absolute truth' but multiple truths. With this understanding of multiple truths, the concept of relativism has dominated in social constructionism (Nightingale & Cromby 1999) in contrast to the realism perspective of positivism. Realism argues that an external world exists independently of one's representations of it (Searle 1995). Relativism dismisses this and argues that 'since any such world is inaccessible to us in both principle and practice it need not be postulated or considered' (Nightingale & Cromby 1999: 6). There is a range of positions around the realism-relativism debate and it is important to be ontologically clear about the position in this work because it underpins the methodological thinking. I adopted a critical realist ontology around this. This is the belief that there is a world out there that is observable and independent of human consciousness. However I regard knowledge about this world as socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). A critical realist stance enables both referentiality and objectivity although it is 'always partial, limited and necessarily dependent upon further empirical and discursive revision' (Nightingale and Cromby 1999: 710).

The implication for this study of holding a critical realist perspective is that from an ontological point of view I see social constructions based on a reality, outside of interpersonal discourse, including the physical body and the physical and social environments that we are in. From an epistemological point of view I hold a position of relativism in that the knowledge that we have about the world and our ideas about it are socially constructed and that this is socially achieved through discourse. The thinking of Popper helps to illustrate the position I take between epistemological relativism and ontological realism. Popper (1959) in

response to the challenge of quantum physics and relativist trends in philosophy defended post positivistic realism with the idea that while a description may never be completely accurate it can become more so, moving towards an approximation of the truth. As Sass (1988: 265) argues although 'truth can never be value free, it is not naïve to seek truth'.

### **5.3. Methodology and methods**

Having identified the theoretical perspective of the study it was important to identify a congruent methodology. This section discusses the processes involved in this and the identification of a narrative methodology.

I needed a methodology that enabled qualitative exploration of how counsellors understand their practice with regard to spirituality, one that incorporated an understanding of the co-construction of findings, and the discovery of multiple truths rather than an absolute truth. Various methodologies were considered initially for this study, a range of which will be examined.

A phenomenological approach was considered. The emphasis here is on the phenomenon itself as opposed to its context. This did not fit with the aims of my research which aimed to examine counsellors understanding of spirituality within the context of their lives. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is an approach widely used in health psychology (Smith et al 2009). It has an idiographic, case based emphasis and uses small sample sizes. It encourages interpretation of the meaning of data in terms of psychological constructs and conceptualisations are likely to be based on pre-existing ideas from psychological theory. I wanted to analyse data from a wider perspective than this and not be limited to pre-existing psychological theory. Grounded theory is the 'market' leader in qualitative research (McLeod



2011). It aims to generate theory grounded in the data. However the breaking down of the data into fragmented sections that this approach involves misses the additional meaning of the story as a whole. It does not therefore fit well with the theoretical perspective of the study that sees meaning as understood within the context of culture. It also does not lend itself to the relational aspect of the data (West 2001a) and the affect the researcher might have on it and vice versa. A further approach considered was the use of an heuristic methodology. This requires the researcher to surrender to the research question to the extent that personal transformation take place, with the potential to transform others (Moustakas 1990). It has a clear template for implementation. However its method is unboundaried and does not readily fit into academic schedules. I had concerns about this. It was a methodology new to me and at the time of deciding the methodology I was unsure if I had the personal capacity for it. For these reasons I did not use it.

Undertaking a research methods course as part of my post-graduate training was very helpful in this process and this led me to consider the use of a narrative methodology. It was through engaging with reflection and reflexivity<sup>60</sup> in exploring the research questions that narratives became the methodology of choice and a narrative inquiry approach was adopted. This approach will be described prior to detailing the understanding of narratives used in this study.

#### **5.4. A narrative inquiry approach**

A narrative inquiry approach is defined as a collaboration between the researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with the milieu (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). These authors define narrative inquiry as that that focuses on trying to understand how data is created as well as the analysis of narrative. This study is a narrative inquiry in that in addition to collecting narratives from

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<sup>60</sup> These concepts are discussed in Chapter 7.

the interviews other forms of data collection were used to understand how the narratives were created. These are examined in the next chapter describing the development of the research methods.

#### **5.4.1. The congruence of the narrative inquiry approach with social constructionism**

I understand a narrative inquiry approach as congruent with social constructionism. Social constructionism posits that people actively engage with one another in order to make sense of experience. Meaning making is thus achieved through relationship in the process of experience. It is a continuing process and understood in the context of one's past and present culture. The telling and discovery of narratives is similarly a means of making sense of experience by engaging with another, typically, the listener. It is thus also done in relationship with others and is an on-going process. A narrative inquiry approach is a good fit with the underlying philosophy of this study and able to address the research questions. The understanding of narratives used in this study will now be examined.

#### **5.4.2. Narratives**

Narratives, or as they are often referred to, stories,<sup>61</sup> are a primary way of making sense of an experience (Bruner 1986,1990; Mishler 1986; Polkinghorne 1988). Narratives are an evolving series of stories framed in and through interaction with another. They are a means of making sense of experiences and feelings that are difficult to think about (Riessman 1993) and for enabling a search for meaning (Epston & White 1992). This felt an appropriate method for this study and one that resonated well with the methods of psychodynamic counselling, where the telling of stories is a pivotal and/or explicit part of the work (McLeod 2013). Spirituality is difficult to talk about particularly if there are limited

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<sup>61</sup> Contemporary convention is that narrative and story are often used interchangeably (Riessman 2008). A distinction between them is made later in this section.

opportunities to do this (King 2009). A method was required that enabled counsellors to make sense of and to articulate their thoughts here. Narratives are a way of doing this. Through the actual telling of narratives to another order is created for the narrator and their emotions contained (Riessman 2008), important in an area that is difficult to think about. The telling of stories with another person also enables a connection with them (Riessman 1993; 2008). This felt important in exploring the potentially sensitive and personal area of spirituality with participants. A further factor influencing the use of a narrative approach is that it enables participants to be asked about their own specific experiences rather than general questions that could be problematic because of the complex and contested nature of spirituality. Narratives thus felt a safe and contained means of enabling participants to articulate their thoughts about spirituality in practice. Stories also resonate with spirituality and religion in that stories are often used in accounts and experiences of both. Importantly narratives also play a pivotal role in psychodynamic counselling and psychotherapy generally; the telling of stories being a key part of the work. Irvin Yalom (2014) and Stephen Grosz (2013) illustrate this well by providing accessible narratives of psychotherapy.

In contrast to other qualitative methods and forms of interviewing narratives enable access to experiences that cannot always be addressed directly, instead experiences are addressed through the telling of stories. They are a way of illustrating understanding, helping to make sense, clarify and question understandings as well as demonstrate contradictions, conflicts and incomplete understandings (Riessman 1993, 2008). By seeking stories and accounts of experiences and events participants are encouraged to speak for longer periods of time than traditional interview techniques. Individual, discrete stories may be told alongside those told throughout the narratives, a point that is picked up below in Section 5.4.2.

#### **5.4.2.1. Understanding of narrative for this research**

There has been extensive recent interest in narratives in empirical research resulting in a diversity of understanding and use so it is helpful to consider exactly what I mean when I talk of narratives. It is equally important that all text and talk is not seen as narrative, as it sometimes has been (Polkinghorne 1988).

I understand narratives as working with contingent sequences. They are

forms of discourse that offer a coherence over time, within space and context: 'so that narrators make sense of themselves, social situations, and history.'

(Speedy 2008: 6, citing Bamberg & McCabe, 1998 and Clandinin & Connolly 2000).

Catherine Riessman (1993) agrees with this and asserts that narratives may include chronological sequencing (Labov & Waletzky 1967), consequential sequencing – one event causing another (Young 1987) and thematic sequencing where narrative is stitched together by theme rather than by time (Michaels 1981).

I also understand that narratives:

- are sequential and meaningful
- are definitively human
- 're-present' experience, reconstituting it, as well as expressing it
- display transformation or change (Squire 2013).

This research will focus on counsellors' narratives of their experiences of making sense of and engaging with spirituality in practice as well as their narratives of particular events that may have occurred. This is a common form of foci in narrative work (Andrews et al 2013).

#### **5.4.2.2. Distinctions between narrative and story**

It is also important to be clear about what I understand as the distinctions between narrative and story. A range of work (Riessman 1990, McLeod & Balamoutsou 1996, Abbot 2002) led me to use 'narrative' to refer to the interviews as a whole and the term 'story' to refer to specific incidents within it. Porter Abbot (2002), although talking about a literary form of narrative, regards stories as something delivered by narrative; as something that pre-exists it as folk stories, latent stories, virtual stories and untold stories. He sees narrative as coming after stories, 'to be a representation' of them (Abbot 2002: 32).

Stories can take different forms in narratives. Riessman (1990) in her study of exploring divorcing individuals and how they make sense of themselves and their marriages, found in the detailed analysis of individual interviews that it produced a complex discourse form describing it as having 'embedded narrative segments within an overarching narrative that includes nonnarrative parts' (Riessman 1993: 51). She found that stories told in interviews were rarely neatly bounded and locating them was complex and part of the interpretive process. In a similar way John McLeod & Sophia Balamoutsou (1996), in the analysis of a single therapy session, saw the client as attempting to narrativise his understanding through the production of a series of stories connected by linking passages and interviewer interventions. Michael Agar & Jerry Hobbs (1982) similarly argue that everything has a place in the story and that the researcher has the responsibility for exploring how the parts of the story fit together. Riessman (1993) further notes that William Labov's (1972, 1982; Labov & Waletzky 1967) theory and the straightforward stories he analyses are an inadequate model for analyzing subjective experiences and understandings. Thus identifying stories is not always clear within narratives; it demands attention to the whole and the complex ways that stories may be told over the course of the narrative.

Further support for my approach of seeing stories emerging in narratives over time, in smaller forms and in complex ways is seen in the more recent debate about 'small' and 'big' stories. Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2006) in exploring what constitutes a story worthy of analysis identified the term 'small stories', an umbrella term that she argues represents a range of under represented narrative activities such as the telling of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared events as well as allusions to telling and deferrals of tellings. She suggests that small stories where the smallness of talk and fleeting moments of narrative orientation to the world can be easily missed if the analytical lens is focused only on fully-fledged and big stories.

Like Michael Bamberg (2006) Georgakopoulou (2006) argues for more systematic study and exploration of appropriate tools for the analysis of small stories. Although the majority of small stories in her study of female adolescents in Greece more or less connected with the narrative canon, several did not fit prototypical definitional criteria such as the temporal ordering of events, Georgakopoulou (2006) goes on to argue that not treating them as stories would disregard the participants' situated understandings. Thus there is a need to attend to parts of the interaction in the interview that appear to be small stories and to determine connections between their interactional features and where they occur in the narratives. Georgakopoulou (2006) argues that small stories research is a new narrative turn. This emphasizes the importance of being alert to all possible forms of stories in narratives, in particular the need to consider the narrative as a whole and the stories that are emerging throughout it and not just 'big' stories that are clear and discrete within the narratives. This understanding reflects a hermeneutic approach in that understandings and interpretations are sought by approaching the narrative as a whole but with the moving back and forth between this and detailed parts of it, with each informing the other.

To summarise, this section outlines an argument for a narrative inquiry approach to this study, one that is congruent with social constructionism.

It demonstrates that narratives are ideally suited to enabling counsellors to make sense of and articulate their understandings and engagement with spirituality in practice. Narratives are understood as forms of discourse that offer coherence over time, within space and context. Distinctions were made between narrative and story and the complexity of how stories are revealed in narratives was stressed.

#### **5.4.2.3. The limitations of narratives**

While narratives can tell us a great deal it is equally important to be aware of what they cannot tell us. Andrea Duchet & Natasha Mauthner (2008) argue that all that can be known is:

what is narrated by subjects, as well as our interpretation of their stories within the wider web of social and structural relations from which the narrated subjects speak.

(Duchet & Mauthner 2008: 404)

Douchet & Mauthner (2008) go on to quote Kenneth Plummer (1995: 168):

*Whatever else a story is, it is not simply the lived life.* It speaks all around the life: it provides routes into a life, lays down maps for lives to follow, suggests links between a life and a culture. It may indeed be one of the most important tools we have for understanding lives and wider cultures they are part of. But it is not *the* life, which is in principle unknown and unknowable.

This position sits alongside the critical realist position adopted in the study and argued earlier; that there is a reality that cannot be fully known but one that we can move towards approximations of understanding of it.

## **5.5. Obtaining the narratives- the use of interviews**

This section explores the concept of interviews and how they are used to obtain narratives. The development of the interview method for this study is discussed in the next chapter.

With the perspectives underpinning the study and the interest in exploring narrative, interviews fitted well in addressing the research questions. Other methods of collecting the data were largely impractical. Practically and ethically there would be problems with observing the practice of counsellors. The recording of sessions with clients similarly has ethical as well as practical issues in that spiritual issues or experiences cannot be guaranteed to occur in every session and a great deal of data may need to be generated to achieve this. As a part time post-graduate student this was not feasible.

Interviews were an ideal choice of narrative collection since they can be seen as narrative occasions (Riessman 2008) and a discursive accomplishment, where two active participants jointly construct narrative and meaning (Mishler 1986). Narrative interviews have more in common with ethnography than mainstream social science interviewing which typically involves the researcher asking questions and receiving reports in response rather than stories (Gubrium & Holstein 2002).

In order to obtain narratives the goal of such interviews is to generate detailed accounts, with the participant taking longer turns at talk than ordinary conversation (Kvale 1996). In such cases the interviewer is the audience whom the participant is presenting himself to and in a particular light. Substantial changes in interview practices are required to enable narratives in all its forms (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Etherington, 2004; Riessman 2008; Speedy 2008). A key aspect in viewing the research interview as a conversation is the need for the researcher to give up control. This can generate anxiety because:



Although we have particular paths that we want to cover related to the substantive and theoretical foci of our studies, narrative interviewing necessitates following participants down *their* trails.

(Riessman 2008: 24).

The disparity in power between the researcher and researched can never be equal but such an approach encourages greater equality (Kvale 1996; Riessman 2008; Speedy 2008).

There is a developing literature of narrative interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein 2002; Mishler 1986, 2000; Kvale 1996; Speedy 2008). However little is known about how they are constructed in practice (Speedy 2008). Jane Speedy (2008) highlights various ways in which narrative therapy practices may help with developing narratives in research interviews. In particular she emphasizes the use of relational language to enable engagement in the complexity of people's lives. Relational language is language that enables movement away from binary constructs., facilitating conversation that moves back and forth continually between peoples' meanings and intentions and their context and history. Speedy's (2008) detail about the use of Bruner's (1986, 1990, 1991) landscape metaphor (including the landscapes of meaning and action) to describe the storied space that people inhabit is helpful here. Landscapes of action are the stories we tell ourselves and others about events in context, over time. Landscapes of meaning are when they are given or take special meanings and values. This together with Michael White & David Epston's (1990) use of 'scaffolding' questions is helpful. Scaffolding questions enable a:

.. stretching out across these landscapes [of action and meaning] towards the edges of people's zones of proximal development (and expanding the conversation from that which is known and familiar towards that which is possible to know: aspects of the landscape where discoveries can be made and/or forgotten, or 'subjugated' knowledges can be reclaimed).

(Speedy 2008:68).

In terms of developing guidelines for interviews other key people include Riessman (1993; 2008), Elliot Mishler (1986), Steiner Kvale (1996), Wendy Hollway & Tony Jefferson (2000) and Peter Emerson & Stephen Frosh (2004). Key aspects that they identify for this include:

- the use of introductory points followed by a series of open core questions
- the use of open ended questions to open up topics and enable participants to answer in ways that are meaningful for them
- to follow up participants general descriptions with a question such as 'can you remember a particular time when..?' and using the respondent's ordering and phrasing
- the use of probes to explore further e.g. ' can you tell me why that particular moment stands out..?'

It is also noted that despite all that we do to generate narratives they can often come at unexpected times, even in response to fixed questions (Riessman 2008). Thus it is important in the interviews to listen in an emotionally attentive and engaged way, in order to discover participants' narratives and frameworks of understanding (Riessman 2008).

These aspects of narrative interviewing were essential in developing the interviews used in this research. These are discussed in the next chapter.

## **5.6. Analysis of the narratives**

Analysis of narratives has a long history and there are multiple and varied ways of doing this. Vladimir Propp's (1968) analysis of the Russian fairy tale provided an early example of this. Labov (1972; 1982), a key proponent in the development of analysis of narratives, to some extent built on Propp's work.

The process of narrative analysis is the means by which 'the researcher organizes the data elements into a coherent and developmental account' (Polkinghorne 1995: 15). The many approaches to it (Langellier 1989, Chase 2011) include a focus on linguistics (Gee 1991), content (Lieblich et al 1998), narrative form and discursive construction of meaning (Gergen & Gergen 1988; Riessman 1993). Narrative analysis has no single heritage, drawing instead on a wide range of sources (Priest 2000). There is no standardised step guide to conducting it and boundaries between analytic methods often overlap and blur (Riessman 2008). Attempts to develop a hierarchy of approaches to narrative analysis have been resisted (Riessman & Speedy 2006; Holloway & Freshwater 2007). While initially frustrating to novice researchers (Squire 2008; Hunter 2010) such a stance encourages a creative and individual analysis pertinent to the data being interpreted (Holloway & Freshwater 2007). It has been argued that analysis of narratives should be 'a loose, intuitive, artistic and poetic process and should not be viewed as formulaic, prefigured and narrow' (Roberts 2002: 117). In such a way the analysis should accommodate the data as it presents itself, rather than being predetermined. There will be multiple truths within narratives with no one correct reading or interpretation of the text (Josselson & Lieblich 2001).

An open and creative approach to narrative analysis is used in current research. In reviewing key and current work in this field <sup>62</sup> this is commonly the case with researchers developing methods to meet their data as it emerged. Simmonds (2003) for example combined several definitions of narratives including her own to identify and analyse narratives in her interviews with psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists about spirituality within psychoanalysis. Ross (2010) developed a method of thematic narrative analysis as part of his analysis of interviews with psychoanalysts about religion and spirituality. Eun

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<sup>62</sup> This included work retrieved from searches using PsychINFO, and focusing on counsellors/psychotherapists and psychoanalysts and religion/spirituality, and work identified as using a narrative approach in the broad area of religion and spirituality.

Joung (2007), in exploring women's faith development developed a method of narrative analysis based on various qualitative methodologies as well as aspects of a variety of methods of narrative analysis. Other researchers have adopted generic qualitative criteria for analysing narratives. Khalid Alshareef (2005) for example used the general procedure for analysing qualitative data developed by John Cresswell (2003) and presented as a six-stage process, in analysing narratives with older men about their religious beliefs and practices. Sonja Potts (2008) in exploring the religion of therapists used Kerry Chamberlain's (2000) generic criteria for qualitative data to inform and guide the analytic process. The aforementioned research and their respective analytic methods were helpful examples of the adaptation and application of methods of analysis to narratives. I considered the use of their methods for my study but I did not feel that they could be transferred and applied directly to my work. However such work encouraged me in using an open approach to the analysis of the data. This involved trialling a number of approaches as the data was gathered. In turn a method was developed, one that was transparent and clear. This is important, as detail about the process of analysis of narratives, in some research, is thin (c.f. Alshareef 2005 is an example here). The method of analysis of the data is discussed in the next chapter.

## **5.7. Summary**

This chapter has outlined the elements of the research process and demonstrated their congruency and consistency with one another. A rationale has been given for the narrative methodology and why it is appropriate for exploring the area of spirituality with psychodynamic counsellors. The details of the refinement and delivery of the methods will now be presented.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **METHODS; REFINING THE METHODS AND CONDUCTING THE STUDY**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

The rationale for a narrative inquiry for the research has been argued as well as the need for getting much of the data by interview. This chapter explores the development of the methods for obtaining the data for this study. Details of the preparatory study and collection of data for the main study are provided. I discuss the techniques used for analysis of the data.

#### **6.2. Key points from the literature review and initial conversations with colleagues**

Talking with several psychodynamic colleagues prior to the preparatory study reinforced the empirical evidence (Wyatt 2002; Crossley & Salter 2005; King 2009) that spirituality is difficult to think and talk about, particularly if not much prior thought had been given to it. Because I was not seeking experts like other studies (Simmonds 2003; Ross 2010) it was likely that participants would need help in the study to think and talk about spirituality. Whilst narratives are a helpful means of enabling this, these early conversations also indicated that a definition of spirituality would be helpful as a starting point for talking about it.

A further consideration was the need to develop a method of interviewing that would enable narratives to be obtained that would encompass the research questions. These two points were the foci of the preparatory study.

## **6.2 The preparatory study**

In order to help participants to think and talk about spirituality in their practice the use of a journaling tool prior to the interviews was proposed and tested in the preparatory study.

### **6.2.1. The development of the journaling tool**

Gillie Bolton (2010: 128) states that:

Journals are records of experiences, thoughts and feelings about particular aspects of life, or with specific structures. A journal can record anything and in any way, relative to the issue to which it pertains.

The aim of using a journal was to raise participants' awareness of their thinking about spirituality and about it in relation to their psychodynamic practice prior to the interviews. I wanted to develop a method that would help to pull together some of their thinking about a difficult subject so that when they came to be interviewed they had some thoughts that could be explored, developed or contradicted as they explored the subject with me. Reflecting on thoughts and practice is not new; Freud was a prolific writer and reflected on his work regularly through the writing of his thoughts and of letters (McAleer 2004).

Journals are a means to do this since they allow a space for reflection, for knowing ourselves better (Bolton 2010). The use of a diary-interview method is not new following the classic work of Don Zimmerman & Lawrence Wieder (1977). However although there is a large body of applied health and social care research that has used diaries<sup>63</sup> or journals (Elliott 1997) their use in qualitative psychotherapeutic research

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<sup>63</sup> In contrast to journals, which have been defined above, diaries can contain anything, be confidantes, contain stories, hopes; fears, in essence any attendant feelings (Bolton 2010).

is scarce (Mackrill 2008) particularly the use of unsolicited journals. These are journals not seen or analysed by the researcher.

Because of the potentially sensitive and formative nature of the journal content I was keen to ensure that the journals in this study were private with the participant in control of what to share about it. I anticipated new ideas potentially being formed, as well as contradictory and ambivalent ones (Mackrill 2008; Harvey 2011). It thus felt important for the participant to be able to control their exposure about this. Appreciation of the development of new narratives by this method is not new (Meth 2003; Harvey 2011).

I wanted to include a range of journaling exercises in order to give participants variety, and to meet a range of different needs and preferences in ways of thinking about spirituality and psychodynamic practice. For this reason a range of different exercises were included.<sup>64</sup> There were 5 exercises:

- An exercise encouraging less conscious thoughts to surface (writing anything in relation to spirituality and psychodynamic counselling, reflecting on their responses in an unhurried manner)
- A cognitive based exercise (brain storming thoughts around the words 'spirituality' and 'psychodynamic counselling')
- A meditative method (based on the work of Progoff (1992). This is a means of uncovering participants' spiritual positioning)
- A structured reflective model (adapted from Bolton (2010) this is a more conscious approach to reflect on the research subjects)
- An unstructured exercise (sketching or drawing images that participants experience around the research subjects).

These exercises were preceded by a preliminary exercise. This was a six -minute write where participants are encouraged to write whatever

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<sup>64</sup> These are detailed in Appendix 2.

comes into their mind. This approach encourages people to go back to their very first stages of writing without thinking and can enable them to begin to listen properly to some of the different voices within themselves (Bolton 2010).

### **6.2.2. Trialling the journaling tool**

As part of the preparatory study participants were sought to trial the journaling tool. An advert in a local counselling agency led to three participants volunteering. This sample size was seen as sufficient to test the issues identified and manageable in terms of the time and resources available for this phase of the work. This took place following full ethical approval being obtained from the local University Research Ethics Committee. (The ethical considerations for this study are examined in detail in Chapter 7).

I had assumed a level of competency about journaling among the participants since this is a part of their professional training. This assumption was validated. That said the importance of preparing participants well for it (Bolton 2010) was reinforced in the preparatory study; participants valued a verbal outline of the journal guidelines and exercises and a reminder of the optional nature of the exercises.

Based on the work of Holly (1989) and Bolton (2010) I had suggested that participants aimed to journal twice a week for 30 minutes and for a period of 3-4 weeks before being interviewed. This time was also affirmed in the preparatory study. As will be seen in the discussion of the interview method there was a need for a second interview. Participants felt that less time was required for journaling prior to a second interview. They felt that only 2-3 weeks was required since thinking about the subject had been occurring since preparation for the first interview. Participants were given additional journal guidelines in preparation for the second interview (Appendix 2). These were focused



on their counselling practice and reflected the core questions in the second interview.

Participants described the journal as being hard to complete at times in that it evoked a range of feelings some of which felt difficult to manage. Participants were aware of some of their defences and resistances being brought up. These were usefully explored in the interviews. This emphasized the need to manage these potential risks and direct as necessary support for participants for unmanaged forms of distress (this is explored further in Chapter 7).

Partly due to the length of time of journaling and the sometimes large amounts of material participants produced in their journals it was decided to ask participants in the main study to summarise their thinking on a sheet of A4 prior to each interview. This too remained private, belonging to the participants. Summarising their thinking would also encourage a rereading of journals (Bolton 2010), in preparation for the interviews. In all cases in the preparatory study the journal was experienced as a helpful way of preparing for the interviews.

### **6.2.3. The development of the interview method**

With regard to developing the method of interviewing there were two key issues that needed exploring in the preparatory study. The first was the need to develop guidelines that ensured a breadth and openness to the research area yet would also ensure that the research questions were covered within a reasonable time. The second was the need to consider whether more than one interview was needed. In practice these issues were interlinked.

Further thinking about the guidelines for the interviews highlighted that time would be needed to obtain both participants' understanding of and engagement with spirituality in practice. It was thus decided to trial a two interview method. This would also enable any possible omissions,

inconsistencies or contradictions in narratives to be followed up (Hollway & Jefferson 2000). A second interview would also help participants to reflect on the interview (Kvale 1996) and to follow up points if they want this.

### **6.2.3.1. The interview guidelines**

In terms of the guidelines for the interviews I decided to use a series of core questions. In developing these it became clear that the first interview could focus on participants' understandings of spirituality in their practice and the second interview on their engagement with it in practice.

The preparatory study enabled the refinement of the core questions. For the first interview in the main study they were:

- can you tell me about your understanding of psychodynamic counselling and how you have come to this understanding?
- can you tell me what you are writing about with regard to spirituality and how you came to this understanding? How does it fit with the definition that I have given you?
- can you tell me your thinking with regard to spirituality and psychodynamic counselling? What are the points of fit? What are the points of tension?
- can you talk about how this impacts on your counselling practice? Can you talk about particular examples here and of particular experiences of spiritual issues, concepts and content in your work?
- is there anything that you have excluded talking about that you have been writing about? Can you talk about that?

The first question was felt to be one that participants could answer with ease and thus enable them to settle into the interview and find their voice (Riessman 2008).

The core questions for the second interview in the main study were:

- In terms of client work do you have any particular reflections from thinking about this in your journal?
- Have you experienced any explicit spiritual issues relating to you or your clients? What is your understanding of these? What is your understanding of these psychodynamically?
- what has been your experience of spiritual issues, concepts, experiences and/or content in your counselling work?
- was there an absence of spiritual issues, concepts, experiences and/or content in your counselling work for you and/or your clients? If so how do you understand this?
- any other thoughts, unexplained experiences that you would like to comment on e.g. countertransference or unusual experiences?

These questions were derived and refined from initial explorations in the field, reviewing the literature and the preparatory study itself.

The core questions prevented me falling into the conventional assumption of social science research where the researcher asks the questions and reports are obtained rather than stories (Chase 2011) and highlighted my role as both questioner and listener and the role of participant as respondent and narrator (Bell 1999). This process also enabled one supervisor (SR) to review my interviewing skills via the transcripts and to provide feedback. This was useful and developmental in that this was a new form of interviewing for me. This review continued into the early part of the main study.

There were additional elements to each interview. In the first interview after the core questions had been addressed I asked about the participants' experiences of journaling, in recognition of its potential developmental impact (Bolton 2010; Harvey 2011). I also asked about the reasons for taking part in the study, as a factor for consideration in the analysis of the data. The final section included in the first interview was an administrative element where demographic details were

collected, journal guidelines for the second interview given and explained and a date for the second interview arranged.

The opening format of the second interview was slightly different in that it enabled participants to pick up anything arising from the first interview. Three sections followed the core questions in the second interview. One section asked again about their experiences of journaling in this part of the study and how it may have impacted on them. A question asking about their experiences of being involved in the study was also included here. This was followed by an opportunity to offer any other comments in relation to the study. The final section was an administrative one where demographic information and contact details were checked so that transcripts and final reports could be sent to participants. The two interviews for each participant were treated as a pair, jointly forming each participant's narrative.

Undertaking two interviews with each participant in the preparatory study demonstrated the need and value of two interviews for not only obtaining the narratives but also providing the means for each participant to fully express themselves across the research questions.

The preparatory study enabled a robust method of gathering narratives to be developed and provided a means of enhancing my skills in narrative interviewing. This process resulted in the main study being approached with confidence. Data collection for the main study began in January 2011, and was completed in January 2012.

### **6.3. The main study**

This section details how the main study was conducted. This includes the recruitment of the participants, meeting with them and the interview process.

### **6.3.1. Selecting an area for the study and sampling**

There were limitations in selecting an area for the study in terms of the resources and time available with a part-time doctoral study. Because of this I decided to focus on places that I could realistically reach within a day and thus focused on anywhere within a radius of 50 miles of my home. This covers a diverse population with multiple psychodynamic counsellors potentially available.

In terms of participants the requirements for taking part in the study were that they saw themselves as psychodynamic counsellors primarily and were willing and able to undertake the methodological requirements. I wanted to ensure a breadth to the sample and whilst not aiming for a representative sample the aim was to select a relevant range of counsellors in relation to the wider universe of them (Mason 2002). I wanted to ensure that a range of participants with different spiritual positions and understandings were included in the sample to enable differences to be explored. So rather than taking people on a first come first served basis I aimed for a purposive form of sampling. The aim was also to include a range of counselling agencies in the research in recognition of the broader social and organizational impacts on counsellors and their understandings.

Initially adverts were sent to a national counselling and psychotherapy journal and to members of a city wide psychotherapeutic society (Appendix 3). The advert was also sent to two counselling agencies, one secular and one religious. The latter was in the same county as the researcher and known as a psychodynamic Christian counselling agency and the other selected during a web site search of psychodynamic, non-religious based counselling agencies within the area covered for the study. In both cases the organization was contacted first and consent obtained prior to the advert being emailed or displayed. No participants were obtained from these counselling agencies.

### **6.3.1.1. The recruitment of participants**

In terms of the recruitment of participants to the study the sequential nature of this will be described and explanations for decisions made about sampling given. The first two participants who volunteered themselves, Andrew and Brian both had a religious faith though they had very different working environments. They responded to an advert in a psychotherapeutic society bulletin. The third participant, Janet, who also had a religious faith offered herself following seeing an advert for the study in the same society, and a conversation with me.

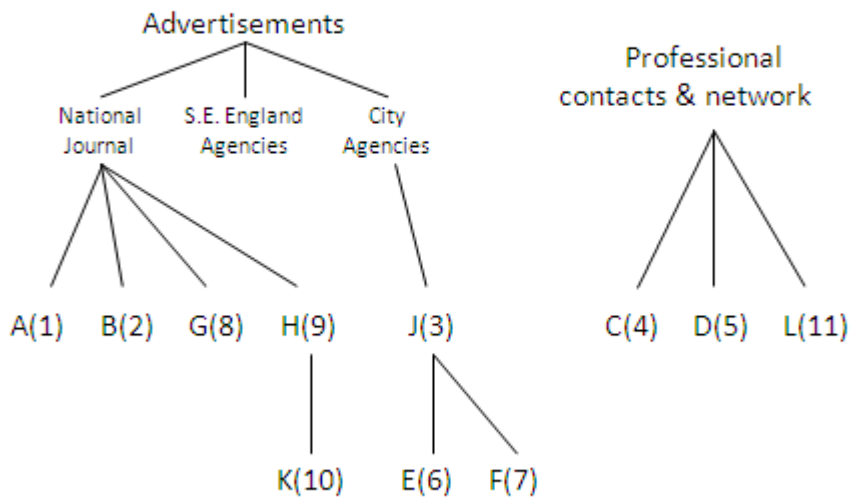
In order to broaden the sample I approached two further participants who had spoken with me about the study both of whom I knew professionally. One was an atheist, Deborah, with an interest in the study and the other, Chris, a person with a deep interest in spirituality. I felt that both participants offered alternative perspectives to those already taking part in the study.

By this point although I had a range of participants with differing work environments I was keen to expand further the breadth of spiritual positions that they held. I adopted a snowballing approach (Mason 2002) to sampling by asking participants for anyone that they knew who may be interested in the study, were psychodynamic counsellors but who did not have a religious faith. Janet offered two contacts. I made contact after she had sought permission from them for me to do this. This resulted in recruiting Elizabeth, an atheist and Frank, an agnostic.

Two further participants identified themselves from the national journal. Both of these had faith positions and very different working environments, George and Hazel. On meeting Hazel she informed me of a colleague of hers who wanted to take part in the study. This resulted in recruiting Kathleen. All three participants were interested in research in this area having either completed some research recently or were in the process of doing it.

The final participant, Leonard, was obtained following a discussion about the study, as part of a professional discussion, and his subsequent interest and desire to take part. His spiritual position was a point of difference to others in the sample and thus added further breadth to the sample. The progress of recruitment to the study is summarised below in Diagram 1:

Recruitment of qualitative sample



NB: Numbers indicate order of recruitment

I adopted a phased strategy in the work not only to enable a breadth of sample but also for managing the workload. I wanted to allow enough time to listen to the first interview prior to the second one taking place and to have a sense of their understanding before seeking new participants. Ensuring effective management and pacing of the study was not only a means of safeguarding participants but of ensuring that the data was useful and usable (Bond 2004).

### **6.3.2. Meeting the participants**

Having made initial contact with participants, mainly by email, they were sent information about the study (Appendix 1) prior to meeting me. All participants were given the option to meet with me to discuss the study prior to agreeing to take part in it. They all took up this opportunity. In all but three cases I met participants in their place of work. I met one person on University premises since this was more convenient for her and one participant at their home as this was most helpful for them. Safety precautions were taken in terms of checking out the contact details of participants and their workplaces, and texting a supervisor prior to and following the interviews. I met one participant in a public place. This was because there was no known place at a mutually convenient meeting point. We settled on the interviews taking place in the foyer area of a large hotel in Central London. The impact of this and the challenges of ensuring a safe space for the interview, in a public place, are addressed in Chapter 12.

In order to enable as fully informed consent as possible I explained the study and its requirements. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions that they had about the study. Written consent was obtained from all of them (Appendix 4). The journal and how to use it was described at the first meeting.

### **6.3.3. Undertaking the interviews**

The first interview for each participant took place 3-4 weeks after they had started journaling. The second interview took place 2-3 weeks after the first interview. As mentioned the primary focus of the first interview was to explore counsellors' understanding of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling and the primary focus of the second one was to explore their experiences of working with spirituality in their



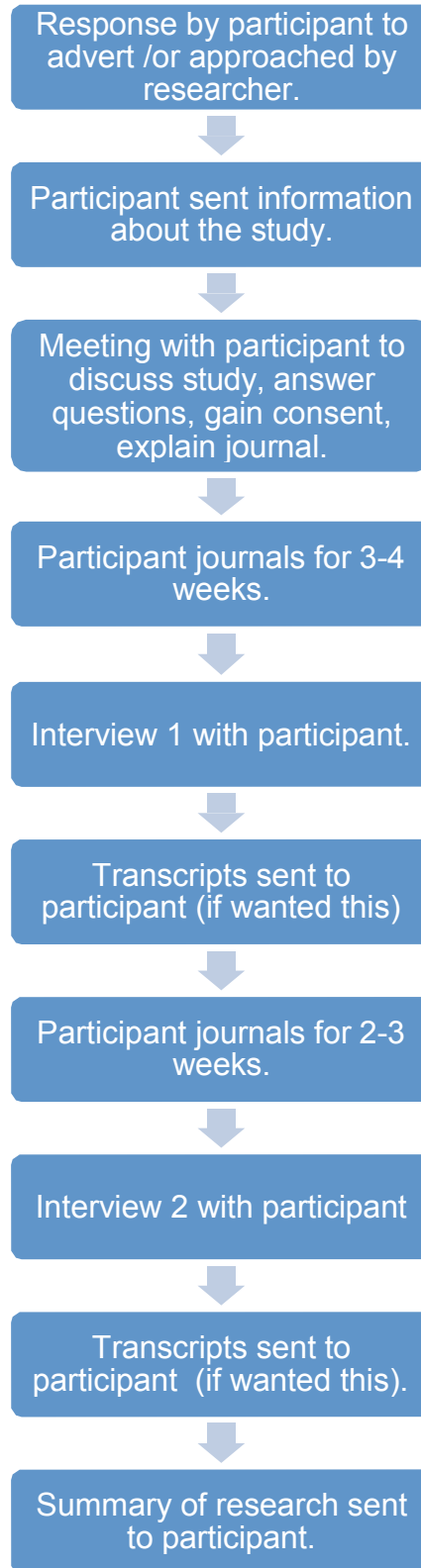
clinical practice. Although this broadly worked in principle there were inevitably overlaps between topics in the first and second interviews.

I adopted a flexible approach in the ordering of the questions in the interview since the aim was to ensure that I was emotionally attentive and engaged with the participant rather than concerned with the specific wording and ordering of the questions (Riessman 2008). It is important to move to the rhythm and uniqueness of each participant, being fully present in the interview (Swinton & Mowat 2006). In such a way I was able to manage the confusion and contradictions experienced in the work as participants explored their understandings and uncertainties in this area. As the study progressed my confidence in doing this increased. I felt engaged in the interviews, seeking points of clarification and exploration of areas of uncertainty. In this sense I was aware how data analysis had begun during the interviews (Kvale 1996; Simmonds 2003). Interviewing was a time and energy consuming process. Notes were taken of these encounters both immediately after the interview and on subsequent days following them.

In order to assist in the transcription and storing of data, interviews were recorded onto a digital recorder. A recording on an audio micro cassette was also obtained as a backup.

A summary of the process of data collection from participants is presented overleaf

**Diagram 2. Summary of the process of data collection from each participant.**



## **6.4. Data analysis**

Each participant in this study is seen as a separate case. Thus this study is a form of case based inquiry <sup>65</sup> (Riessman 2008). A case based narrative approach enables the many sided, complex and conflicting stories of participants to be uncovered and explored (Riessman 2008). The following section explores the development of the process of analysis used in the study.

### **6.4.1. The analytic method**

Overall there were two main stages in the analysis: first the interpretation of 'getting inside' each participant's narrative, and second the creation of a super-ordinate interpretive researcher's narrative (Josselson 1995). Before detailing these stages it is important to be reminded that I took a holistic approach to the analysis whereby the narrative is taken as a whole and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative (Lieblich et al 1998).

In order to answer the research questions I decided to undertake both a thematic and genre analysis of the narratives. The former focuses on the content answering the question of what is being said in the narratives and the latter addresses how understandings are constructed (Riessman 2008). It was important to include the analysis of genres as this shows how participants approach their understandings and practice of spirituality, helping to uncover the complexities and challenges of this process. Such a combined approach to the analysis of the data is more likely to be productive (Lieblich et al 1998). It felt comprehensive in that all aspects of the research questions were addressed. This approach required several steps and these together with the preparation of the data are explored below.

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<sup>65</sup> This is distinct from case study research that is 'a form of inquiry that seeks to make sense of all aspects of a case, as a thing in itself' (McLeod 2011: 227).

#### **6.4.2. Stage 1. The interview narrative – getting inside the personal narratives**

There were several stages in this process:

- Transcription of the interviews
- Immersion in the data and stance taken in the analysis
- Organization of the data through identifying life as lived
- Holistic content analysis- identifying themes
- Holistic form analysis – identifying form or genres

Although there was overlap in these stages in practice for clarity they will be explored separately.

#### **Transcription of interviews**

Transcription of each interview commenced as soon as was reasonably possible after it had taken place. Analysis of data occurs at this point, at transcription, since it is interpretive in its very essence (Mishler 1991).

Transcripts are a partial representation of talk and as such are a transformation (Mishler 1986: 48) or reconstruction (Lapadat & Lindsey 1999). Transcribing was a time consuming and arduous process and there was a need to re-listen to the tape to pick up transcribing errors. This was essential work because the need for well-prepared scripts for narrative analysis is widely acknowledged (Lapadat 2000; Riessman 2008).

There is no universal form of transcription suitable for all research situations (Riessman 2008). I made some decisions about transcribing in advance that is that I, as the researcher, would be included in the transcript, since I understood the interviews as co-constructed, and that line numbers for the whole narrative would be included to enable easy reference to the text. However other than this I followed Judith Lapadat

(2000) and evolved the transcription conventions as I undertook the transcribing.

I needed some detail in the transcripts to 'hear' how participants spoke and so transcribed main sounds in the recordings as well as the words. This included pauses and full stops where it felt that sentences or talk on topics ended. The repeated listening and rereading of the data led to different ways of understanding it (Mishler 1986) and enabled conscious analysis of the data to develop. It was during this process that I began to identify various forms of stories within the narrative, those that were clearly bounded, those that were not and those that were in smaller forms (Georgakopoulou 2006). This helped with identifying the narrative elements of the interviews for inclusion in analysis of the data.

### **Immersion in the data and stance taken in the analysis**

The necessity of repeated listening and immersion in the data cannot be overstated and is essential in enabling the 'processes of incubation, uncertainty and chaos, discovery and critical appraisal to take place' (McLeod 2001: 135). I recognized that the processes of collection and analysis of data are very active ones to begin with. My primary approach to the data was to listen and to read without any special attention, until a pattern emerged (Lieblich et al 1998). I initially took an empathetic stance to the data similar to Paul Ricoeur's (1970) hermeneutics of faith position<sup>66</sup> and then bore in mind his hermeneutics of suspicion position. Doing this enabled me to get involved with the data and the participant, and to have an objective stance to it. This helped me to observe myself and the participant, from a reflexive standpoint. By so doing I sought to reduce the distance between the knower and known (Holloway & Freshwater 2007). I retained a position of reflexive curiosity in the hope of 'getting inside what is going on' (Potts 2008: 107).

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<sup>66</sup> A hermeneutics of faith position assumes that the participant is an expert in their experience and a hermeneutics of suspicion position involves a critical engagement with the text with the assumption that experience is not assumed to be transparent to itself (Ricoeur 1970).

The use of computer programmes was considered for analysing the narratives and training on NVivo 09 was undertaken to enable this. However as this progressed there was a concern that it would drive the process rather than facilitate it. Although useful for grouping and managing some data I experienced feeling distanced from the data at times. Transcripts felt more 'real' and it felt important not to lose physical interaction with it (Balamoutsou 2002). I also experienced more freedom and creativity of thought with this more manual process. As is typical in an hermeneutic approach I began to move back and forth between the whole text and detailed parts of it.

### **Organising the data through differentiating life as lived data from life as narrated data**

Because of the desire for a realistic breadth and depth in the sample, as anticipated, a large volume of data was generated. In order to help organise this I separated out life as lived data from life as narrated (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal 2004). This enabled a separation of actual events in participants' lives from their experiences of them over time. This helped with developing an initial introduction and sense of each participant, described in Chapter 8.

### **Holistic thematic analysis- identifying themes**

The holistic thematic approach focuses on the whole narrative and the content presented by it, and the meanings inherent in it. The steps that were involved in this were an amalgam of the work of Amia Lieblich et al (1998), Wilfram Fischer- Rosenthal & Gabriele Rosenthal (2004) and Immy Holloway & Dawn Freshwater (2007).

This process began with the repeated rereading and re-listening to the tapes. During this process patterns in the data began to emerge. I began

making notes of reflections, thoughts, and queries. I focused on the themes around the research questions. I read the themes that were emerging separately and repeatedly, determining nuances by re-listening to the tapes. These were noted on a separate A4 sheet of paper that had three columns; one for themes, one for the line numbers of the text relating to each theme and one for notes and thoughts, as they arose in this part of the process (See Appendix 5 for an example of this). I was alert to keep track of themes in the narratives.

Themes were identified in 'big' and 'small' stories (Georgakopoulou 2006). The identification of these stories in the early stage of the analysis helped with this process.

In identifying themes it was also important to consider the context of the interview including my experience of being with the participant. My notes about this were used in this part of the analytical process. In addition I was mindful to compare the two interviews for each participant for points of consistency, inconsistency or contradiction.

Each interview generated several pages of possible themes in the data. It was a time consuming process and in addition to specifically identifying the themes in each narrative and how they may relate to one another I kept my thinking open to the research questions using my journal to record my thoughts.

The next stage was the grouping of themes together on separate A4 sheets to enable a building up and clarity of themes. The format was similar to the sheets used in the initial stage of analysis in that there were three columns: one to contain the line numbers of the text relating to a theme, a column to note the theme and a column for notes and how themes may relate to other themes. A further summarising process took place after this detailing a summary of themes in each narrative with core sentences and ideas that were located specifically in the narratives.

The final part of this process was summarising the themes in relation to

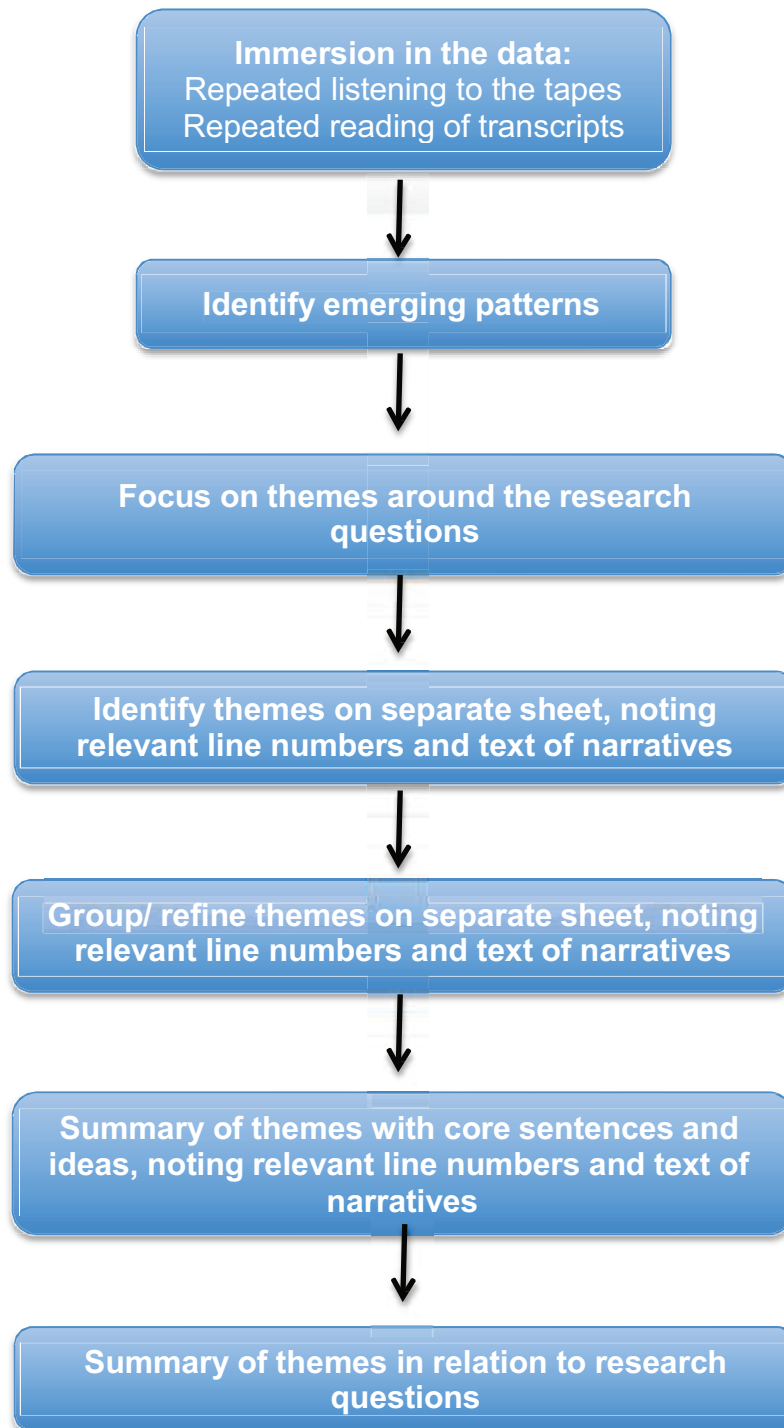
the research questions that is counsellors' understanding of spirituality, their understanding of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling and the impact of this on their practice.

Through this process main themes were identified representing the core of the narratives. This method ensured a focus on the sequencing and progression of themes within interviews (Andrews et al 2013). It enabled core sentences and ideas to be identified and linked with each theme. This makes the findings highly auditable (Holloway & Freshwater 2007). It also meant that participants' voices were represented clearly and with a minimum of overlay and gloss (Simmonds 2003). Multiple and conflicting perspectives were reported which in the context of understanding of narratives in this study was seen as enriching and not diminishing.

This analytic method also meant that I was able to interpret and theorise from the whole narrative and its meaning rather than breaking it down into categories and stripping the narratives of their sequence and plot (Squire 2008). It resulted in the beginnings of a map of the narrative construction of their subjective realities. A summary of this particular process is shown in Diagram 3.



**Diagram 3. Summary of the process for identification of themes**



## **Holistic form analysis – identifying form or genres**

Holistic form analysis also focuses on the whole narrative but it explores it in terms of its plot or structure. It focuses more on the 'telling' of the narrative (Riessman 2008). The methods developed in this study to identify the forms or genres of the narratives were influenced by Lieblich et al (1998), Squire (2007) and Riessman (2008). This was done separately from identifying the themes in the narrative although when thoughts about genres occurred during the analysis of themes they were noted and vice versa. Genres have distinctive styles and structures and pull us into the teller's point of view. They thus help with understanding how people make sense in their narratives (Riessman 2008).

Genres or particular narrative styles commonly identified in literary works have been identified in empirical research: Patricia Stevens & B. Doerr (1997) for example found three types of narrative in interviews with women identified as HIV positive: epiphany, confirmation, calamity. These forms and genres were useful for thinking in this part of the analysis.

The first stage in this part of the process is the identification of the thematic focus of the development of the plot. The thematic focus is important here only in as far as it provides raw material for the structure. While themes may develop the interest for this part of the analysis is on the specific form and direction taken by the theme for example is it a narrative of progress, decline or stability (Lieblich et al 1998). So rather than a focus on the themes and plots themselves the focus is on the structure and how themes and plots develop around this. Initial thoughts were made on the A4 sheets of paper that were used for the first stage of the thematic analysis.

The second stage of identifying the genres of the narratives is to identify the dynamics of the plot that can be inferred from particular forms of speech. This includes reflections on specific phases in participants' lives

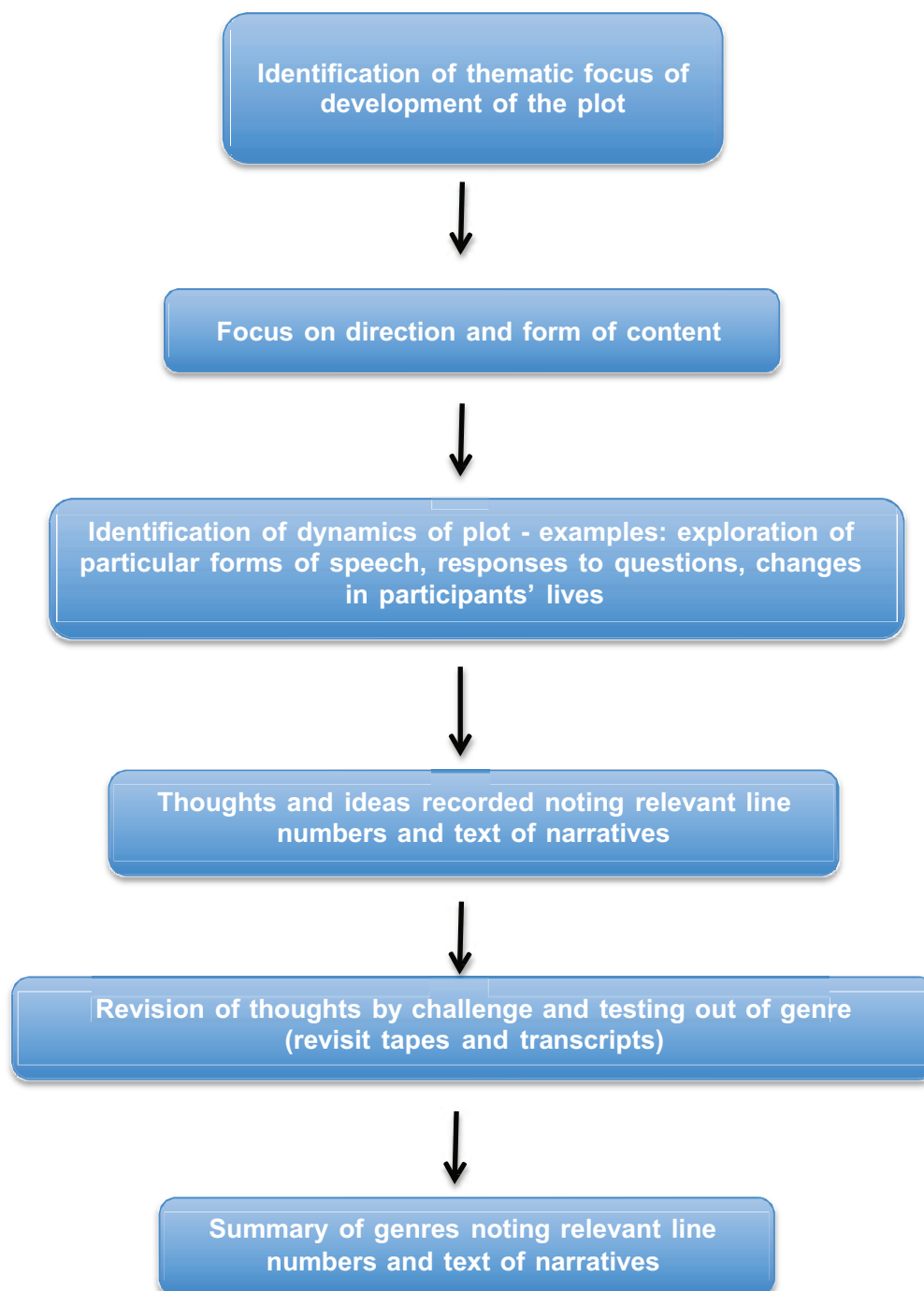
to evaluative comments about their whole life for example a Cinderella-type story. It also includes responses to questions about changes and decisions in peoples' lives (Lieblich et al 1998). They were noted onto A4 sheets of paper together with the initial thoughts noted on the first reading for genres. These notes were then used to test out and challenge identification of the genres. A third summary sheet was used to summarise the genres with accompanying line references to identify the text associated with them.

This approach to analysis was less direct and accessible than the identification of themes in the data and it was not always easy to separate out the form or genre from the content of the story. Indeed some view form as embodiment of its content (Lieblich et al 1998). However despite some of the complexities in this process it contributed to reflecting the richness of the data in the analysis. Undertaking both forms of analysis (content and genre) widens the understanding of each participant and their understanding of spirituality in psychodynamic counselling.

My perceptions and experiences of the data were crucial throughout the study but particularly at this stage. It was important to be active in the process of analysis. At times this generated feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity and an 'unknowability of things' (McLeod 2011: 10). I was aware of the need to draw on this in order to be fully open to the data. I also became aware of the need for a time of 'stepping away' from the data at times, of incubation. Incubation has been argued to be critical in analysis and interpretation (Moustakas 1990; Braud & Anderson 1998; Freshwater 1998; Balamoutsou 2002). These authors suggest that a period of incubation invites the creative process to work, while the researcher is in a restful state of being and doing nothing (Holloway & Freshwater 2007). As the analysis continued I came to increasingly value this. In addition to this I also used mind maps that I found as a creative and playful means of analysing and linking the data. This

together with keeping analytic notes and journaling were essential in moving the analysis on to stage two, that of developing a theorised interpretation of the research. A summary of the process for the identification of genres is presented in Diagram 4.

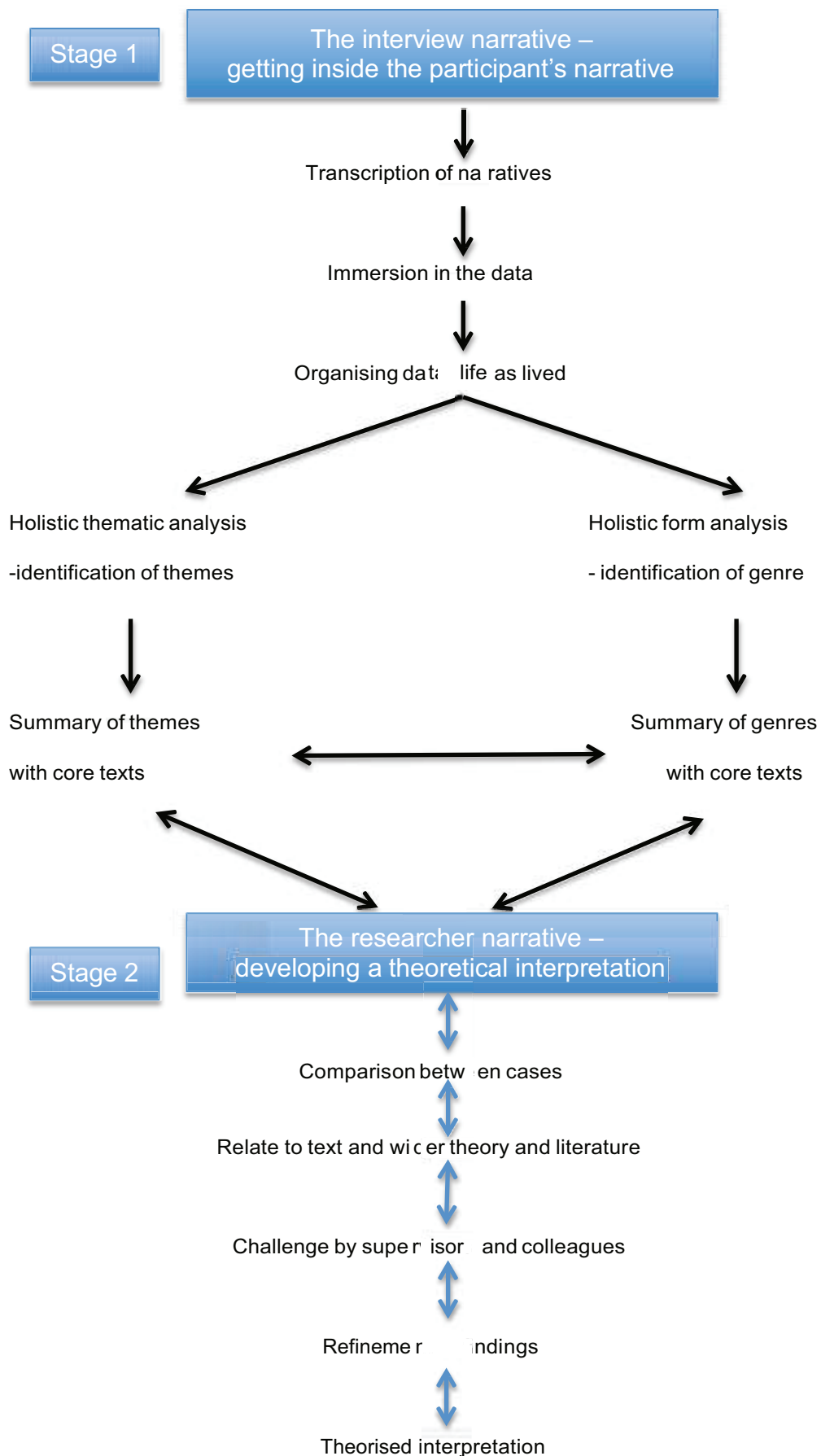
**Diagram 4. Summary of the process for identification of genres**



### **6.4.3. Stage 2. The research narrative; developing a theorised interpretation**

Developing a theorised interpretation began as the analysis proceeded. I sought to develop theoretical perspectives that while not generalizable had the potential to move beyond the particularities of this research. The summary sheets of themes and genres for each participant were helpful in developing this by enabling a more systematic analysis. Themes and genres addressing the research areas could be easily located and compared across participants. The recording of line numbers of text for each theme and genre enabled easy checking with transcripts. Comparisons between cases were made with similarities, differences and contradictions noted. These notes were made on separate sheets of paper using a similar three column format: one for noting line numbers of text, one for main themes, genres and findings and one for notes and thoughts about this. I maintained a position of curiosity about the 'how' and 'why' of the findings, seeking answers both within the text and in the wider theory and literature, with interplay between them. This enables theorising to incorporate both findings of the study and the wider theory literature. In addition to my critical stance, my colleagues and supervisors challenged the emerging findings and analytical thinking. Through such processing themes and genres were reduced to enable participants' constructions of their understandings of spirituality within their practice to be reported with clarity and theorised interpretations made. This did not necessarily mean coherence in narratives as conflicting themes within participants emerged but such differences and contradictions could be identified and explored. This produced the research narrative. The overriding aim was to be clear in my presentation of the analysis of participants' narratives while at the same time enabling their stories to be heard and empathised with (Holloway & Freshwater 2007). A summary of the method of analysis of the narratives is represented in Diagram 5, and a more detailed framework of the stages of data analysis is presented in Appendix 6.

**Diagram 5. Summary of method of analysis of narratives**



## **6.5. Summary**

This chapter explored the development of the methods used to generate counsellors' narratives, including the use of journals prior to interviews. The sampling approach and methods resulted in a range of narratives being obtained providing a very rich source of data that contributed to addressing the research aims and questions. The methods of data analysis were examined. The importance of rigour and reflexivity to this study is explored in the next chapter and the need to remain ethically mindful throughout it.

## CHAPTER 7

### RIGOUR, REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICAL MINDFULNESS

#### 7.1. Introduction

In all research there is a need to ensure that it can be trusted, is authentic and valid, and that others can use it in further work in this area (MacLeod 2011). In order to achieve this, rigour, reflexivity and ethical mindfulness were central to this study. The ways in which these were each attained will be discussed.

#### 7.2. Rigour in qualitative research

This section presents an overview of the concept of the need for rigour and how it was implemented. Yvonne Lincoln & Egon Guba (1985: 290), in their classic work on naturalistic inquiry, describe the basic question of qualitative rigour as:

How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?

Whilst strict adherence to frameworks for rigour has been challenged (Schwandt 1996; Morse et al 2002) it is important for this research to demonstrate credibility and authenticity in its reporting and for it to be trusted if it is to impact and contribute to professional debate and development (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

The traditional criteria of methodological competence and validity have been formulated by positivism. This paradigm has established its terminology as the language of research as a whole (Kvale 1995).



However because of fundamental differences in their philosophical bases it is not often seen as applicable to qualitative research.

The debate about what criteria and terminology should be used to address reliability and validity in qualitative research has existed for some time. Some argue for the translation of reliability and validity of positivism into different terms thought to be more applicable to the qualitative field (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Altheide & Johnson 1994; Morse 1999; Morse et al 2002) and to narratives in particular (Chase 2005; Riessman 2008). Lincoln & Guba (1985) for example provided a model addressing four components of trustworthiness: truth-value (credibility), applicability (transferability); consistency (dependability); and neutrality (confirmability). They popularized the term trustworthiness and later authenticity (Guba & Lincoln 1989), claiming them as the standard for qualitative research. In so doing they 'reconceptualised' validity (Smith 1998).

The most widely cited set of guidelines within the field of counselling and psychotherapy is that by Robert Elliot et al (1999). Although very useful they equally open up a number of questions about the nature of criteria that can be used for assessing the validity of research. The criteria in the first section of Elliot et al's guidelines read 'very much as an importation of positivist or natural science assumptions about knowledge into the field of qualitative research' (McLeod 2011: 270). As has been mentioned, the appropriateness of positivist assumptions for narratives has to be questioned since narratives do not establish the truth of events or experiences indeed the same event can be reported in widely varying ways depending on the values, interests and aims of the narrator (Spence 1982; Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

In considering rigour in this study I sought to establish criteria applicable to the study and to be as clear as possible about this. I used the guidelines by Lincoln & Guba and fed into this framework

recommendations offered by Riessman (2008) and McLeod (2011). It is of note that measures used in ensuring one aspect of trustworthiness can also be useful in ensuring other aspects; it is the measures taken to enable all four aspects noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that trustworthiness is achieved.

For this study the following was undertaken:

**Credibility**, or the extent to which the research represents the social reality of participants and the meanings they have in it. This was achieved through enabling an accurate description and interpretation of the work, particularly through reflexivity and reflection and the use of the research diary.<sup>67</sup> This included explicitly describing the development of the research methods and epistemology, and their appropriateness to the research aims, documenting the sources used in the work and being clear about the evidence and how pieces are critically related to each other (Riessman 2008). Explanation and selection of an appropriate sample and size were also important here. I involved others in the data analysis, interpretation and analytical thinking to enable consideration of competing and alternative interpretations of the data. This included a fellow PhD student familiar with the methodology, the concept of spirituality and who is a psychotherapist, and the other was a supervisor of the work (SR). Their help was with reduced data sets to ensure full exploration of themes and that themes were not missed rather than the actual coding of the data.

I did not seek coherence<sup>68</sup> in representing counsellors' narratives but rather sought coexisting realities; selves and communities that are

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<sup>67</sup> Further detail is given on the use of research diaries in this study in the next section on rigour and reflexivity.

<sup>68</sup> Coherence here is in the sense of a narrative hanging together neatly, with few gaps or inconsistencies (Riessman 2008) Although it has been argued that text based coherence is a helpful way of demonstrating trustworthiness (Agar & Hobbs 1982) there have been more recent challenges to this with the recognition of multiple and contradictory aspects in narratives; Langer (1991) in his work with Holocaust testimonies, and others such as Frosh (2007) identified incoherence in testimonies,

pulling together and pulling apart at the same time. While coherence is important in interpretation Riessman (2008: 190) notes that Lawrence Langer (1991) is also right in that:

we need to search for the inner principles of incoherence that make these [survivor] testimonies accessible to us.

Making sense analytically of these tensions thus supports trustworthiness.

Although it has been argued that the credibility of a study can be increased by taking the results back to participants, to check if the researcher's reconstructions are seen as adequate representations (Lincoln & Guba 1985), it was discounted in this study. Taking results to participants can be argued to be politically and ethically important and essential in empowering their corroboration. However it may be illusory; Riessman (2008) for example notes that a lot of time may have passed between an interview and their full analysis and salient issues may not be so several months later. McLeod (2011) while acknowledging the potential benefits of member checking equally argues that this is extremely hard to do in a satisfactory way. Using the work of Michael Bloor (1997) he highlights the difficulties as including: how hard it can be to engage participants in the task of reading a report closely and some participants may be explicit about their disagreement but be motivated by considerations other than scientific criteria such as defending their work position. I decided that it would be more effective to initiate discussion about the research at the end of the interviews. The usefulness of asking participants about their experiences of the interviews was recognized (Kvale & Brinkman 2009) and the possibility of sharing tentative conclusions and themes at this time was valued. It became clear during this part of the interview that participants were helped to understand spirituality in psychodynamic counselling in new

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arguing that this reflects fragmented lives and is important to maintain in order to understand others more fully.

ways, in itself evidence of authenticity and catalytic validity (Stiles 1993). Participants were also offered a copy of the transcripts and invited to comment on them both during the interviews and afterwards via email and by phone. Details of these and their experiences of the interview process are included in Chapter 12.

**Transferability** (or the use of the findings in a wider population). In order to achieve this I aimed to be as detailed and open as possible in my reflexivity and writing up of the work, ensuring enough detail to contextualize the study. The use of the research diary was important here. This was a means to record my thoughts, feelings and experiences in the research. It was an important tool as is described in the next section. As recommended by McLeod (2011), from the outset I sought to consider issues around replicability.

In qualitative research it is not the researcher's responsibility to generalise but to provide a thick<sup>69</sup> and accurate description (Swinton & Mowat 2006). It is through this that it is possible to explore the transferability of a study. The concepts of identification and resonance (Swinton & Mowat 2006) were useful in considering the possibility of transferability of this study to other contexts. Some experience of identification and resonance were experienced on talking about initial findings with professional colleagues who worked in other contexts and who I met at conferences.<sup>70</sup> In this way a claim to some degree of transferability is made; the study raised issues and insights beyond the particularities of this study and beyond the immediate research context.

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<sup>69</sup> I sought a thick level of description (Geertz 1973; Shenhav 2005). A thin level relates to the detail about events and situations and their order of appearance in the text. A thick description is one where the relationship between content and process of the narrative is central to the analytic process (Geertz 1973).

<sup>70</sup> This included BACP Research conference, British Association of the Study of Spirituality conferences and the then APSCC conferences (now named BACP Spirituality).

**Dependability** (or the consistency of accuracy of the study). I worked to provide enough information to ensure that researchers and readers can follow my decision trail, through clear and rigorous reflexivity and the writing up of the study.

**Confirmability** (the qualitative counterpart to construct validity). This was achieved largely through reflexivity and reflection to help with interpretations and new insights, and through the meeting of the previous conditions. I sought to clearly document my claims for the reader as well as detail both the contexts of the interviews and as much of the transcripts and working with them as is possible in the thesis. This was not without problems in that due to the length of the narratives in my data I often had to illustrate it with short extracts. Such an approach can lead to reader scepticism since:

illustrative short text sections can usually be 'read' in ways that contrast with the often large and rich interpretations offered

(Squire 2008: 35).

I sought to offset this with detailed accounts of interpretive procedures and of an example given in the appendices of interview material and its analysis.

Guba & Lincoln (1989) added authenticity as a concept essential to rigour. Authenticity is achieved when the research is adequate, fair and just to participants, when their ideas are fairly presented and when participants and readers have better insight into their own problems and are empowered to improve their situation (Erlandson et al. 1993). Elements assisting here were the rigorous processes required for ethical approval and the clarity and transparency about decision-making and analytical thinking in the research process. The research process and the generation of narratives helped participants make more sense of themselves with regard to spirituality and helped to identify and empower

them to follow up appropriate support and interests as required. This is explored further in the discussion chapter.

It is through such processes that I sought to demonstrate integrity and good research governance and practice (Sandelowski 1993; Elliott et al 1999; Thomas & Magilvy 2011).

### **7.1.1. Reflexivity and rigour**

Reflexivity is central to qualitative research (Denzin 1997). Indeed for some it is seen as perhaps *the* most crucial dimension of it (Swinton & Mowat 2006). The development of qualitative research highlighted the myth of neutrality, the position where the researcher writes as if positioned from a 'neutral' or absent' stance to the text (Charmaz & Mitchell 1997). Reflexivity is defined as:

the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings.

(Swinton & Mowat 2006: 59)

It involves the researcher constantly taking stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subjecting these to the same critical review as the rest of the data. A reflexive approach enables the researcher to acknowledge and make apparent how they and the research are influenced by their own knowledge, experiences and position in the world (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). The reflexive researcher thus has a very active role, one that involves thinking and acting in ways that are both situated and contextual as well as strategic (Mason 2002).

The use of narratives in research demands a high level of reflexivity (Holloway & Freshwater 2007) and the need for this to be ongoing in nature and not ad hoc has been well argued (Lieblich et al 1998; Mason

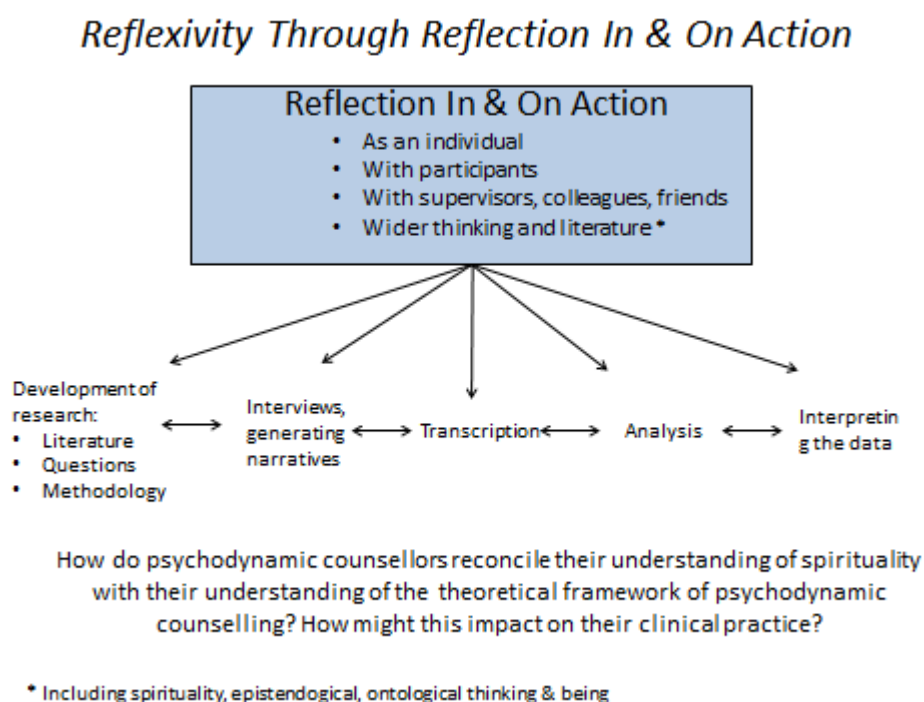
2002; Etherington 2004; Clandinin 2007; Speedy 2008; Simons 2009). Reflexivity is increasingly being used in counselling, psychotherapy and psychoanalytic research (Etherington 2004; Jenkins 2006; Speedy 2008; Ross 2010).

The idea of reflexive practice is not new (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). It first entered the field of research with the second publication of William Whyte's (1943) ethnographic study *Street Corner Society*. However its roots are rather complex originating from a mix of 'post-traditional' cultural and social changes and philosophical critiques (McLeod 2011). As a result of these multiple influences and origins it is a hotly contested construct and a confusing topic (Lynch 2000; Speedy 2008) with researchers from different epistemologies having very different ideas about what is meant by reflecting on personal experiences (Lynch 2000).

Carla Willig (2001) suggests two types of reflexivity: personal and epistemological. Personal reflexivity involves reflecting on the ways in which our own values, experiences, beliefs and wider aims in social life have influenced the research as well as how the research may have changed or influenced us. Epistemological reflexivity is seen as reflecting on assumptions made about how we see the world and the nature of knowledge, and the implications of this on the research and its findings. Kenneth Gergen & Mary Gergen (1991) alternatively outline a social constructionist approach to reflexivity, as the researcher thinking outwards into the area of shared languages and understanding. Such an approach helps militate against an overemphasis on subjectivity and legitimized emoting (Finlay 1998). Whilst I can understand the sentiments behind Finlay's view I hold value in the reflexive position and reflecting *in* and *on* action in this work including what is evoked for me in the research process. I saw it as vital in ensuring rigour in the study. I used insights from introspection and reflection in this study not just as an end in itself but also as a springboard for interpretations and general insights. Thus it was important to notice both my impact on the generation of narratives and the impact of the research on me.

It is important to be transparent about the reflexive position taken in a study (Charmaz & Mitchell 1997; Finlay & Gough 2003; Speedy 2008). To help delineate the various aspects of reflexivity in this study the concepts of reflection in and on action were used in conjunction with Willig (2001) and Gergen & Gergen (1991) and are represented below.

**Diagram 6 Summary of processes of reflexivity and reflection used in the study.**



Using reflection in action (reflection during an experience/process) and on action (reflection after an experience/process) helps to ensure rigour (Mason 2011). This included reflecting during the interview process, reflecting on feelings arising for me in the interviews and on the process itself.<sup>71</sup> Reflection on action is similar to and includes Rom Harré's (2004)'s second level of reflection; the demand of the writer to be

<sup>71</sup> This has correspondence with the monitoring of transference and countertransference in counselling practice.



reflective about the reflection of participants. This is a process that takes place over time starting from the initial encounter of participants' reflections. These processes enabled my responses and interpretations of encounters with participants to be made explicit. It is also a means of recording how my thoughts and feelings changed during the research process (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

The use of the above model felt a good fit for the research and I felt confident in the use of reflexive thinking. I have engaged in reflection personally and professionally for many years both as a nurse and as a counsellor, and I have taught this process to undergraduate students for several years. I was aware of the need in this study to rein in the natural tendency in this process of describing my own self-learning, and to focus on understanding and providing a rationale for actions and decisions taken during the course of the study.

Despite attempts to be reflective and to increase my self-awareness and knowledge, I recognize that bias is always present in qualitative research (Freshwater & Avis 2004). I understood that the research was interpreted through my subjective understanding and that I could not be fully aware of myself or of my tacit knowledge and intuition. That said I aimed to do all that I could here. I regularly engaged in self-critique and self-appraisal (Koch & Harrington 1998). In order to further enable self-awareness I undertook some psychoanalytic therapy during the study. I was also aware that hearing detailed stories of other people's experiences of spirituality and reading around this subject was variously experienced as unsettling, confusing, energizing and influencing my views. I recognized the need to explore this and make it explicit. I thus met regularly with a spiritual director, a person experienced in accompanying people on their spiritual journeys. I recorded details of this in a diary. The impact of the research on me personally was at times challenging, this is not something unique to me; doing a doctoral study has variously been described as generating self-doubt and a questioning of self-image

(Phillips & Pugh 2000), creating a sink or swim experience (Gosling & Noordam 2010) and a bumpy ride (Williams 2011).

Diaries were used from the outset of the study, which provided useful detail and a means of an audit trail (Wolcott 2001). I attempted to keep a rhythm to this in recognition that in each encounter with the work a reflexive element always occurs (Findlay & Gough 2003). Initially two separate types of diary were kept: one for decisions and thinking about the research and the other for a more personal reflection of the process of the research. In reality and as time developed there began to be merging of the two and one diary came to be mainly used. The recording of personal reflections and thoughts alongside reflections of the research process enabled details of my current thinking including decisions and rethinking of these in the study, to be recorded. This is often missing when dairies are used as audit trails in qualitative research where usually only decisions that were made and acted on are recorded (Morse et al 2002).

I noted all contacts that I kept with participants and my experiences and reactions to them both personally and in relation to them. After each person to person encounter with participants I reflected on them, sometimes mulling over these experiences for several days to uncover thoughts and feelings. I also kept doing this both during transcription of the data and during analysis; a separate sheet was kept to the side of the data on my desk to enable easy note taking here. Through such methods I attempted to ensure robustness and consistency in my reflexivity.

In recording my own beliefs and prejudices during the development of the research the diary recorded an accurate documentation of the study procedures and a methodological awareness (Silverman 2001). It also enabled openness in reporting of the narratives and their plot including my responses to it and not just selected examples supporting preconceived ideas (Silverman 2005).

Although reflexivity is an important part of the research process it did not assume a dominant discourse in the work. While clearly contributing to the meaningfulness of the research reflexive discourses are themselves positioned within discourses and thus did not assume privilege over other forms (McLeod 2001). It is important to hold the reflexivity discourse alongside the others in the research.

The importance of rigour in the study cannot be overstated; I was very aware of Margarete Sandelowski's (1993: 2) warning that an uncritical approach to rigour can lead to rigour mortis. Reflexivity is a crucial part in ensuring the trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity of a study. This includes being clear about the processes for generating data and for interpreting it, documenting these clearly and the analytic claims. Such aspects of rigour enable trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity of the study and an end product that captures the experience of those in the study (Chase, 2005; Riessman 1993; 2008).

### **7.1.2. Involvement of colleagues in the study**

This research has benefitted from the involvement of colleagues across a variety of disciplines. I had three academic supervisors, one based in the Department of Psychology, Social Work and Public Health, one in the Department of Nursing, and one based in the Department of Philosophy and Religion. There was also an academic consultant based in the department of counselling at a different university in the same city. Engaging with my supervisors and academic consultant enabled different viewpoints to be considered and challenged. As mentioned one supervisor (SR) was also involved from the early stages of data analysis along with a fellow PhD student familiar with the methodology.

I also engaged in various counselling and psychotherapy organizations and spirituality forums. Attendance at professional meetings and conferences was particularly valuable including the annual British

Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Research conference, BACP Spirituality conferences and the British Association for the Study of Spirituality conferences. Involvement in such professional meetings and presentation and discussion of current work enabled continued thinking and reformulating of what was being discovered. Such working had the benefit of enabling greater mutual understandings between researchers and it usefully provided opportunities for examining issues from different perspectives (Bond 2004).

## **7.2. Ethical considerations**

In order to be ethically sound research needs to have a purpose beyond simply being an end in itself (Iphofen 2005). This research sought to benefit both the participants and a wider audience. It sought to add knowledge and understanding of how to think about and to work with spirituality in counselling practice. It aimed to provide detail to other therapists about how spirituality could be thought about as well as the challenges in doing this. It focused on contributing to professional debate and dialogue as well as to future training and professional development policies. Thus it sought to bring about change and to enable psychodynamic counsellors voices to be heard with regard to working with spirituality in practice. A commitment to undertake such research is also and importantly a means of demonstrating accountability for therapeutic work (Bond 2004).

It is important for researchers to ensure the highest possible level of trustworthiness and integrity with regard to their relationship to the participants and all those involved directly in it, to the construction of new knowledge and how it is communicated, and to its application to practice (McLeod 2011). This can be achieved through fostering and striving for a sense of ethical responsibility (Bond 2004) and ethical mindfulness (Danchev & Ross 2014) throughout a study. It is essential to meet the criteria of the appropriate professional body of study and to obtain ethical approval from the University that the research is registered with. This

research went through a Faculty and a University Research Ethics committee with full approval for the study granted in June 2010. In terms of guidelines from a professional body those outlined by the BACP, the Ethical Guidelines for Researching Counselling and Psychotherapy (Bond 2004; 2015) were used as a framework for maintaining a sense of ethical responsibility. This was achieved through a variety of ways that will now be explored.

There is an expectation to consider any risks with regard to the participants and the integrity of the research undertaken (Abrahams 2007). This was considered from the outset of the work and enabled via consultation with my supervisors and the ethics committees. Regular supervision throughout the work also meant that any risks arising in it could be dealt with.

An important focus in research is the relationship with participants. A number of factors needed consideration. Informed consent is an important principle in research since it is a basic human and civil right to withhold or give consent to take part in a research study (Bond 2004). In order to ensure that consent was freely and fully given a number of measures were taken.

In terms of seeking participants the main means of doing this was by participants responding themselves to an advert to take part.<sup>72</sup> People responding to the research advert were sent a Participation Information Sheet (Appendix 1) detailing the research including any potential risks that may occur. It also included contact details for one of my supervisors and for the University Ethics Committee<sup>73</sup> as is recommended good practice by the BACP (Bond 2004). In order to enable as full consent as

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<sup>72</sup> Some participants were obtained by a snowballing method. This is discussed in Chapter 6.3.1.1. On initial email contact with them I stressed the optional nature of taking part in the study, that there was no pressure to do so and that they could also withdraw at any point in it.

<sup>73</sup> This provided a place where participants could take complaints and for them to be dealt with swiftly, as good practice recommends (Bond 2004).

possible<sup>74</sup> I then contacted the participants as agreed on initial contact, by phone and/or email. This was to answer any immediate questions they may have had. If participants were then happy to proceed and meet to discuss their involvement in the study a meeting was arranged. Subsequent meetings typically took between 30 and 45 minutes and enabled the study to be discussed, their possible involvement and what this would entail. Participants were given the opportunity to sign a consent form at this meeting or to sign it at a later date but prior to participation in the study.<sup>75</sup> Consent for the study was sought again at the first and second interview. I regarded consent as a process (Mason 2002) and so the option of withdrawing from the study at any stage was repeated throughout the study. This is particularly important in research using in-depth interviewing methods where participants often reveal more than they intend to (West & Byrne 2009). The possibility of areas of vulnerability being uncovered by participants in the research is important to consider and will now be discussed.

Research exploring the spirituality of participants has the potential of uncovering areas of vulnerability and uncertainty in their lives. I recognized the importance of avoiding distress in participants and of ensuring that there were measures available to help them should areas of vulnerability that require further help be uncovered in the research process (Bond 2004). Although I assumed some robustness in the participants since they are all qualified counsellors, and that they had some knowledge of helpful resources, I also had lists of individuals and organizations they could be offered should the need arise. I checked the wellbeing of participants during each encounter with them. This is an important part of the interview process and important in this study for despite preparing participants for the potential impact of research it is often the case in research exploring new areas of understanding that they cannot fully know what they are truly in for and the impact on them

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<sup>74</sup> It is doubtful if informed consent can ever truly and genuinely be given since unforeseen circumstances can arise during the course of a study (Mason 2002).

<sup>75</sup> Most signed the consent form at the first person to person meeting to discuss the work.

(Danchev & Ross 2014). As a result of involvement in this study three participants resumed or aimed to resume some personal therapy.<sup>76</sup> They all had experiences of therapy during their training at the minimum and were happy to manage this aspect of their needs. These needs were identified after the first interview and in each case they were reminded that there was no requirement to take any further part in the study. In all cases they were happy to continue.

This research had a transformatory aspect not only in terms of participants identifying new psychological needs but also in terms of how they demonstrated new understandings and perspectives about spirituality in psychodynamic counselling, a point that is discussed in Chapters 8-13.

In terms of managing my personal risks and safety I did this both in a general sense and a specific sense. In a general sense I ensured and valued regular and ongoing supervision. In a more specific sense I took measures for my personal safety when meeting new participants. This included texting a supervisor prior to and following such meetings.

It is important to ensure adequate protection of personally sensitive information from unauthorized disclosure (Bond 2004). In order to ensure this data obtained from participants were assigned a code and I was the only person who held information about the codes. This was held securely in a locked cupboard in a locked office. In addition all identifying features on the transcriptions were omitted such as names and job titles that could identify people and places. Data on my personal computer was accessible only to me.

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<sup>76</sup> In one incident a participant became upset in our first meeting. This surprised us both. However through this she identified a personal need and sought help for this. One person in reviewing her early life experiences recognized the need for further personal work. A third participant recognized, in reviewing significant life events, that he needed further therapy.

In terms of ensuring privacy in the reporting of the data I recognized that although it is difficult to totally protect participants' identities, a realistic aim to adopt was that only those whom participants have told stories to, that is me, should be able to recognize them (Jenkins 2006). However this was not without difficulties particularly when presenting the data may at times include presentation of large segments of narratives. I also felt very close to participants' stories and lives, a not uncommon experience (Josselson 1996; McLeod 2004). A moral sensitivity to such data was needed (Balamoutsou 2002). Like Balamoutsou I had different voices in me as the researcher including that of the counsellor concerned for the participants, the researcher needing to get the work completed and the researcher being a 'good student'. The tensions of this resulted in difficulties in thinking about writing about the participants. Ruthellen Josselson (1996) describes a similar experience, of feeling guilty in her writing, feeling like she was talking about her participants behind their back and doing so publicly. I was wary of the intrusiveness of the participants' experiences being fixed in print, summed up and put into language. Language can never contain the whole person and thus 'every act of writing a person's life is inevitably a violation' (Josselson 1996: 62). I equally knew first, that participants valued the interviews and found them helpful (as mentioned this is discussed in the Findings and Discussion Chapters), and second, that although my ethical obligation to them would always come first it is important to make the findings public and to contribute to greater understanding in this area. While recognising that I had a lot of power as the researcher, in having the narratives and the moral importance of not abusing this I aimed to use this sensitively and responsibly for the well being of the participants. Josselson's stance of working in 'anguish' was helpful. She argues that this cannot be prevented and that she would worry if she did not feel 'anguish' as it stops researchers from going too far in their reporting. She states that it is through our anxiety, guilt and shame that participants are honoured:



To do this work we must contain these feelings rather than deny, suppress or rationalise them. We must at least be fully aware of what we are doing.

(Josselson 1996: 70)

Through this thinking I was able to ensure the privacy of the participants in the presentation of the data.

It is important to be fair, honest and accurate in the publication and dissemination of the study. Ensuring new knowledge gets known is important (Danchev & Ross 2014).<sup>77</sup> Reciprocity is also important in research and giving something back to participants (Patton 1990; Sieber 1993). I was committed to communicating the results to the participants as an acknowledgement of their contribution and recognition that their time and energy in the study made a meaningful contribution to knowledge (Bond 2004). All participants wanted some feedback about the study ranging from seeing the whole thesis to a summary of the findings.

I recognized the interdependence between research integrity and trustworthiness and their role in reinforcing one another (Bond 2004).

Trudo Lemmens (2008) describes researchers having a higher sense of calling in their work and that if they stay connected to this it will enable them to sustain an ethical approach to research. This resonated with me personally on an intellectual and a spiritual level and was helpful in remaining ethically mindful in the research.

### **7.3. Summary**

This chapter demonstrated the need for rigour, reflexivity and ethical mindfulness in this study. It described how this was undertaken, in order to ensure its trustworthiness and authenticity, so that in turn it will be of

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<sup>77</sup> In addition to the work already undertaken articles are planned for three journals for publication next year.

use to others. The findings of the study will be presented in the next chapters.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE GENRES IN THEIR NARRATIVES**

#### **8.1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the participants in the study providing detail about them while assuring their anonymity. Detail of the genres identified in participants' narratives, that is, the way they tell their stories, follows this. The genres in narratives are important in that they provide detail about how participants approach their understanding and engagement with spirituality; how they do this and how they manage the complexities involved.

#### **8.2. Introduction to the participants**

In order to avoid referring to the participants in terms of an initial, which felt impersonal and did not reflect the level of encounter in the research process I decided to give participants names, with an initial that did not match their own.

##### **1. Andrew**

Andrew is a 62 year old man. He was brought up in the Anglo-Catholic church and at the time of the research was exploring his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church.

Andrew identifies himself as a counselling psychologist in terms of his counselling work. At the time of the study he was in the process of leaving his post as a lecturer at a theological college, having worked in this post for over 12 years. Although not all of his clients were Christian

Andrew is widely known for his interest in working with clients with a religious faith. He has a private practice in counselling and in the supervision of counsellors.

Andrew has undertaken psychodynamic training to Master's degree level 20 years previously. He felt deeply influenced by two Jungian supervisors that he subsequently worked with, each for a period of 5 years.

## **2. Brian**

Brian is a 62 year old man. He identifies himself as belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. He undertook training as a monk in his early years prior to moving into teaching in adult education.

He stated that he was an analytical psychotherapist. He has a private practice and manages the psychosocial support for a large charitable organization.

He achieved a diploma in Analytical Psychology at The Guild of Analytical Psychology and Spirituality (GAPS), based in London. He had graduated from this training two years previously and deeply valued this. A key focus in GAPS is the exploration of spirituality and religion within Jungian thought and analytical practice. Although he wondered if other counsellors would see him as a psychodynamic practitioner he was clear that this was the method of his practice.

## **3. Chris**

Chris is a 66 year old man. He regards himself as a Christian, a member of the Church of England and a person who values his Zen spiritual practice.

He works in a self employed capacity as a counsellor, coach, spiritual director and work consultant.

He trained to diploma level in psychodynamic counselling 17 years previously at a WPF affiliated counselling agency. He has done additional training outside of this including group analysis training.

Chris values his spiritual practices particularly his meditation and experiences of solitude.

#### **4. Deborah**

Deborah is a 44 year old woman. She identifies herself as an atheist. She felt that in her earlier years she had researched a lot about religion and could see its value but that she had not experienced the feelings that she had read about.

Deborah works voluntarily as a counsellor and as the assessor of new clients in a local counselling agency.

She trained to diploma level in psychodynamic counselling 6 years previously at a WPF affiliated counselling agency. At the time of the research she was starting her training as a psychoanalyst at the British Psychoanalytic Association and very much looking forward to this.

#### **5. Elizabeth**

Elizabeth is a 68 year old woman. She describes herself as an atheist. She had experienced difficulties in her early life with religion and remained angry about aspects of these.

She currently has a private psychotherapy and supervision practice. She also describes herself as a trainer having being involved in higher education for a number of years.

She undertook her training as a psychodynamic psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic 40 years previously.

## **6. Frank**

Frank is a 62 year old man. As a child he was brought up in the Church of Scotland. He currently sees himself as an 'open minded agnostic.'

He works as a part-time lecturer in counselling, a counsellor for a university counselling service, a supervisor of counsellors, a consultant to counselling services and has a small private practice.

Frank undertook post-graduate level training in psychodynamic counselling 28 years previously. He has undertaken other types of training since this time including group analysis training.

## **7. George**

George is a 48 year old man. He identifies himself as non-Christian and as a Quaker. He was brought up as a Quaker and went to a Quaker school in his teenage years.

He describes himself as a counsellor/ psychotherapist working in the NHS in a disability team. He also has a small private practice.

He undertook his counselling training 15 years previously. While he described himself as an integrative counsellor he did subsequent psychodynamic training and sees this as core to his practice. He is in the process of registering for a doctoral study.

## **8. Hazel.**

Hazel is a 53 year old woman She is a Christian, having developed a Christian faith early in her life. In more recent years Hazel experienced conflicts and uncertainties in her church community and what they believe.

She currently works as a mental health worker for a mental health charity and has a private practice.

Hazel undertook a diploma in Psychodynamic counselling 3 years previously and was awaiting completion of a BA in counselling at the time of the study.

### **9. Janet**

Janet is a 65 year-old woman. She is a Christian having been brought up in the Anglican Church. She is also a Third Order Franciscan.<sup>78</sup>

She currently works as a psychotherapist and as an ordained minister in the Church of England. Following experience as a secondary school teacher where she developed an interest in counselling she undertook psychoanalytic/psychodynamic training to become a psychotherapist. As a psychotherapist and Anglican priest, Janet describes herself as a minister in secular employment. Her counselling work is her source of income and outside of this she offers a ministry of availability largely to her local church and to a theological college.

Janet trained initially at the Institute of Group Analysis over 15 years previously, prior to training for individual work. She described herself as a psychodynamic practitioner. She is in the process of registering for a doctoral study.

### **10. Kathleen**

Kathleen is a 43 year old woman. She is a Christian having developed a faith in her childhood.

She is both a nurse, working in palliative care and a voluntary counsellor. She was also in the process of developing a private practice at the time of the study.

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<sup>78</sup>This is whereby men and women living standard lives in the world live under the Franciscan Rule. St. Francis was an Italian Catholic friar and preacher.

Kathleen undertook a diploma in Psychodynamic counselling 3 years previously and was awaiting completion of a BA in counselling. She was a friend of Hazel.

### **11. Leonard**

Leonard is a 70 year old man. Having trained as an ordained priest in his early years he now describes himself as an agnostic in terms of his religious position.

He previously worked as a lecturer in counselling at a local university. He now has a private practice and works as a guest lecturer.

Leonard trained at the Tavistock Clinic 38 years previously. He is in the process of registering for a doctoral study.

A summary of the participants is presented overleaf. It can be seen that a range of psychodynamic counsellors was obtained in the sample. There was a range in ages although skewed towards the 60 years plus age band (6 were in the 60-69 band). In terms of national data this age range represent 17.5 % of counsellors registered with the BACP with the largest age group being the 50-59 age band representing 34.2% of BACP counsellors. BACP data does not indicate the distribution of age within the bands, whether they are skewed to higher or lower ends. What can be said is that 8 of the 11 participants in this study are aged 50 or over and this represents over 50% of counsellors registered with the BACP.<sup>79</sup>

There was a variety of spiritual positions and of working positions representing a good spread in the sample. It is possible to explore how various professional and work cultures may impact on participants' understandings of spirituality in their work. Although participants had undertaken different types of training they all understand themselves as psychodynamic counsellors.

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<sup>79</sup> Counsellors 70 years of age and over represent 2.6% of counsellors registered with the BACP in September 2014. The third largest grouping is 40-49 year olds (29.3%).



**Table 1: Summary of the participants**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Highest Educational Attainment</b>	<b>Religious Affiliation*</b>	<b>Current employment</b>	<b>Place of employment</b>
<b>A</b>	M	60-69	Post graduate	Church of England	Counselling psychologist	Theological college/private practice
<b>B</b>	M	60-69	Post graduate	Roman Catholic	Psychotherapist	Charity/private practice
<b>C</b>	M	60-69	Diploma level	Church of England	Counsellor	Private practice
<b>D</b>	F	40-49	Graduate	Atheist	Counsellor	Volunteer at counselling agency
<b>E</b>	F	60-69	Graduate	Atheist	Psychotherapist	Private practice
<b>F</b>	M	60-69	Post graduate	Agnostic 'but open mind'	Counsellor	University/private practice
<b>G</b>	M	40-49	Post graduate	Quaker/ non Christian	Counsellor/ Psychotherapist	NHS/private practice
<b>H</b>	F	50-59	Graduate	Christian	Counsellor	Charity/private practice
<b>J</b>	F	60-69	Post graduate	Anglican	Psychotherapist	Private practice
<b>K</b>	F	40-49	Graduate	Christian	Counsellor	Volunteer counsellor
<b>L</b>	M	70+	Post graduate	Agnostic	Counsellor/ Psychotherapist	Private practice/guest lecturer

\* This is as participants defined themselves.

## **8.2. The genres in participants narratives**

The genres of participants' narratives are presented separately in recognition that they occur across the themes identified. The genres, or how narratives are told, pull the listener into the teller's point of view (Riessman 2008). In this study they demonstrate how participants approach their understanding and engagement with spirituality. It is common for a number of different genres to be present in narratives and to overlap with one another (Frank 1995; Clandinin & Rosiek 2007; Squire 2008). This was the case in this study. However typically there are some that are particularly insistent. These are the ones that are the focus of this chapter. Some examples of overlapping genres within the main genres will be given to illustrate the range shown in the narratives following a discussion of the main genres.

In this study two main genres emerged from the data and were identified across the narratives; the discovery genre and the clarity genre. These will each be examined. Prior to this the use of the journal by participants and how it helped them to think about spirituality in their practice will be discussed.

### **8.2.1. The use of the journal**

As Chapter 2 and 6 argue, the difficulties in talking and thinking about spirituality are well known (Crossley & Salter 2005; King 2009; Swinton 2001, 2011). This matched my personal experiences. While obtaining narratives was identified as a means to help overcome this the literature and my experiences led to the recognition that additional help would be needed. This led to the development of a journal in the preparatory study to help participants to articulate and develop their thoughts here. These participants found it very helpful. While this was largely the case in the main study there were variations in its use and reactions to it. Some participants valued it greatly and used it throughout the research process. They valued being guided initially in their thinking in this area.

That said a common comment was that they felt that they had not consciously journalled as much as they had hoped to.<sup>80</sup> Although this was the case my experience in the interviews with all the participants was that they had engaged in the research process and thought a great deal about it. It may be that although they did not specifically set aside the suggested time for journaling and addressing the questions in it, thinking about this subject may have taken place outside of these times on subconscious and unconscious levels. There were other participants who described themselves as being experienced in reflecting in this area and thus did not specifically use the journal exercises but used the journal as a means of prompting their thinking; while not recording a lot in it they felt that they had thought about the research prior to the interviews and produced an A4 summary for the interviews. There were two participants who demonstrated some initial ambivalence and resistance to the journal. For one participant this was because of the demands that she felt that it made on her. Elizabeth had been asked to take part in the research, as an atheist, to broaden the sample. While she recognized that she had some interest in the subject she equally recognized that she was 'not that interested in it' (E01: 25). That said and to her surprise she engaged in the research actively and was surprised by how hard she had worked. Frank had a stronger reaction to the journal. He had a strong resistance to the journal exercises, feeling that they cut across psychodynamic thinking and thus did not help his thinking. He also questioned the methodology. Following some time discussing this prior to the first interview he subsequently engaged in the interview process and clearly had done some thinking about the subject. He understood his resistance as being about the means of preparing for the interview but it may also have included some ambivalence to the research and the difficulties in thinking and talking in this area.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> A suggested frequency for journaling was for 30 minutes twice a week for 3-4 weeks for the first interview and 2-3 weeks for the second interview.

<sup>81</sup> This is explored in Chapter 12.2.2 where initial difficulties in meeting with Frank are discussed.

In summary the journal had a use beyond participants using the exercises within it; as a prompt generally to help thinking outside of these times at subconscious and unconscious levels. The genres in participants' narratives will now be examined.

### **8.2.2. The discovery genre**

A major genre identified in this study was the discovery genre. The majority of participants demonstrated this (n=7). Although the telling of narratives enables an increased awareness of self and in itself is a sense making process (Squire 2007) the discovery of new thinking about spirituality and about it in relation to their work was marked in this genre. This is a genre where participants largely develop their thinking about spirituality in relation to their psychodynamic practice through taking part in the research. Through their involvement in the research they demonstrated an absence or limited thinking and talking in this area prior to it. These participants were unsurprisingly sometimes not clear about their thoughts, occasionally not at all, and welcomed thinking about it.

There are a number of features to this genre. The main feature is the demonstration of the uncovering and development of thoughts as participants wrote and spoke about spirituality within their practice. This aspect was demonstrated throughout the narratives of these participants. While it was a dominant feature of their narratives it was demonstrated in various ways and to varying degrees. There were some participants who overtly recognized their need to make sense of spirituality within their practice, having a desire to do so and purposely used the research for this. Hazel is an example here. She was frustrated by its exclusion in her recent counsellor training and because of the importance of spirituality to her and to her work with clients she wanted to find a way of incorporating and working with it in her psychodynamic practice.

Hazel (02: 1979)

And I think there's been bits of me that I've conveniently put away for a while thinking well you know that can wait until later. And I think part of me did want to get it out I wanted to engage in it [the research] for personal reasons because I felt it was time. But I also wanted to advance the research because I do feel there's a lack at the moment in the spiritual dimension that we can no longer ignore, that the clients deserve to be able to go there.

Elizabeth, while initially ambivalent about the research, recognized the need for her to make sense in this area, having not done this before. For other participants, they had done some thinking over several years, but not in a purposeful sense; it was not something that had come to the fore of their thinking or thought about in a coherent way. As such they welcomed the opportunity that the research gave them to intentionally think about it. This aspect of the genre demonstrated a sense of tentativeness and newness in thinking. Chris's narratives are an example where this is shown. While he had a deep understanding of his own spirituality he had done little thinking about it in relation to his psychodynamic practice:

Chris (02: 1304)

I mean I've thought a little bit about where spirituality is but not much.

Chris (02: 165)

I haven't sort of worked this out quite so much before you know.

This aspect of the discovery genre illustrates that participants thinking about spirituality in relation to their practice developed greatly during the research process, that this was a key feature for most participants in the study.

Another feature of the discovery genre is the recognition by participants of the value of thinking about spirituality and the research questions; of thinking about a subject that they had not thought a great deal about and/or talked about much before. The finding that participants valued thinking about the subject indicates that psychodynamic counsellors are likely to value opportunities to do this. This feature was demonstrated in many narratives. Two examples will be used to illustrate it.

Frank is an example here. Despite initial ambivalence in thinking about the research Frank, an agnostic, overtly stated the value of taking part in the research. He had thought about spirituality over a long period of time but not in a concerted explicitly conscious way and one in which he was clear about his thinking here:

Frank (01: 255)

I think its been very helpful to me knowing that I'm being invited to think about this, to capture, get hold of something which I've maybe just taken for granted or I haven't really raised to the surface, I think it's such an interesting question. I think it has led me to just articulate and clarify a little bit more for myself this aspect of the work.

Deborah, an atheist equally valued trying to make sense of her feelings in this area:

Deborah (01: 1102)

I think having to formulate words to be here today and to think about it in terms of what I might say and so on I think it really has caused me to try and understand the sense of what I've been feeling for a long time

JB- mm

Deborah- and putting it into words so in that sense I think it's been (pause) very useful because I think its something that's been in my head

JB- mm

Deborah- that I've not been able to grab hold of  
JB- right

She reinforces the difficulties in thinking about spirituality that it is hard  
'to grab hold of.'

A final feature of the discovery genre is the sense of the continuing nature of thinking in this area that an end was not and cannot be reached. There was a sense of participants describing their current but not fixed or necessarily settled understanding of spirituality in their practice, that this is where they had got to so far in their thinking. This was more marked in some participants than others but overall they recognize this as a continuing area of development. It was frequently stated that having started to think about the subject in a more concerted and focused way for the research there was a need to continue their thinking in this area, that this was an on-going journey. Chris for example states:

Chris (02: 1491)

It [the research] has made me think and I shall go on thinking about the things we have been talking about.

The discovery genre thus is one where participants demonstrate that in the absence of sustained thinking and/or talking about spirituality in their practice they developed their thoughts in this area by taking part in the research. They valued doing this and having started this process recognize the need for continuing thinking in this area.

#### **8.2.2.1. Examples of overlapping genres within the discovery genre**

While the discovery genre was one of two main genres in the study as mentioned there were less dominant but overlapping genres throughout the narratives. Examples are presented to demonstrate this. Whilst all participants in this genre demonstrated a discovery element in their

genre some also demonstrated elements of the clarity genre that will be explored next. For example Kathleen was very certain when talking about the need to incorporate her spirituality into her work, because of the centrality of it to her (c.f. Chapter 9.2.1.3.). Deborah while valuing the research helping her to make sense in this area also demonstrated clarity and certainty in talking about the need for her to absolutely separate spirituality from religion (c.f. Chapter 9.2.2.1.). Elizabeth in trying to make sense of spirituality in her practice during the research, demonstrated incomprehension at times in thinking about spirituality (c.f. Chapter 11.2).

The discovery genre contrasted greatly with the clarity genre. This will now be explored.

### **8.2.3. The clarity genre**

The second main genre identified in the study was the clarity genre. Whilst narratives always involve an element of new learning or change (Squire 2007) some participants demonstrated a strong sense of clarity in their narrative. By this I mean that some participants demonstrated clear thinking about spirituality and about it in relation to their practice having thought about it for a long time. Their views were established and thought through. This genre illustrates that it is possible for psychodynamic counsellors to think about spirituality within their practice and to have some clarity about their understandings here.

Four participants demonstrated this genre. There are a number of features to it. These features were not initially easy to identify with tensions between them. These will be discussed but such tensions led to difficulties in identifying the key aspects of the genre and of labelling it in a clear and accurate way that conveyed how these participants told their narratives. Repeated returns to the transcripts and sustained thinking



and reflection helped here in identifying the title for this genre, one that felt a good sense of fit (Rennie & Fergus 2006).

The main feature is that in the light of participants' thinking, reading and talking about spirituality in their practice prior to the research they gave clear, reasoned and often detailed explanations for their understanding in this area. Examples will be given to illustrate this. One participant here is a Christian (Andrew) and the other an agnostic (Leonard), illustrating that the religious position is not a factor in the use of the clarity genre; that participants' different understandings of spirituality does not determine whether they have reasoned and thought through understandings here.

First, Andrew's narratives demonstrated the clarity genre. He gave clear, reasoned and often referenced explanations of his understanding of spirituality and psychodynamic practice. This was shown in the first interview when he quoted Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury's understanding of spirituality as one that held resonance for him:

Andrew (01: 398)

spirituality is gratitude because from the experience of gratitude follows, one the notion there is somebody and something to be grateful for and secondly that (pause) one is in a relationship of gratitude rather than resentment

JB- mm mm

Andrew- so we've got that sort of essential otherness and that essential goodness and that essential relationship with these things

JB- right

Andrew-and that's spirituality

He later identified the work of Fowler and Niebuhr in demonstrating how he held a variety of different spiritual positions at different times.

Andrew (01; 920)

I'm going to sort of find myself in different positions depending on who I find myself with. I've found James Fowler very helpful. Also Niebuhr's Christ and Culture. The book itself is not at all easy it's over

50 years old and it's very theological but if you go to sort of websites where it's main arguments are summarized in contemporary terms it's much clearer. But it's a marvellous piece of structuralism in mapping really different ways in which Christian churches have thought about the relationship between Christ and the world and I find myself in all of them at different times.

His use of references alongside his understandings demonstrated a person who had thought and read about the subject and was keen to demonstrate both this and that his ideas had a basis in others thinking. In this way he illustrates clarity in his narratives; that he had given this subject a great deal of thought about and that there was some clear thinking within this.

Leonard also demonstrated the clarity genre within his narratives. He articulated his difficulties with spirituality within psychodynamic practice clearly. He was certain that religion and religious objects did not have any truth in themselves; he understood them as having value symbolically. He articulated this clearly:

Leonard (01: 728)

You've got to look at the whole of this [religion] as symbolic language  
JB- mm

Leonard- And don't believe it. In a way just suspend belief and then it's fine you know. If you are going to say this in church fine but don't think it's true, you know real.

He was able to articulate his thoughts here and what he understood clearly, having spent many years thinking about it.

The second feature of this genre is participants' acknowledgement of the diversity and complexity in their understandings of spirituality in their practice. They identified that they are open to and can understand a complex range of different thinking here. For some this was a reflection of their own position that they held different spiritual positions depending on whom they were with and for others this was the ability to

comprehend different understandings of spirituality that clients have despite not personally sharing them. The impact of this thinking on their psychodynamic practice will be explored further in Chapter 10. In relation to the clarity genre Andrew illustrates both these features. He recognized the range and complexity in his understanding of spirituality:

Andrew (02: 259)

there is within me a very clear strong diversity here between a cynical English liberal for whom spontaneous extemporaneous prayer is tarred with the brush of wish fulfilment and self indulgence and not to be trusted at all, and on the other hand the Van Gogh strain in me just sort of jumps into the swimming pool without checking whether there's any water in it, and thinks that probably the most precious and authentic religious expression of which anyone's capable, is just a completely unquestioning acceptance of things as they are and raising your voice in praise to that.

He stated that he held a variety of different spiritual positions and understandings, identifying himself as having a conjunctive faith under Fowler's (1981) model. As such he valued being open to a range of spiritualities both for him and for what clients may present with. This second aspect of the clarity genre is thus recognition of the complexity and diversity of their understandings of spirituality and the positions that they work from.

The third feature of the clarity genre is participants' recognition that having thought about the subject of spirituality and about it in relation to their practice for a long time, they feel settled in their thinking here. Participants demonstrating this genre recognized that they had reached a position that they currently felt comfortable with. Janet's narratives illustrated this clearly. In discussing the relationship between spirituality and psychodynamic practice she recognized that she had done a lot of thinking in this area and had now reached a point where thinking across them was currently easy for her:

Janet (01: 810)

It's now just got settled

Janet (01: 716)

I have done so much searching and exploring along the way that's what's happened now is that I'm thinking across the disciplines in an embodied way

Janet (01: 1556)

so it's something that has been going on for a long time but it was helpful to have a particular focus [for thinking in this research]

The fourth feature of this genre is that although these participants had done a lot of thinking in this area and feel settled about this they equally recognize that they cannot fully know this area, that is they know they do not and cannot know all that there is about spirituality and about it in relation to their practice. As such these participants are open to uncertainty, anxieties and doubts and that these can be managed. They have clarity in knowing that they do not know all that can be known about spirituality. In terms of participants being open to uncertainty in their thinking Janet's narrative is an example here. She illustrates how she has and continues to value uncertainty in terms of her understandings of spirituality, citing the work of the medieval thinker, Abelard, introduced to her by her father:

Janet (01: 1196)

[Abelard] said something like from doubting we are led to enquiry and from enquiry we may be led to the truth. So if that's an undergirding principle you can see why I've not had to struggle with having certainties messed about because I've never had any certainties, because I've always been allowed to have an open mind.

Through being encouraged to be open from an early age Janet felt able to manage uncertainty.

The final feature of the clarity genre is linked to the fourth feature in that alongside being open to doubts they recognize the developmental nature of thinking in this area, that there is a need to continue their thinking here. In contrast to those participants demonstrating the discovery genre these participants had a more settled understanding of spirituality and of spirituality in relation to their practice. Nonetheless they equally reflected a need to continue their thinking about spirituality and for it to be reworked. They understand this as a continuing journey and as such there is a contingency to their understandings. Brian's narratives are an example illustrating this. He described this in relation to developing one's own personal spirituality and the struggle in this:

Brian (01: 345)

so what you are really trying to do is to develop your own expression of your own personal spirituality and that's a constant struggle and a conflict

Brian (01: 469)

there's a lot of processing going on, walking round in circles

Brian (01: 601)

JB- so it's a continuing process

Brian- utterly continuing, it's individuation. It just goes on and on and on. Individuation isn't somewhere where you arrive at as far as I can make out.

Whilst having clarity in their understanding and feeling settled these participants demonstrate that it is not a rigid genre but one that is open to review and reworking, that participants recognize and have the desire to do this.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The theme of a continuing journey in relation to spirituality in psychodynamic practice is explored in detail in Chapter 11.

### **8.2.3.1. Examples of overlapping genres within the clarity genre**

In terms of overlapping genres these were less obvious within the clarity genre compared to the discovery genre. However underlying the sense of assuredness in participants narratives in this genre there were some overlaps. There was a contingency genre. Whilst participants recognized this through understanding their thinking in this area being a continuing process Leonard's narratives particularly demonstrated the contingent nature of his thinking. He stated that his thoughts were developing all the time and he thus had a resistance to being labelled. This is explored further in Chapter 10.

An additional genre of struggle was also noted within the clarity genre. Whilst participants illustrating this genre could give reasoned understandings this had not been achieved without a sense of struggle and a continuing sense of this at times for some. Andrew is an example here. Although strongly demonstrating the clarity genre he also described feeling lonely and cut off from people, only having a few people that he could talk with about this. As such at times he finds it hard to cope. This is discussed further in Chapter 10 but in terms of overlapping genres it illustrates the contrast to the main genre and something of the range that exists within narratives.

This genre of clarity demonstrates that it is possible for psychodynamic counsellors to think about spirituality in relation to their practice and as the following chapters will demonstrate to develop thinking and practice in this area for themselves.

### **8.3. Summary**

This chapter provided an introduction to the participants in the study illustrating the range in their age, training, spirituality and work environments. The varied ways that they used the journal in the study

was presented and its value as a prompt for thinking about spirituality in relation to their practice was discussed.

The complexities of identifying genres were highlighted and the difficulties in identifying features within them, particularly the clarity genre, were discussed. Two main genres were identified in participants' narratives: the discovery genre and the clarity genre. The main feature of the discovery genre was the recognition that participants developed their thinking in this area largely by taking part in the research. They valued this process. The main features of the clarity genre was the demonstration of clear, well-reasoned and sometimes complex explanations for participants' understanding of spirituality, and of it in relation to psychodynamic practice. Although participants demonstrating this genre had a more settled position in relation to their understandings they were open to uncertainties here and recognize the need for continued thinking. Participants showing the discovery genre were understandably less settled in their understandings of spirituality, They equally recognize the need to continue thinking here, that having started thinking about spirituality and about it in relation to their practice they want to continue it. Overlapping genres within the main genres were presented.

Having examined the genres within the narratives, the themes within them will now be explored.

## CHAPTER 9

### PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUALITY

#### 9.0. Introduction

In order to know how participants understand and work with spirituality in psychodynamic practice it is important to know their personal understandings of spirituality. The difficulties in defining spirituality and the heterogeneity of the construct have been well argued (Swinton 2001, 2011; King 2009). In recognition of this and the need to have some parameters in which to think about it Cook's (2004) definition of spirituality was used as a starting point in this study. This chapter will start with how participants' related to this definition. It is followed by their interpretations of spirituality demonstrating a wide range. This chapter details these providing selections of the narratives to illustrate this.

#### 9.1. Participants' reactions to Cook's definition of spirituality

Cook's definition of spirituality was given to participants at the outset of the study being included on the Participant Information Sheet given out at the initial meetings with each participant. It was explicitly given as a starting point for their thinking about spirituality in relation to the study:

Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as a relationship with that which is intimately 'inner', immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as a relationship with that which is wholly 'other', transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values. (Cook 2004: 549)



The majority of participants had a benign response to it with no strong comments or reactions. They used it as intended, as a starting point from which to talk about their understanding of spirituality. While most participants did not talk specifically about this definition analysis of the data demonstrated it to be a largely inclusive one. Most participants' understanding of spirituality reflected several or all of its key elements. This included the thinking of both those who identified their spirituality with a religion and those who emphasized the distinction and separateness between them. Frank explicitly recognized and valued this point:

Frank (02: 389)

I also think it's [Cook's definition] very fair because what it does do is that it allows spirituality to have a variety of sources not actually saying this is the source.

The creative, universal and innate dimension of spirituality was recognized by many participants for example Frank went on to say:

Frank (02: 404)

I just think, and I don't know what the mystery is, I think we're born with something. There is something about just being human which means that there is something which requires an answer and an expression

JB- mm mm

Frank- which we call spiritual

The experiences of spirituality at an 'inner' level, within the self, within communities and that which is wholly 'other' and beyond the self was recognized in various ways by many participants for example:

Kathleen (01: 371)

to me spirituality is much more broad [than religion]. People can find it in things other than perhaps you know a god. Maybe that's not what they see it as. I think it's more of an experience where you may be congruent with something, maybe congruent with nature or whatever. It's something that's bigger than you that gives you an inner peace or an inner sort of reason for being. It can be an identity with others but it could be something that's very just on your own even maybe a walk along the beach or a beautiful sunset or something like that. I think it's when you have those sort of moments that take you out of yourself

JB- mm

Kathleen- transcendent sort of moments. For me that involves you know a personal belief in a God but I don't think it necessarily has to

JB- mm

Kathleen- for people

Andrew described spirituality simply as a meeting place with God (A01: 49) and Chris as about the present moment with God and eternity 'in the present moment in the here and now' (C01: 79). The themes identified in the data and examined below will illustrate these points further.

An aspect that Cook's definition has not emphasized that emerged in this study is that spirituality is about connection and relationships between people. This is an important aspect of spirituality identified in this study (c.f. Section 9.2.2.1. for example). While arguably it can be inferred either within Cook's phrases 'within the self and others' or 'arising both ...within communities, social groups and traditions' or the phrase 'as relationship with that which is wholly 'other', transcendent and beyond the self,' none of these phrases emphasize the element of spirituality relating to relationships between small groups or two people. The encounter of spirituality within the counselling dyad was a feature in this study and will be demonstrated in the following findings chapters. Cook's definition thus would benefit from this addition, to reflect all aspects of spirituality in this study.

Most participants variously showed an understanding of spirituality as being of ultimate importance and about meaning and purpose. For example;

Brian (01: 158)

and the way I think of spirituality is, I would use the word numinous,  
numinosity<sup>83</sup>

JB- yeah

B01- numen<sup>84</sup> means everything to me and I think I will not stop trying  
to discover what the numen means

Frank (01: 371)

[spirituality] is something essential to life which is about a deep  
meaning and a value about what it is to be human and how one  
should conduct oneself relative to other humans,

There were two participants who struggled with Cook's definition of spirituality. This was because they struggled with the construct generally and what it meant. While the majority of participants in this study identified their personal understandings of spirituality these two participants could not do this and had difficulties with understanding it. This struggle is explored later in this chapter.

In summary apart from two participants Cook's definition proved a helpful and largely inclusive one and one valuable for those with very different understandings of spirituality. The main concern with this definition was lack of emphasis on spirituality being about connection and relationship between two or small groups of people. This is important in terms of thinking about the counselling dyad and how spirituality is experienced. Including this point into Cook's definition enables an explicit understanding of spirituality being about intra, inter (including between two people) and transpersonal experiences elements essential to understanding spirituality. The details of participants' understandings here will now be explored.

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<sup>83</sup> The term numinosity was coined by Otto(1917) and defined by him to refer to the non-rational part of religion (see Chapter 9.2.2.1.).

<sup>84</sup> Numen is a Latin term for divinity or divine presence. It is defined as a deity or spirit presiding over a thing or place or a guiding force of spirit (Collins English dictionary accessed online 03.06.15).

## **9.2. The main ways of understanding spirituality**

As mentioned there were two initial groupings among the participants: those who offered their understandings of spirituality and those who could not do this, having difficulties here. In the former group the relationship of spirituality with religion is an important factor in understanding spirituality for some participants. This was because of their understanding of a direct and essential relationship between spirituality and religion. For others there was a dislike of institutionalised religion and a need to make a clear distinction and separation between it and spirituality. Thus there were three main themes in understanding spirituality in this study: <sup>85</sup>

- Understanding spirituality by linking it with religion
- Understanding spirituality by separating it from religion
- Difficulties with understanding spirituality; a problematic concept

These will each be explored.

### **9.2.1. Understanding spirituality by linking it with religion**

Seven participants in this study valued the link between their spirituality and their religion. Three sub-themes were identified within this theme. These will be examined.

#### **9.2.1.1. The importance of a belief in and a personal relationship with God**

Reflecting the prevalence of Christian participants in the sample in this study most participants emphasising the link between their spirituality and their religion identified the importance of their belief in and having a

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<sup>85</sup> A table summarising all themes and subthemes identified in the study can be found in Appendix 7.

personal relationship with God. This was deeply valued and essential to their experience of spirituality. Andrew demonstrates this:

Andrew (01: 49)

for me it's very much about a meeting place with God. I bring my concerns and then he speaks to them so the essence of spirituality is the encounter with something other than myself and that's the touchstone that's how I know it's spirituality.

The importance of a personal relationship with God was stressed. God is seen as something greater than themselves '[God is] greater than human beings and their minds' (Janet 01: 1141) and their relationship with God was seen as dynamic and evolving. This was especially evident in the discovery genre of Hazel's narrative, who recognized the changing nature of her relationship with God. Hazel recognized that her relationships with God and her church were in the process of change and that her relationship with God felt 'bigger' than it previously had been:

Hazel (01: 850)

and neither do I think that I'm being judged by God. But God is different too

JB- mm

Hazel- yeah my spiritual relationship to God has changed in that it's much bigger its much more expansive.

#### **9.2.1.2. The importance of spiritual practice**

The second sub theme in the linking of spirituality with religion is the importance of spiritual practice. Several participants emphasized this. They saw their spiritual practice as essential and central to engaging with their spirituality. Their spiritual practices enable experiences of both transcendence and immanence:

George (01: 334)

I think it [Quaker practice] really is a resource. For me it's about looking inside myself but also connecting with something which is the other really.

Chris (01: 79)

spirituality being very much about the present moment, the here and now and that eternity is in the here and now.

Chris, while being clear that he was a Christian, regularly undertook Zen meditative practice. He deeply valued this as a means of engaging with a key aspect of his spirituality, that of the present moment. This could be when he is alone or with others. He understood God as ever present that is immanent. Other forms of spiritual practice that were seen as essential by participants included regular religious services, personal prayer times and experiences of solitude, all enabling engagement with their spirituality.

### **9.2.1.3. The centrality of spirituality and religion in participants lives**

All of the participants that linked their spirituality with religion stressed the centrality of their spirituality and religion to their lives:

Janet (01: 1043)

it's [spirituality] what I breathe

JB- yes

Janet- it's what I breathe so it's in the core of me

This was so central that they understood it as their personal ontology, their way of seeing the world. The sense of this was so strong such that several participants explicitly stated that it had to be incorporated in their work since they could not practice without it:

Kathleen (01: 489)

because I guess of the model and sort of questions I've asked along the way and responses that I've received again it causes you to reflect how it [spirituality] can be incorporated because it is a part of who I am and it [spirituality] either needed to be incorporated or I wasn't going to be able to do the work.

Other participants recognized the value of their spirituality and religion in times of difficulty, seeing it as a major source of support and resourcing. Examples of this include the use of prayer at times of difficulties in their counselling practice, and in preparation for it.

The key aspect to these participants' spirituality is their personal connection and relationship with God or Other. While they recognized that spiritual experiences can occur with other people this was the primary focus of their understanding of spirituality. Having explored the understandings of spirituality of those participants who link it with their religion the understandings of participants who need to separate spirituality from religion will now be explored.

### **9.2.2. Understanding spirituality by separating it from religion**

As discussed in Chapter 2 spirituality has increasingly become separated from religion with many people seeing no connection between them or a need to separate them (Casey 2013). Three participants demonstrated this in the study. Two participants had a need to separate spirituality from religion because of their dislike of and difficulties with institutionalised religion, Frank, an agnostic and Deborah, an atheist. One participant, Brian had this requirement because of his understanding that personal spirituality needed to be separated from its religious context in order for it to be understood. The need to separate spirituality from religion was something that was encouraged and that was helpful during Brian's GAPS training. This training focused on the

exploration of spirituality and religion in Jungian thought and practice. He thus had a clear understanding and need to do this. He felt that it was easy to get caught up by religious concepts and contexts and thus limit access to one's personal spirituality. He saw personal spirituality as something more profound and rooted in the unconscious:

Brian (01: 333)

so if you like detach it from the religious context. I try to do that and it can be much more helpful then to see about the personal spirituality because that's actually what we're all trying to do is to find and express our own personal spirituality even if we don't know that, by which I mean it will get caught up for instance in my case by church JB- mm

Brian- which is an archetype and it can get completely trapped by archetypes your own personal spirituality. So what you are really trying to do is to develop your own expression of your own personal spirituality. And that's a constant struggle and a conflict you feel alienated between where you've come from and what your home is at it were.

Brian understood spirituality as something primitive, coming from the guts and something instinctive. Thus he regarded 'spirituality as an expression of feeling' (B02 757).

There was one common sub-theme among the three participants here that of understanding spirituality as a form of connection with something other or greater than themselves and/or between people. This will now be explored.

#### **9.2.2.1. Understanding spirituality as connection with something other or greater than oneself and/or between people**

The theme of connection was common to all three participants who separated spirituality from religion. The details of understandings of



types of connection varied but the core aspect here was of connecting, within oneself, to something greater than oneself and/or with other people.

Frank understood connecting with one's own spirituality as relating to goodness, meaning and purpose and how one should conduct oneself in relation to others. He experienced such encounters as profound and powerful experiences and argued that they can exist both within oneself, with others as well as beyond oneself.

Frank (01: 1012)

All one knows is it's something profound, powerful, and everyone can get in touch with it. It can be something which is, I mean, again, you use terms like oceanic or at one with or larger than oneself, or a connection with something greater than us.<sup>86</sup>

Brian also demonstrated the importance of connection or communion with something other for his understanding of spirituality. This was through his preference for the word numinous to spirituality. As mentioned this was a word coined by Otto (1917) in his book *The Idea of the Holy*. The numinous is seen as the non-rational part of religion, underlying all religions (p. 6). It is wholly Other, and complex; it evokes a reaction of silence, provokes terror because it presents itself as an overwhelming power and yet is merciful and gracious (p.14). A numinous experience involves communion with a wholly Other. This Other may be divine, God, sacred or Other (p.26). Brian understood spirituality as a numinous experience involving connection or communion with this wholly Other.

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<sup>86</sup> The use of more humanistic language such as goodness or existential reflected Frank's conscious desire to separate his understanding of spirituality from institutionalised religion.

Deborah on the other hand experienced spirituality as connection between people. She described spirituality as a deep connection with another person, a sense of deep equality, using the term 'we-ness':

Deborah (02: 161)

it's a we-ness in the sense of being connected but separate, but not merged necessarily, there's a sense of otherness and I can't think of another word for it, it's an equality on a human level.

She went on further to say that such experiences involved complete attunement to the other person, an experience of true equality and of feeling understood. As an atheist she was adamant that spirituality was not the domain of God:

Deborah (01: 667)

my whole sort of thoughts about spirituality were absolutely between people. It's not the domain of God and it's not something which is unobtainable between humans, it's definitely on the level of between humans.

Participants in this grouping, that need to separate spirituality from religion, thus reflect a common understanding of spirituality as a form of connection within the self, with other people and/or beyond the self to God/Other.

In contrast to participants who were able to describe their understandings of spirituality there were participants who struggled with this.

### **9.2.3. Difficulties with understanding spirituality; a problematic concept**

As has been argued earlier the relationship between spirituality and psychoanalytically-informed practices like psychodynamic counselling has historically been one of antagonism because of Freud's stance to it and its subsequent reduction to psychoanalytic concepts.

There were two participants in this study that reflected this position. These participants struggled with the construct of spirituality and what it meant:

Leonard (01:1054)

I'm not myself happy about the word spirituality or spiritual or spirituality in the counselling context I don't know really know what it means.

Both participants made multiple attempts to understand it. One participant Leonard had done some sustained thinking about this over a period of time,<sup>87</sup> and the second participant Elizabeth engaged actively with the research exploring dictionary definitions of it, using references in the media to it and thinking about it in relation to her life, her friends and her colleagues. She felt that she got nearer to what she thought others understood as spiritual experiences through the use of art and other metaphors. For example she described how the work of Dante and his concept of the inferno and heaven helped with some understanding here:

Elizabeth (01: 1126)

I mean the only way I can get near it is Dante really and his concept you know in the inferno and the heaven and and er (fading)  
JB- can you talk a bit more about inferno and heaven and  
Elizabeth- limbo and what's the other one, God again it was through art there was a wonderful Botticelli exhibition at the Royal Academy 10 years ago of Botticelli's drawings of Dante circles of hell and heaven

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<sup>87</sup> In the sense of having thought, in a sustained way, about spirituality over a long period of time Leonard was clear in his thinking here. As the next chapter will show he saw spirituality as an unnecessary construct in psychodynamic work, one that was forced; he felt coherent and clear in his thinking here.

JB- yes

Elizabeth- the souls and moving through them with who's the Greek philosopher Neard [sic], was it Neard maybe and having to leave him at the doorway of heaven because he couldn't enter. I mean I suppose it's when it's a very it's (pause) relationship focused moment in separation then I get a sense of well maybe

JB- right

Elizabeth- but it has to be something wonderful like Botticelli and Dante (laugh) you know no less.

However both remained bewildered by the construct of spirituality.

Participant bewilderment with spirituality was largely due to their association of spirituality with religion and God. Both participants had problems with this: Leonard because he felt that there were no actual truths in religion and Elizabeth who, based on her early life experiences, felt contempt and rage with religion, for example:

Elizabeth (01: 440)

So when you get this stuff about Christ dying for our sins, no way I'm never ever going to have someone lay that on me. You can hear the rage in my voice.

JB- absolutely

In his struggle with understanding of spirituality Leonard described it as trying 'to harvest bubbles' (L01: 1111). The implications of this difficulty is explored in the following chapters examining the impact of participants understanding of spirituality on their understanding and experience of it in psychodynamic practice.

Having explored the main ways in which participants understand spirituality two additional themes identified in the narratives relating to spirituality will now be explored: the difficulties in talking about spirituality and the innateness of it.

### **9.3. The difficulties in talking about spirituality**

Although the participants engaged in talking in the interviews the majority referred to the difficulties in talking about it, and the sense of running out of words in doing so. For example:

Frank (01: 951)

you know, we read the literature, and words like ineffable or beyond expression or mystery. One runs out of words.

Participants experienced words as often being inadequate in talking about spirituality, with spirituality having a 'different currency' to words (Chris 01: 858). As such several participants felt that it could be accessed through different forms such as music, the arts and poetry.

Even when there are words for spirituality some participants highlighted the difficulty in ensuring shared language where one felt understood. For example Andrew described 'bruising experiences' (A01: 1152) when talking with others about spirituality and realising that the language he used was not understood by those he was engaging with.

In recognising the difficulties with words in talking about spirituality other participants recognized the importance of silence in engaging with and understanding others spirituality:

George (02: 807)

sometimes there are no words sometimes there are no explanations, its more about connecting with that stillness.

In addition, because of the difficulties in describing spirituality one participant, Deborah found it easier to talk about spirituality when it felt absent. Engaging with this absence enabled Deborah to think more about spirituality and recognize her sadness about how little she felt it operated in the world.

## 9.4. The innateness of spirituality

Eight participants explicitly identified that they saw spirituality as innate to humans. This was described in different ways but with the core understanding of its innateness.

Andrew for example argued that spirituality was innate to humans;

Andrew (02: 1033)

I mean spirituality is not like owning a motorbike, it's not a commodity it's not an option, every human consists of spirit as well as flesh.

And Brian understood spirituality as an integral part of being human:

Brian (01: 892)

I don't see spirituality as something separate of course no way  
JB- mm

B01- it's an integral part of psyche. And my psyche is obviously what I bring to my work and relate and are relating with the other psyches and watching out of course with all the transference and projection that goes on at the same time.

I could not compartmentalize off spirituality and then leave it, I'll leave that outside somewhere

Whilst recognising the innate nature of spirituality and its ever-present nature some participants recognized the varying levels at which people engaged with it. Frank illustrates this well:

Frank (01: 647)

in some people it's clearly more heightened in than others. Because some people are just, haven't really accessed that, but it is my belief that it is innate in all human beings and can definitely somehow be facilitated or stimulated.

The ways in which participants understand and engage with this spirituality is the focus of the following chapters.

## 9.5. Summary

This chapter explored the main ways that participants understand spirituality. The starting point for looking at this was Cook's (2004) definition of spirituality. The findings indicate that this model requires an adjustment to include all the elements identified by participants in their understanding of spirituality. Specifically it needs to include that spirituality relates to relationships between two or more people.

The themes identified in participants' narratives reflected three of the four groupings in Casey's (2013) model that is there were those participants who identified their spirituality through their religion (spiritual and religious), those who identified their spirituality by separating it from religion (spiritual but not religious) <sup>88</sup> and those who had difficulties understanding spirituality (neither spiritual nor religious).

The subthemes within the main themes were identified. A common theme for all participants with an understanding of spirituality was that of connection, within the self, between people and/or with God/Other/other.

Two additional themes in the data were the difficulties in talking about spirituality and the innateness of spirituality to humans. The prevalence of these themes indicates its recognition by many participants.

Participants' understanding of spirituality is important in that it impacts on how it is understood and worked with in the context of their psychodynamic practice. How spirituality is understood in their psychodynamic work is the focus of the next chapter.

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<sup>88</sup> Brian is an exception here; he was spiritual and religious but understood the need to separate them in order for personal spirituality to be understood and experienced.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **SPIRITUALITY AND THE PSYCHODYNAMIC MODEL**

#### **10.1. Introduction**

This chapter explores how participants understand spirituality in the psychodynamic model. The previous chapter demonstrated a range of understandings of spirituality among the participants. These understandings impact on how participants' see spirituality within psychodynamic thinking and practice, with participants interpreting the model or translating it in the light of their spiritual understandings. This chapter explores the main themes in the narratives around this.

#### **10.2. Main themes in understandings of spirituality within the psychodynamic model**

The majority of participants in this study identify links between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling (9). Three main themes were identified among these participants (see 1-3 below). There were two participants who had difficulties in understanding spirituality. There was one main theme in these narratives (Theme 4). There was a further theme common to all participants and that is the need for counsellors to be and to know themselves in their practice (Theme 5). These themes are summarised below:

Main themes:

1. Relating spirituality to aspects of psychodynamic thinking.
2. The use of religious constructs and understandings in the work.
3. Understanding spirituality as beyond psychodynamic thinking and



language.

4. The lack of fit between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling.
5. The need for counsellors to be and to know themselves: an essential part of practice.

These themes will now be examined.

### **10.1.1. Theme 1: Relating spirituality to aspects of psychodynamic thinking**

In making sense of the relationship between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling participants' related their understanding of spirituality to aspects of psychodynamic thinking. This was done in a variety of ways with three sub themes within this main theme. These are:

- the repositioning of Freud: understanding his work as spiritual and Freud as a religious man
- linking spirituality with psychodynamic theories and theorists
- understanding spirituality and psychodynamic counselling as parallel processes.

The sub themes will now be explored.

#### **10.1.1.1. The repositioning of Freud: understanding his work as spiritual and Freud as a religious man**

Five participants in the study mentioned Freud in their narratives. In addition to valuing his contribution to the psychodynamic method, some participants also explicitly recognized his work as spiritual. These participants argued that attending to the inner world of the client, to their deep emotional and psychological needs are spiritual tasks and have a spiritual quality about them. Andrew's narrative illustrates this. He argues that Freud's thinking and practice was deeply humanitarian and spiritual

and repositioned Freud as a religious man arguing that the intensity of his work could not be sustained as an atheist:

Andrew (02: 940)

that you simply couldn't sustain that as an atheist. Atheism is a respectable intellectual position but we're not talking about intellectual positions we're talking about juice, we're talking about blood, about what flows, what's possible.

Andrew argued that counselling work was achieved through reciprocity through relationships, not just intellect, and he understood this as spiritual. Andrew thus regarded Freud as a religious man. This is a contentious interpretation and one that Freud would oppose (Freud 1927, 1930) in that religion is seen to encompass adherence to a set of beliefs, practices and rituals that are related to the sacred<sup>89</sup> and to a particular tradition, and require a belief in a personal God for most (Casey 2013). While it is difficult to see how Freud fits within such an interpretation what Andrew seems to be saying is that through Freud's actions and care for his clients and wanting to do good for them Freud demonstrates a drive within him that enables this. Andrew does not believe that this can be sustained from an atheistic position and thus interprets that the drives within Freud and his actions about wanting to help others as having a religious base. Caring and helping others are aspects of and the goals of many religions (King 2009). Andrew is merging his spirituality with his religion, Christianity. He appears not to see a difference between them, framing his spirituality within his Christian faith. Central to Andrew's understanding and that help with his reasoning here is his belief that spirituality is an innate part of humans (see Chapter 9.4). Andrew understands that God is innate in the world that 'God is synonymous with existence' (A02: 874). He thus interprets his understanding of himself and others within this ontology. It is with

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<sup>89</sup> Sacred is defined as 'that which relates to the numinous (mystical, supernatural) or God, and in Eastern religious traditions, to Ultimate Truth or Reality' (Koenig 2009: 284).

such a stance that he argues his position about Freud being a religious man.

#### **10.1.1.2. Linking spirituality with psychodynamic theories and theorists**

Some participants in demonstrating their understanding of spirituality within psychodynamic practice did so by linking their spirituality to aspects of psychodynamic theory and theorists. This varied among participants with most mentioning very little about psychodynamic theory and a few detailing a fair amount. This range occurred with participants demonstrating both the discovery genre and the clarity genre. The connections that participants made here will now be discussed starting with participants who linked the unconscious with spirituality.

##### **The unconscious**

Some participants related the unconscious to spirituality. They did this in contrasting ways demonstrating their individual understanding of the relationship between spirituality and the unconscious. The main difference in participants' understanding here is in the nature of the connection between them: some argued that spirituality and the unconscious are connected and rooted in one another and others that they are not connected, that they are separate.

In terms of a connection between spirituality and the unconscious the latter was seen as containing 'the roots of spirituality,' one's personal spirituality (Brian 01: 361). With this understanding the aim of psychodynamic work was to make the unconscious (and thus one's personal spirituality) conscious. Brian for example explicitly recognized this in his work. George is another example of a participant who understands a connection between the unconscious and spirituality. He argues that an increase in spiritual awareness results in an increase in awareness of unconscious material. He described this succinctly, as the

'spiritual sense enabling a window onto the unconscious' (George 01: 687).

In contrast to this view, spirituality and the unconscious were also seen as two very different things. Hazel illustrates this. Like Chris, she describes the sacredness of spirituality and the values and love that are part of it. She contrasts this with the unconscious that had no values or moral base and thus felt that they were separate and different constructs. However this felt a provisional understanding for her with the newness of her thinking illustrated by her comment 'that's where I've got to at the moment I think' (Hazel 01: 715).

The contrasting ways that participants understand the unconscious indicates that the psychodynamic model is interpreted flexibly and used to incorporate individual ideas about spirituality, in ways that make sense for each participant.

### **Psychodynamic theorists**

Some participants related spirituality to specific psychodynamic theorists. This too was done in a variety of ways and the links that participants made to the work of Bion and Klein will be shown to illustrate this. Bion's work was valued by participants and similarities were made between his concept of unknowing, having no memory or desire, with the experience of Christian mystics being in the present moment and sitting with the unknown. For example:

Janet (01:1411)

you see there's an awful lot of common ground between the sacrament of the present moment and being in the here and now so that Bion, you know, is very spiritual.

Janet (02: 602)

I think the other things that's a spiritual task as well we could argue is the sitting with the unknown

JB- mm

Janet- without memory or desire or understanding to quote Bion. That sense of not knowing where this session's going to go and sitting with it.

As well as being seen as spiritual Bion is also seen as a mystic (Andrew). The concept of containment<sup>90</sup> is also helpful for and applied to the understanding of God as a good container by Andrew. Through his understanding of the omnipresence of God (this was Andrew's ontology-see Section 11.8.4), Andrew has an image of God as the container in the work, containing the client and him in it:

Andrew (01: 978)

so he [God] becomes the sort of the good therapist who listens to an appalling tale of abuse, and with Bion, says I don't know why you're so angry with me I'm not trying to help you, but what I am doing is containing what's in the room, you know now of a potential for abuse. That becomes for me an image of God.

Spirituality was also linked with Klein and in particular her work on envy and gratitude. Andrew demonstrated this in his understanding of spirituality as gratitude:

Andrew (01: 773)

also thinking about spirituality as gratitude so I mean I think Melanie Klein's papers on envy and gratitude and the way in which she makes gratitude an outcome and a sign of health replacing covertness and envy that that person is in a satisfactory relationship with the world, and I would say and with the creator.

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<sup>90</sup> Containment describes interchanges where one person's disturbing states of mind are conveyed to another person. In this process, as these states of mind are taken in the mind of the second person, they lose their frightening and unmanageable quality and become transformed into something tolerable and meaningful (Spurling 2004).

He agreed with Klein's view about gratitude being a sign of health and enabling a satisfactory relationship with the world but includes within this a relationship with the creator, God.

By understanding psychodynamic theorists as spiritual or relating spirituality to theory participants demonstrated a form of translation between them that enables correspondence and communication between psychodynamic understanding and spirituality. Participants did this to make sense for themselves of spirituality within their psychodynamic practice. This point will be further developed in Chapter 13.

#### **10.1.1.3. The parallel processes within spirituality and psychodynamic counselling**

Participants identified many similar processes in spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. Participants understand them as parallel processes, that is processes that occur in both spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. As will be demonstrated in this subtheme several participants who identified parallel processes in spirituality and psychodynamic counselling recognized and encouraged exchange between them to help inform and develop each other.

Participants identified parallel processes in terms of the thinking about spirituality and psychodynamic counselling and in terms of their understanding of the skills or 'doing' of it. These will each be explored.

#### **Parallel processes in thinking about spirituality and psychodynamic counselling**

Some participants recognized a parallel process between spirituality and psychodynamic practice through being present to the client, attending to the present moment and taking their inner world seriously. They understand this as spiritual or a spiritual task. Chris is an example here

understanding the present moment as a parallel process central to both spirituality and psychodynamic practice. He described the centrality of the present moment to his spirituality, and also uses this as a focus in his psychodynamic work:

Chris (02: 169)

the way I present any model is to bring it into the present moment really so (pause) whether even if I were an analyst I would be saying well what of this neurosis that we've uncovered from the unconscious is manifesting right now you know it's not really of any interest if it's just buried and not doing anything but how can we find it now.

As mentioned some participants argue that paying attention to the inner world is recognized as a parallel process, that both do this. With this understanding psychodynamic counselling is seen as a spiritual activity or task:

Janet (02: 393)

Janet- I mean Freud started being quite cross about religion having been brought up in a mixture of Jewish and Catholic environment and then set out to invent something that gave paid huge attention to people's inner world and took them seriously as human beings  
JB- mm

Janet- well that you could argue is a spiritual task.

The repositioning of Freud and his work as deeply spiritual has been argued earlier in this chapter and participants are reinforcing these ideas by identifying parallels between being present and deeply listening to clients and spirituality.

Parallels are also argued by some participants to exist between the ethical and moral principles of spirituality and the ethical principles of counselling. Hazel for example described this as being 'a massive part for me' (Hazel 01: 1371). Some participants see parallels in terms of the model and processes of both. Kathleen is an example here:

Kathleen (K01: 773)

Kathleen- again I think if we think in terms of the, you know, the therapeutic framework and things like that, the model for living a spiritual life if you like, and if we're talking about just spirituality its more nebulous and what you make it isn't it? But there are I think there's still the sort of boundaries I suppose and sort of concepts of how to do things and I think that to me is very congruent as well you know that feels very similar in a lot of ways

JB- mm

Kathleen- so I see them [ spirituality and psychodynamic counselling] very much as different words to describe a similar sort of process really of what's going on and I don't see any conflict at all for me

As such she described it as being ' two sides of the same coin really' (K01: 951). Andrew (02: 222) also recognized this and stated that both could benefit from a trade between them including developing a better understanding of God:

Andrew (01: 1233)

analysis is not religion but if you are a religious person then the silence within an analytic session with a good analyst you know can contribute towards one's understanding of God.

A further example of a parallel process was recognition of being on the edge in both spirituality and psychodynamic practice. This was the case with Janet. She valued her Franciscan beliefs in helping her to manage her thinking and her practice of spirituality. These beliefs have an emphasis on 'being on the edge and helping people on the edge' (Janet 01: 1339). She felt that this was a feature of both her spirituality and her psychodynamic practice; her psychodynamic work was about helping people on the edge.

### **Parallel processes in the skills of spirituality and psychodynamic counselling**



There were several parallel processes recognized in the 'doing' or skills of spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. Several will be presented to demonstrate the range here.

The importance of discipline and a focus on the longer term in both processes is important to some participants. Janet recognized the value of a liberating discipline:

Janet (J01: 750)

Janet-...because I do believe in the spirit of discipline

JB- right

Janet- but not harsh discipline, liberating discipline and so that sense of structure so if you like there's quite a good connection between living life according to a rule in an unrigid way

JB- mm

Janet- and the discipline of the psychoanalytic, psychodynamic approach. So rigour and rhythm, discipline and taking a long term view are all things that I would say that apply to both.

Parallels were also seen in terms of preparation for and the stillness required in both. Religious practices were mentioned as helpful here. For example Chris and Janet made spiritual links between emptying the mind in preparation for client work as advocated by Bion, with the Christian understanding of kenotic thinking:

Janet (02: 566)

I think that self-emptying so that's from a Christological point of view.

It's the kenotic thinking, it's the self –emptying in order to be alongside the other.

These self- emptying processes were argued to be exactly the same but with different explanations: kenosis is the process of emptying the self and going beyond the self in order to be self-giving (Hastings et al 2000)

and the process of abolishing 'memory and desire' is necessary for focusing on the immediate present and being with the client (Bion 1963,1970). George recognized how the stillness acquired through his Quaker practice was helpful and was used in preparation for his work and for managing the silences in the work:

George (02: 807)

and I think you know that fits in very much with my Quaker model that when I'm working with clients I think that actually I probably access my Quakerism more when it's really difficult stuff cos sometimes there are no words sometimes there are no explanations. It's more about connecting with that stillness.

Some participants recognized parallels in the process of engagement and deep listening to clients with spirituality; that these are spiritual activities. Janet for example understood the deep listening to a client as a sacramental practice:

Janet (01: 846)

Janet- and this is one of the things I believe in, is the ordinariness of what we're trying to do and I'd say that both in ministry and in the consulting room, it is at the same time ordinary and extraordinary  
JB- yes

Janet- if you've never had somebody really listen to you and here's this person alright you may be paying with a cheque at the end of the month but they're listening to you in a way that you've never been listened to before, that I believe is sacramental.

Deborah's aim in her work is to achieve equality with clients to ensure that they are understood is equally seen as a form of spirituality. This was her understanding of it. As an atheist Deborah sees this as a secular form of spirituality.

The idea of helping clients to let go of anxieties and defences is also identified as a parallel process in spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. Brian in particular argued this. He stated that this was central both to his psychodynamic practice and to his understanding of developing one's spirituality and of enabling personal transformation. He cited the work of several spiritual and religious texts including the book of Job in the Bible, Meister Eckhart<sup>91</sup> and the I Ching<sup>92</sup> as illustrating forms of 'letting go.'

A final parallel process to be presented here is that of love. This was seen as part of both spirituality and psychodynamic practice. Hazel is an example here. She saw her work as a counsellor as an expression of her faith and of wanting to love and give to others. She saw this as a central force in all that she does:

Hazel (01: 1520)

the word love is never used in the psychotherapy, <sup>93</sup> counselling world and yet love is for me the central driving force in everything that I do and not doing harm

JB- mm

Hazel- that's the opposite side of it if you like that I'm here because I love the client

JB- yes

Hazel- not in the way of cuddling but in a way of wanting their highest good

JB- mm

Hazel- wanting to be a facilitator in their healing process which come from love as the fundamental, and we're almost scared to say the word love. It's almost like its too fluffy or it's too out there and it's got all kinds of connotations.

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<sup>91</sup> Meister Eckhart is a radical thirteenth century German theologian, priest, philosopher and mystic (Eckhart 1994).

<sup>92</sup> The I-Ching is alternatively known as the Classic of Changes or Book of Changes and is one of the oldest Chinese texts. It focuses on the dynamics of opposites and the acceptance of the inevitability of change ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com) accessed on 24.01.15).

<sup>93</sup> This is not the case for example, Lear (1990) and Sayers (2003) both discuss this within the context of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, a point that is developed in Chapter 13.

Although central to her practice Hazel reflects a professional reticence about talk about love. This is also experienced by Chris and examined in the next chapter (11.2).

This section has demonstrated that participants understand the relationship between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling through several parallel processes, processes that are common to both. This is one way of understanding the relationship between them. Other forms of understanding that have been explored within the main theme of relating spirituality to aspects of psychodynamic theory are the repositioning of their understanding of Freud and linking spirituality with the model's theories and theorists. The second main theme, that of the use of religious constructs and understandings in the work, will now be explored.

### **10.1.2. Theme 2: The use of religious constructs and understandings in the work**

The majority of participants (7) in this study identify a religious position; six are Christian and one a Quaker. The Christian participants used a variety of religious constructs in their practice. By this I mean that they used overt reference to aspects of their religion in their psychodynamic work. Examples will be given to illustrate the range here.

The majority of participants in this group identified a sense of vocation or calling from God to psychodynamic work. They described being called by God and enabled to do the work. For example:

Kathleen (02: 616)

I feel it's [counselling] something I've been given as a gift really. It's something that I've been you know enabled to do and I feel because of that I'm, that's the reason I'm able to do it, is through the strength of my beliefs sort of thing. It's always there, it's what motivates me to do  
JB- mm

Kathleen- It's [Holy Spirit]<sup>94</sup> just sort of the driving force really is for what I do in everything really I think so it's always there in the room with me.

Within this calling there is recognition of the need to suffer alongside the client to help understand the transformative nature of it:

Andrew (02: 727)

my spiritual calling as a therapist is to suffer alongside the client and to understand the alchemy of suffering, the transformative alchemy of it.

The Christian image of Jesus suffering on the Cross or in the Garden of Gethsemane is identified as a model helpful in understanding the client's suffering at a deep level. For example:

Chris (01: 542)

The other central fact of Christianity the Passion which goes with the resurrection as you know as a horse and carriage so to speak (pause) that people come to us as therapists because they're hurting and the Passion is (pause) all about humankind hurting in general and in the specific as well. So if I'm sitting with a client who is hurting we're right there in the Garden of Gethsemane<sup>95</sup> as it were. So its probably about me needing to be unconsciously but very firmly as if I'm in the Garden of Gethsemane

JB-yes

Chris- without actually mentioning it or even necessarily being very conscious of it.

Janet recognized the need for continuing discernment for ensuring that she was working where God wanted her to be. It can be seen that

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<sup>94</sup> As a Christian Kathleen, like others, understands the Holy Spirit as guiding her in her work. See later in this section. In Christianity the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity: God as spiritually active in the world (Hastings et al 2000).

<sup>95</sup> The Garden of Gethsemane is the garden between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives where Jesus went with his disciples after the Last Supper and was betrayed.

participants' understandings of spirituality and religion is woven into their understanding of being a counsellor with their psychodynamic work being seen as an expression of this. The transformative nature of this was recognized, a point further developed in Chapter 11.

In terms of other religious constructs used in the work several participants understood God as being ever present and thus present in counselling work. Chris epitomised this well linking his understandings of the Incarnation<sup>96</sup> in Christianity with his understanding of the divine being constantly present including in the counselling room. Some participants recognized God or the Holy Spirit as a positive and guiding presence in their work, partnering them in the work. For example, Janet explicitly referenced her trust in the Holy Spirit in her work:

Janet (J02:512)

My job is to prepare myself so that I then trust that if I do make a mistake it's not going to matter because the Holy Spirit is rather greater than my capacity to make a mistake or not.

Chris had an alternative perspective on how Christ guided his life including his counselling work. He had come to understand his Christian faith through experience and living in the world, and although he knew it was not supported etymologically he understood belief or believe as 'be living' Christianity:

Chris (01: 708)

whereas if I be-live [sic] the gospels I want to live the way Christ, it shows me it is worth living with massive self abandonment and quite a revolutionary attitude to prayer and to relationship and to those who we should respect and love.

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<sup>96</sup> Incarnation is the embodiment of God the Son in human flesh as Jesus Christ (Hastings et al 2000).

Chris demonstrated a sense of a revolutionary attitude to relationship. This is a point developed in Chapter 11 focusing on his understanding and sharing with clients of some of his feelings of liking and love of them.

A final example of the use of religious constructs in psychodynamic work is the use of Christ's meeting with Mary Magdalene in the Garden of Gethsemane in the work and the use of it as a model for the resolution of sexual abuse. This is a point argued by Andrew who stresses the importance of sex to spirituality and argues for the need to consider sexual differences in counselling work. He felt that the example of the risen Christ with Mary Magdalene enabled a freeing of sexuality with it becoming a blessing rather than a curse. Andrew understands sexuality as helpful in thinking about spirituality, stating that:

Andrew (02: 1473)

if you're asking about someone's spiritual health you could do a lot worse than ask what's your experience of the other sex.

He argued that he would 'have no truck with' (Andrew 02: 1514) an asexual spirituality, something others would agree with (MacKenna 2008).

It can be seen that participants use a variety of religious understandings and constructs in their work that help them personally in their counselling work. A further theme of understanding spirituality within psychodynamic counselling is of it moving into a different zone of being, beyond psychodynamic understanding and language. This will now be explored.

### **10.1.3. Theme 3: Understanding spirituality as beyond psychodynamic thinking and language**

As has been argued earlier it is not possible to ever fully understand or know psychodynamic practice or spirituality, both will always remain beyond description (Blass 2006), for they are elusive constructs and experiences. In thinking about them together, all participants who see a link between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling understand it, or elements of it, as being beyond psychodynamic thinking and language, and another zone or dimension of experience. In this study for those with a religion this was because their spirituality is essentially their ontology. Kathleen, for example, clearly articulated this in Chapter 9.2.1.3. The omnipresence of God detailed in the last theme, that God is present in all things, also illustrates this strand.

Those participants without a religion also understand spirituality as being beyond psychodynamic thinking and language and, like those with a religious faith, when talking about spirituality often referred to a different dimension or zone of being. These participants, Deborah and Frank understand spirituality as being beyond current psychodynamic thinking and explanation. For example:

Frank (01: 482)

really what we're talking about it is something which lies beyond relationships and lies beyond object relations, it's something about a person's take on what for them life is about or could be or might be or should be. And in that point I think you move into something which has a more spiritual quality to it, let's call it spiritual, or if that frightens you, existential, but we're down to we're getting to a bedrock of what it is to be human.

However their narratives about the lack of psychodynamic understanding here differed. Frank recognized that although there are the beginnings of thinking and research about spirituality in psychodynamic counselling the



legacy of the historical animosity to religion and spirituality within it meant that it is not part of the currency of psychodynamic thinking yet, with nothing in current main texts. He argues that it is not yet something assimilated within the culture of psychodynamic understanding. As such there was little means of making sense of it within current psychodynamic thinking and thus he saw spirituality as something beyond it.

Deborah, on the other hand, resisted psychodynamic understandings of spirituality wanting to retain spirituality as being beyond this. She felt that if spirituality is understood psychodynamically it will reduce it to a form of technique:

Deborah (01: 1131)

you see for me that then becomes technique and technical language and technical words that that actually take away from the meaning of what it means to be with somebody sitting in a room on that level  
JB- right  
Deborah- and so I don't like using those [psychodynamic] words I run away from them.

For her it was important that learning about this way of engaging with clients was not done in an academic intellectual way but in an experiential way. This is essential for Deborah. She regards her understanding of spirituality experienced as equality as an essential way of aiming to relate to clients. She felt that the inclusion of understanding this psychodynamically would reduce its meaning, deconstruct it in unhelpful ways rather than encourage its development in a more experiential way. As such she preferred to think about it as beyond psychodynamic understanding. There was a sense of letting go or pushing away of the desire for rational thought and factual information alone. She values intuitive and experiential knowing and a willingness to experience other forms of discourse, something she was doing in her emerging understanding of spirituality.

#### **10.1.4. Theme 4: The lack of fit between spirituality and the psychodynamic model**

As discussed in Chapter 8, two participants had difficulties understanding spirituality and what it means. Because of this they could not see a fit between it and the psychodynamic model. They regarded this as something forced and unnecessary:

Leonard (01: 1133)

it's an unnecessary, an Occam's razor cut.<sup>97</sup> What you don't need. Don't put explanations in that you don't need.

Elizabeth recognized her exasperation with spiritual and religious language and her incredulity that people could have such beliefs. Both participants described the centrality of their psychodynamic thinking; Elizabeth broadened this to her life outside of work:

Elizabeth (02: 1274)

it's the way I approach everything really. That's my faith if you like.

and Leonard talked about being 'soaked in' (L01: 1283) this for his work.

While Leonard recognized and respected that clients had experiences that they regarded as spiritual and that were important to them he himself did not share such explanations. He gave an example of when there were flashes of inspiration or insight in the work. He did not know where they came from and he was unconcerned about this:

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<sup>97</sup> An Occam razor is the principle that gives precedence to simplicity, that of two competing theories the simpler explanation is used (Britannica.com accessed on 29.10.14).

Leonard (01:1118)

there's too much goes on for me to know where does what I said come from. Did it come from what I have just listened to and therefore feeding it back?

JB- mmm

Leonard- did it come from something that was said three sessions ago which I've forgotten about but somewhere in my memory? It's there.

JB- mmm

Leonard- did it come from some sort of connection between us at a higher level that I don't understand you know a telepathic whatever it may be? But none of us really understand any of that so what I do know is that it doesn't come from God.

Leonard argued that what some people may see as spiritual experiences could be seen psychodynamically as other states of consciousness such as letting go of conscious thinking giving the example of going into a reverie.<sup>98</sup> His preference, like Elizabeth's, is to use psychodynamic understandings, rather than understand such experiences as spiritual:

Leonard (01: 1147)

I suspect that talking to some people I would share what their experience is [of spirituality] but I would not share the explanation

JB- right

Leonard- you know behind it or the meaning behind it.

Leonard (01: 1070)

I wouldn't use the word spiritual. I would say that was an uplifting experience, that's inspirational. That's the same word, the root word inspirational.

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<sup>98</sup> Reverie is a term adopted by Bion (1963) referring to state of mind that the infant requires of the mother. The mother's mind needs to be in a state of calm acceptance in order to take in the infants projected feelings, make sense of them and give them meaning. Through introjection of a receptive, understanding mother the infant can develop his/her capacity for reflection on his/her own states of mind (Hinshelwood 1991:420).

An example from Elizabeth demonstrates her preference for psychodynamic understandings in her work. This excerpt is from her attempts to understand what spirituality is:

Elizabeth (02: 805)

Elizabeth- so that moment in therapy, you know, when like you're in a trance and you're in that completely sort of held space and someone is completely at one with themselves, and you're at one with them and maybe that's spiritual

JB- but how do you understand that when that happens, those moments?

Elizabeth- I understand it in terms of trust, holding and containment, and letting go (pause). It's mother and baby again. It's the relationship

JB- going back into the blissful state?

Elizabeth- yes mm or not even that. Maybe I think it's much more conscious than that. It's a sort of mutual oneness if you like which is also separate because you can think about it

JB- mm (pause) and when you read it in relation to something like outside of that, that's when your resistance comes in

Elizabeth- yes especially that [religious] sort of language

Thus these participants continue the historical and dominant paradigm within psychoanalysis of the ambivalence at best and hostility at worst to spirituality and religion in psychodynamic thinking and practice. Leonard's ambivalence here was further demonstrated by his awareness that although there was a growing literature in this field it was not something that he engaged with.

#### **10.1.5. Theme 5: The need for counsellors to be themselves and to know themselves; an essential part of practice**

All participants in the study consistently and variously articulated the need for counsellors to be themselves and to know themselves in psychodynamic work. While explicitly valuing the psychodynamic model they understand themselves in their practice as being more than the model; that the core of this is who they are as a person. For example:

Leonard (01: 1540)

Leonard- if they [clients] do ask I say well I'm a psychodynamic therapist but actually I'm me and you'll know the way I work by the time we get to the end of this session and I'll ask you whether you want to go on working with me.

Brian (01: 671)

what I'm aiming at is an analytical psychotherapy practice called [Brian X] that's really what I'm trying to do, so it's me.

Hazel (01: 1013)

As a contemporary psychodynamic counsellor my frame of reference for me is not my psychodynamic model, it's more about who I am as a person and although I have become psychodynamic it's not what drives me.

Hazel recognized her desire to help clients to heal and understands this not as psychodynamic theory doing this but:

Hazel (01: 1025)

What I am doing in the counselling room

JB- yes

Hazel- what I am bringing to this whole experience

Being oneself in psychodynamic work is also central for Deborah. Like others she recognized that it can only happen through knowing oneself:

Deborah (01: 258)

It can't happen without knowing yourself either

JB- right

Deborah- so again I find I struggle with my feelings towards (pause) other types of counselling which don't require therapy

JB- because?

Deborah- because it becomes a treatment it becomes a them and us.

## **10.2. Summary**

In summary, this chapter demonstrated the ways in which participants' understandings of spirituality impact on how it is understood in their psychodynamic practice. It identified the various ways that they used to make sense in this area. For those participants identifying a link between spirituality and psychodynamic practice three main themes were presented: relating spirituality to psychodynamic thinking, the use of religious constructs and understanding in the work and understanding spirituality as beyond psychodynamic thinking and language. Within these themes there were frequently attempts to seek correspondence and communication between the two areas, translating experiences in the language of spirituality and of psychodynamic practice, a point that is discussed further in Chapter 13. They recognized the mutual benefit of an exchange between them. The thinking of the two participants who did not understand spirituality and did not see a link between it and psychodynamic work was explored in the fourth main theme. The varied ways in which spirituality is understood in this field illustrates a model of psychodynamic thought that is broad and adaptable to individual beliefs. Thinking about spirituality in this field and about the model is a dynamic, continuing process. This is important in enabling participants to be themselves in their work, an element they regard as essential to practice and the fifth theme explored in this chapter. The application of participants' understanding of spirituality to their practice is examined in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 11

## THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHODYNAMIC COUNSELLING

### **11.1. Introduction**

This chapter explores the application of participants' understanding of spirituality to practice. It will demonstrate how they apply their understanding to their work and how this understanding impacts on their practice. As illustrated through the discussion of the genres of participants' narratives in Chapter 8 this understanding has a more settled and certain feel for some participants (those showing the clarity genre) and a more provisional and evolving sense for some (those showing the discovery genre). The examination of the practice of participants in this area is achieved through exploring their accounts of their preparation and approaches to their work, the prevalence of spirituality in their work and through examples of their work in this area. The tensions for participants in working in this area will be explored along with participants' experiences of the exclusion of spirituality in supervision. Finally, the theme of the continuing nature of the journey in thinking about spirituality in psychodynamic practice will be explored.

### **11.2. Participants' preparations for meeting the client**

As Chapter 9 demonstrated some participants understand their spirituality as helping them prepare for their counselling work and clearing their mind for it, seeing parallels between their spirituality and psychodynamic understandings (c.f. Chapter 9 p14 for similarities between Christian kenotic thinking and Bion's work). Preparation for client work was done through a variety of means: through prayer,

mindfulness, meditation and a letting go of thoughts. For example, Kathleen prayed in a simple manner prior to seeing clients, for helping her to be present with them, and Chris used a form of listening meditation, from his Zen practice, in order to let go of thoughts prior to his work:

Chris (01:27)

listening meditation you know you're not trying to not listen you're not trying to shut stuff out you're listening you're tuning in to what's going on around you but in a way which forgets the self oddly enough and so being with a client there's no distance and also of a sense of nothingness of no ego. So my hope is that my own ego drops away.

The integration of his Zen spiritual practice enables Chris to prepare for and to be with clients. This resonates with Brian's description of his process of 'letting go of thoughts,' of all that is happening in his life:

Brian (B01: 964)

you know to try and let all that stuff go as much as possible so you can simply be yourself. And the other person's psyche can feel that its in a place where it can be accepted and really start to reflect on itself. That's really what I'm on about.

These examples illustrate that aspects of participants practice, in this case preparation for their work, can thus be seen to incorporate and reflect their spiritual beliefs.

### **11.3. Approaches to the client in counselling work and the need to respect their beliefs**

Participants in this study recognized that they often held different understandings of spirituality to their clients. Most recognized that they needed broader understandings than their own personal understandings in working with clients. For example, Andrew described using a variety of



different spiritual understandings depending on who he was with (A01: 920), that he is able to hold different understandings in order to enable being open to clients' spiritualities. This was a view shared by many participants including a participant who himself struggled with the construct of spirituality. Though clear about his own difficulties with it, Leonard was keen to ensure that he did not offend clients here. He argued that there were many possibilities in thinking in this area and that he wanted to help people to reach answers in these areas for themselves. Thus while he was clear about his current views and his difficulties around spirituality, he sought to respect and support other people in their thoughts:

Leonard (01: 755)

Leonard- I still don't want to offend

JB- no

Leonard- I still think that. I need to, I always want to respect where a person is

JB- yeah

Leonard- and I don't want them to push me into making assertions

JB- mm

Leonard- that they can either agree with or knock down. This is particularly as a therapist

JB- mm

Leonard- I'm not into that. I don't know. I think that would be wrong.

In order to respect clients' beliefs a number of different factors were identified as helpful here. Several participants recognized the need to be open and non-judgemental with clients. Some participants recognized how their understanding and practice of spirituality underpinned this. George's narratives will be used to illustrate this:

George (01: 518)

I like to think that I kind of bring that kind of non- judgemental approach. But what informs my non-judgemental stuff is the Quakerism

JB- right

G01- and the recognition that there is something of the other

JB- yes

G01- in the room and not pinning myself to any particular faith I think that leaves me open to accept what other people are saying and seeing it from their perspective

George recognized that his Quakerism enables an open and non-judgemental approach to clients and understanding their spirituality.

There was also recognition by some participants of the need to hold clients' beliefs intact in the work. This is demonstrated through Deborah's narratives. Following talking about a client and reviewing her work, Deborah then went on to describe the client's relationship with God and how on ending the counselling work it was important to her to have left this intact:

Deborah (02: 655)

She [ the client] had this relationship with God, she had this (pause) sense of what God is to her and his capabilities and his abilities and, you know, his ability to tolerate her inner secrets and forgive her and she was very, very sure about all of that, and so therefore that didn't belong to me, that belonged to him, and that felt very powerful.

JB- Hmm

Deborah- Hmm. But it [a dream that the client had] did set the ball rolling to finish

JB- mmm

Deborah- But it nonetheless you know, was good enough work in terms of where we'd got to and so on. And also with her God intact which was very important to me

JB- to keep her God?

Deborah- intact, mmm

JB- Because?

Deborah- it was something that will sustain her for the rest of her life.

Thus while not sharing the client's views Deborah transcended this and recognized the value and use of them to the client.

Some participants also described the need to equalise the relationship with clients often through the use of a sharing of something of themselves with clients. There were a variety of ways of doing this. Two examples will be given to demonstrate it. George sometimes revealed aspects of his personal situation in order to do this:

George (G01: 604)

sometimes I feel it's appropriate to maybe share something about my own experience because I think that it can actually form a bond with the client

JB- right

G01- so sometimes if people have had, if people have had balance problems for example

JB- yes

G01- I say yes I kind of understand what you're saying a little bit because I also have had balance problems

He felt that this led 'to greater equality in the relationship' (G01: 632).

Chris took this a stage further and in 'a strong amendment' (02: 380) to the psychodynamic model sometimes told clients that he liked or even loved them:

Chris (02: 358)

so at least partly what they're getting from therapy is I would argue and I would say to them you know, I think you and I have a real relationship and I would even actually (pause) maybe we should have turned the tape off for this bit <sup>99</sup>and I will often say and I really like you  
JB- mm

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<sup>99</sup> Approval to include this part in the research was sought following the interview and granted.

Chris- or even I love you, you know to the client which is probably deeply unprofessional to some models but I think it's important because it's giving the person a genuine piece of feedback about their capacity to be liked and to make a relationship and it needs to be a real one

JB- mm

Chris- it's because they might sometimes say well yeah but I'm paying you or it's not a real relationship because we can't go out and have a drink tonight

JB- yeah

Chris- and I say no but that's part of the strength of it that it, you know, so that to me feels like a sort of (pause) a quite strong amendment to a psychodynamic model. I think of most of the psychodynamic therapists I know would disagree with me in what I have just

JB- mm

Chris- put forward

JB- mm and how does that fit for you Chris is that not a problem for you?

Chris- well I think there are dangers about it you know. There are good old fashioned dangers of forming too deep an attachment if you like but actually that wouldn't be I don't think it could be too deep an attachment, but forming an attachment where the erotic is out of control and either for them or for me

JB- yes

Chris- I've never actually found myself threatened by that danger. I mean there is often an erotic transference or countertransference but I've never found it really to be dangerous

JB- mm

Chris- because I think one does this, this is a safe place

JB-mm

Chris- bye bye see you next week you know it's not, so whatever happens in the room

JB- mmm

Chris- and in the realm of feelings rather than actions.

In the context of a boundaried relationship, Chris felt able to express his like or love for a client.

A further means of enabling respect of clients' beliefs is through the use of attuning to the client in order to enable a deep connection with them.

Hazel identified this and saw it as a means of illustrating harmony between her spiritual values and ethical principles of her work:

Hazel (02: 642)

that when you attune to another person its about a way of showing spiritual values that are also in harmony with ethical principles. So it's about your empathy that's really there with the client, its about your compassion, its about your respect its about not wanting to do harm. It's all there

JB- yes

Hazel- as part of who I am as a therapist but which the values that I want to nourish which are part of the spiritual being because I'm not actually they're intangible but they can be felt they can be heard they can be, do you know what I'm saying?

JB- I do

Hazel- I'm sure there must be a word that describes all of that

JB- yes

Hazel- (pause) sort of almost willingness to meet that other person's mind

JB- mm

Hazel- in the room

JB- mm

Hazel – in a way that gives them that deep connection which that so often they're not having

Hazel demonstrates here the integration of her spiritual values with the ethical values of her practice, an area where she argued there was a good fit between them.

While most participants recognized the need to respect client's beliefs and work from their frame of reference there was recognition by one participant (Elizabeth) of the difficulty in doing this. Despite attempts to make sense of spirituality during the research Elizabeth remained baffled and confused by it and as such experienced this when working with clients. In talking about a client who spoke about the Holy Spirit she described her feelings of exasperation:

Elizabeth (02:1296)

yes just bewilderment

JB- yes

Elizabeth- it's a bit exasperated

JB- yes

Elizabeth- maybe that's the best word for it.

Elizabeth recognized her exasperation with spiritual and religious language and her incredulity that people could have such beliefs. She related this to a religious client that she had. Despite her personal views, Elizabeth respected this client's religious beliefs and did not want to reduce them to Freudian understandings, for example by looking at the clients need for a good father. However, she recognized her exasperation with a comment about the Holy Spirit:

Elizabeth (02: 5)

so at one point she [the client] said while we were talking about all this but maybe the Holy Spirit will be there (pause)

I think I almost did that in the session. Normally I'm quite you know

JB- what closed your eyes and you looked shocked

Elizabeth- well I don't know. She picked some well, no I just thought what's she talking about. I mean it was complete bewilderment on my part and she said you don't get what I've been talking about do you and I said no. I don't cos I thought this is mumbo jumbo that was my very judgemental very denigrating

JB- yes yes

Elizabeth- thought process

Elizabeth recognized that this was a term that she 'could not buy into' (E02: 1242). She recognized that she regarded the term "Holy Spirit" 'as a bit silly' (E02: 1304). By talking about this she became more conscious of how she worked here and the limits that could occur in the work; that the client was obviously picking this up, and she wondered about the impact of this on the work. She recognized that she was beginning to talk with the client about her reaction to the comment about the Holy Spirit and thus beginning to process it:

Elizabeth (E02: 1311)

I mean clinically you could think of it in terms of bearing difference and how we each tolerate that and still relate to each other  
JB- yes that's where I was in my thinking  
Elizabeth- yes so in a way that's what we're doing

Whilst Elizabeth was able in this case to begin to address her reaction to her client's beliefs in the work the possibility of shutting out spirituality from the work is very real. In this case, the client is able to talk with the counsellor about it but this may not be possible for others. This reflection stimulated Elizabeth's thinking here and encouraged her to continue thinking about her work here beyond the research.

In summary of this section participants recognized the need to respect clients' beliefs and some overtly recognized the need to hold clients' beliefs intact. Several approaches, informed by participants' spirituality, were used to enable this including an open and non-judgemental approach, the desire to equalise the relationship as well as to attune to the client to enable a deep connection. One participant recognized her limitations here and was able to reflect on her practice in the light of this.

#### **11.4. Variations in the degree of explicitness in working with spirituality**

As mentioned in Chapter 10 many participants understand spirituality to be implicit in their work, that it is a spiritual activity. Some also see it as innate in human beings and thus is always a possibility in the work.

However, there were variations in the level of explicitness that participants worked with spirituality. Some participants stated that they rarely brought the subject up with clients, but if clients did so they would be happy to work with it. Chris is an example here:

Chris (02: 795)

it's not a good idea to be explicit with clients about the action of God in their lives but if they raise it and want to discuss it that's fine.

Chris stressed that the main focus of psychodynamic work were feelings, a point that will be picked up in the next section:

Chris (02: 857)

the feelings are the sort of main currency of the discussion.

The exception here is Elizabeth. She did not recognize herself as working with spiritual issues. She did not understand spirituality and as the example in section 11.2 illustrated she did not feel comfortable with spiritual and religious language. She recognized the dominance and centrality of her psychodynamic thinking and that this was used as her frame of reference; a frame that did not include spirituality in her work.

#### **11.4.1. Working in a boundaried way**

Some participants stressed that the primary focus of counselling work is on emotional and psychological issues. They argued that there was little explicit talk of or work with spirituality in their psychodynamic practice; that they kept this to emotional and psychological issues and spiritual issues were dealt with separately to this in other contexts such as spiritual direction. Janet's narrative will be used to illustrate this. She is an ordained priest who was clear and definitive about working in a boundaried way:

Janet (01: 18)

I mean I'm focused on whatever I'm doing so if I'm  
JB- yes

Janet- focused on seeing a patient then my focus is listening to them obviously and if I'm focused on something else, I was doing a chaplaincy job at the weekend



JB- yes

Janet- then my focus was on accompanying them, listening to what they needed to talk about but the psychodynamic stuff always at the back of my mind

JB- right

Janet- if I'm talking to them and I may or may not say anything but sometimes it informs my

JB - yes

Janet- what I might say and I might translate it into something which would be ordinary language

JB- yes

Janet- and the spiritual dimension is always in my mind

She recognized the need to translate across the disciplines that the language was different in each. She gave examples such as;

Janet (01:1415)

if I'm doing spiritual direction then I might talk about the sacrament of the present moment but if I'm doing a clinical session I'll be talking about what's going on in the here and now you know I'm just wondering who I am here for you, you know from what you've just said.

In both her counselling role and in her priestly role thinking across the spiritual and psychodynamic disciplines took place. What differed was what was explicitly talked about in each mode of working. Janet saw her counselling work as using a psychodynamic methodology and that it was about working with emotional and psychological issues. There was a theme of stressing that she focused on the task in hand, that of either counselling or priestly work but with little explicit combination of both in either of them. She was wary of naming things outside of the discipline that she was working in and thus would not use spiritual or religious language and understanding in psychodynamic work. For example, in describing listening as a sacramental activity she would not use that language. She illustrated her wariness of using words outside of the discipline that she was working in:

Janet (02: 1193)

Janet- I would see it as both but I would be very wary of naming it outside of the discipline

JB- yes

Janet- because while I could quietly with God think something was going on there you know which was, which seemed like a profound spiritual moment. It's this whole business of the courtesy isn't it of using the client's frame of reference?

When talking about the client's frame of reference she saw this as psychological and emotional issues; she understood that this is what clients came for. Thus although she understood much of her work through her spiritual frameworks she held boundaries around this and it was rare for her to explicitly talk about it.

As noted earlier Chris worked in a similarly boundaried way.

### **11.3.2 Introducing spirituality into counselling work**

There were some participants, however, who differed from this and described how they introduced the subject of spirituality into counselling work. They did this in differing ways including by floating it into the work and explicitly asking about it in the work. Examples are given to illustrate this. Frank described 'floating' the subject of spirituality into the work:

Frank (01: 925)

one could float in, you know, the same way that one might use just a cautious introductory trial interpretation, one could float into the conversation something which brings in, something which is other than a reflection on past experiences or relationships out there, where you might use a word like forgiveness or a need for something or a moral, some sort of moral, to see how they might use them, to see whether that's something which they find useful, because for some people of course it's those aspects of their life which is somewhat absent, which they thirst for, because, and again, it comes back to what is the model, what is one understanding, what is the conception, what is of what we,

as counsellors, think it means to be a human being. And we therefore keep an ear open for that and float it into the work.

This was not in an overtly explicit way but by introducing concepts like forgiveness or morality in order to see how and if clients want to use this to explore the spiritual.

Other participants explicitly asked about clients' spirituality. This was often the case with participants who held religious beliefs and who had several clients who either worked or had strong connections with the Church. Andrew is an example here. Many of his clients were either members of the clergy, worked in churches or were clients with explicit religious beliefs, perhaps unsurprising with his church history and experience of working in theological colleges. He stated that he often had a spiritual health and a psychological health in mind and used this to safely challenge some of his client's thinking:

Andrew (01: 585)

I've got in mind a spiritual health and a psychological health that really that are working very much together so I will use my Christian experience and knowledge to challenge some of the tenets that they hold which can be done within the safety of a Christian conversation so that they don't necessarily have to feel threatened. This is somebody who does respect their positions.

Andrew stressed the safety and respect that he held for the client in order to be able to challenge clients here; that it was done safely and thoughtfully. In so doing he worked explicitly with spirituality in his work.

#### **11.4. The prevalence of a conscious sense of spirituality or spiritual encounters in the work**

Participants varied in the amount of conscious awareness of spirituality or spiritual encounters in their work. As mentioned, some participants

experienced minimal encounters of this: those participants who struggled with understanding spirituality and also those who worked in a boundaried way; they rarely used the word spiritual in their work.

Some participants argue that the nature of psychodynamic work is a factor in the prevalence of spirituality in that spiritual encounters rarely occur in short-term work unless clients specifically recognize this as the presenting issue. Reasons given for this include because it takes some time to engage with a client at this level (Frank) and that this is difficult with weekly therapy (Deborah). The latter argument is also based on the assumption that working with spirituality is working at a deep level that takes time to get to. Deborah thus argues that more frequent sessions than weekly help with this level of working.

This research increased participants' awareness of the prevalence of spirituality in their work. In thinking about it for the study it was recognized that spirituality is a bigger part of their work than initially thought. Kathleen is an example here:

Kathleen (02: 112)

I think I said to you before oh I don't think its come up very often really at all but when I reflected back I think it probably has been more of a part than I initially thought and I've got 3 sort of examples that I think might illustrate that.

This was anticipated as a possible impact of the research; that the method could raise their consciousness of spirituality in the work, of both implicit and explicit spiritual experiences. Because several participants recognized the innateness of spirituality in talking about their understanding of it in their work it is perhaps inevitable that they became more attuned or conscious of thinking about it and recognize it in their practice during the research process.

## **11.5. Examples of spiritual encounters in practice**

The participants that recognized spirituality in counselling work gave a range of examples of what they understand by this in their counselling practice. Examples of spiritual encounters in practice in this study are divided into two main groups: those spiritual encounters that are implicit (those that were understood and experienced but not spoken about) and those that are explicitly experienced (those were discussed in the work with clients).

### **11.5.1. Implicit spiritual encounters in counselling practice**

There were various ways in which spirituality is experienced implicitly in the work, that is, they are not explicitly talked about. These fell into three groups that will now be explored.

#### **11.5.1.1. The presence of God in the work**

Some participants describe their experiences of the presence of God in the work. As was discussed in Chapter 9 some participants experienced God as omnipresent. Examples given of the presence of God in their practice included a sense of being cared for by God, relying on God and mediating God in the work.

Andrew's narrative will be used to demonstrate this. He experiences God in his work and illustrates this with a client who was grieving over the death of his mother. His spiritual beliefs, which make him feel cared for by God and able to make mistakes, enable him in his work to be open and vulnerable:

Andrew (02: 780)

Because God is in the room caring for both of us I can surrender the power of my comparative health acquired through my own analysis and make a gift to the patient of my vulnerability

JB-mm

Andrew- always hand in hand with intelligence and thinking and self-awareness and reflectiveness so that I'm not you know saying now you've got to look after me

JB-mm

Andrew- but spirituality lies in the freedom to you know make a mistake like that and not beat myself up and recover from it and learn from it

As such Andrew felt that he relied on God in his work giving numerous examples throughout his narratives.

#### **11.5.1.2. The experience of spirituality in the silences in the work**

Several participants describe spiritual experiences at times of silence in the work. This was described in various ways including silences that were profound, had a deep sense of connection and that were contemplative. As an example Janet explained a deep sense of connection in the silence with a deeply depressed client. She described sitting alongside the client's suffering, being there for them despite the client's inability to connect with the counsellor. She experienced the client valuing this greatly and described it as a 'secular spirituality', a sense of spirituality that was not necessarily experienced in relation to a God by the client but one that enabled a deep level of connection with the client. This illustrates the implicit, that is, unspoken elements of spirituality in Janet's work, an experience that she recognizes and values within the bounded model described earlier. This contrasts with more explicit forms of working with spirituality.

Deborah provides an example of a contemplative silence. She described working with a very anxious client who struggled initially with silences. Deborah described how the nature of the silences began to change in

the work and became more contemplative and thinking. She understood these as having a sense of spirituality:

Deborah (01: 848)

I can think of one person in particular who is very very anxious and very difficult in terms of finding the whole experience anxiety provoking and isn't very forthcoming and the silences that can happen are very very panicky anxious silences. And so I've been helping her in a way by asking questions

JB- mm

Deborah- and so on because of the inability to tolerate these silences. But there have been a couple of occasions where actually the silences felt very different

JB- mm

Deborah- and it's not panicky, it's not anxious and she is contemplative rather than (pause) I don't know panicky I can't think of another word

JB- yeah

D01- and in that sense I guess that sense of spirituality was obtained at those moments.

Several participants stressed the importance of working uniquely with silences with each client to enable them to feel comfortable with it. George is an example here. He illustrated this by talking about attending to the rhythm in the dialogue for each client and responding at a pace that the client felt comfortable with:

George (02: 813)

and it wouldn't necessarily mean that you would stay quiet in a session for any particular period of time but it's about recognizing I think it's the pause in between the sentence and managing that in a way which clients feel comfortable with you know (pause) so it's the spaces in between

JB- I think I understand what you mean but for clarity could you just talk a bit more

George- well I suppose maybe it's the rhythm in the interaction that you're having the rhythm in the dialogue and I think for me I often kind of recognize that something is changing in the room when that rhythm or that pattern or that pacing slows down a bit and it sort of combines with the non verbal communication like eye contact and stuff like that.

By attending to such changes in rhythms and the silences George was able to identify and experience spiritual aspects in the work. This leads into the next point where spirituality is experienced in changes in the quality of the relationship with the client.

### **11.5.1.3. Experiences of change in the quality of the relationship and work with the client leading to a spiritual quality and encounter in the work**

An extension of the example just given about spiritually being experienced through attending to the changes in the silences in the work are the experiences described where, through a change in the quality of the relationship with the client, there is a spiritual quality to the work leading to spiritual encounters in the work. Such experiences do not necessarily involve attending to the rhythm of the silences. Frank provides two examples of this. He describes experiences where the quality of his relationship with the client changes in such a way that it leads in an experience of 'something larger' beyond object relations and relationships to what a person's take on life is:

Frank (01: 501)

one who comes to mind you know without giving details away, what you can find is that you're suddenly, you're listening to and you're involved in the room with a client who's talking about a relationship with a colleague, or a relationship in the family, and about aspects of, let's say, resentment or envy, one is working with that, and then suddenly the quality of the material and the quality of the relationship and what's happening transferenceally, what's happening in the materials one listens to, and in ones countertransference, where the person suddenly uses the word and becomes tearful over the notion of the need to forgive and, in my experiences, there's a qualitative shift in what I'm working with, because what I'm working with is not something, an unpicking of relationships, but it's something about, again, a spiritual quality because it's about the quality of what is good in life, what is necessary in life, to make life, I don't know, whole, abundant, good, so



there's that shift, so and I think this is where psychodynamic counselling it hits that, and the forgiveness might somehow just be in the material but it's not picked up, whereas really what we're talking about it is something which lies beyond relationships and lies beyond object relations, it's something about a person's take on what for them life is about or could be or might be or should be. And in that point I think you move into something which has a more spiritual quality to it.

He described the need to be alert to the 'qualitative shift' in the relationship with the client in order to engage at what he sees as the spiritual level. He feels that he can engage at a spiritual level since this is something he is familiar with and had experience of in his early years (F01: 246). He provides another example of this where there is a 'shift' in the quality of the relationship leading to the client exploring their meaning and purpose, leading to the potential for the client to become more whole and authentic. He highlights how the counsellor not only has to be alert to the changes but also has to be open to working at a spiritual level of engagement, that there is choice in this:

Frank (01: 821)

Frank- you get a client for example who has spoken about dying, struggles with his place of work you know this individual's place of work and it's about authority and hierarchy and blah blah blah and then it suddenly gets to a point where the individual very quietly then at the end of a session may say something like I've been thinking about my work, (pause) and actually I feel rather naked saying this I wonder if it's worth doing (pause) and you just feel the whole thing shift and you think this is something larger than

JB- mm

Frank- (pause) and so there you are beginning to move to something which is potentially leading up to something which is more spiritual

JB- mm

Frank- so the thing is that (pause) which can then be picked up

JB- yes

Frank- because I think this is important cos you begin to realize there's something potentially

JB- mm

Frank- that what this individual is sharing with you is something which is a concern but also a potential for moving forward

JB- mm

Frank- to become more whole more authentic, something is, something wants to come out but it's within the context of again meanings and purpose and value in life

JB-mm

Frank- so I think that's where one has to be open, have sympathy to that sort of thing and allow that into the work.

A further example here is through the experience of auras or light around people, in the work. Hazel describes an experience of seeing auras with a client, something that was new to her. She described her feeling of incredulity about this and that in the process that was unspoken, the client experienced some healing:

Hazel (02: 1173)

this particular day she'd [the client] been talking a lot about healing and her healing and as she sat and spoke I was very aware of a green aura around her on her left on her right side it was very vibrant and green but on her left side it was very pale. And I'm sitting there and I couldn't believe my eyes and I kept doing this [rubs her eyes] and at one point she said are you OK and I said yes I'm fine, and it was big this aura was big but it was very pale, it wasn't as good on this other side on her left side. And I remember thinking this is what people call the aura. I've never experienced it ever before I'd read about it in the past. I knew of it but I didn't really know what I thought about it

JB- mm

Hazel- and here this person was talking about her healing and it was just this and she actually became (small pause) she said she felt very tingly in the session

JB- mm

Hazel- she said it's like something's happening in the session I don't know what it is she said but I feel like I'm receiving some kind of healing today

Hazel's reaction of incredulity is understandable. She sought to make sense of this with her supervisor. However, this was unsuccessful in that the spiritual aspects of this were denied and references made only to the

light in the room and the effects this could have had on Hazel. The exclusion of spirituality from supervision is explored in section 11.7.

### **11.5.2. Explicit spiritual aspects to or spiritual encounters in counselling practice**

Several participants gave examples of explicit spiritual aspects or spiritual encounters in the work. This included examples where clients brought up this material explicitly and those where participants introduced spiritual thinking into the work.

In terms of the former, an example is George's work with a Muslim client who introduced her thinking around Allah into the work. George felt that the client was able to introduce her spirituality into the work because of his open and contained approach to working with spirituality that he described to her. He had done this following questions by the client about this. George's work with this client was helping her to adapt to losses resulting from a failed operation:

George (02: 470)

George- she [the client] has been talking about well why me you know and there's something in Islam where they say Allah will only give you as much as you can tolerate yeah

JB- yeah

George- so we've done a bit of exploring around that

JB- did you bring it up?

George - no she did she did (pause) and right at the beginning she wanted to sort of check out you know what did I think about faith and all that kind of thing and I said that I've got an open mind. I said that it doesn't really matter to me but I do, well it's not that it doesn't matter to me, but I don't define myself specifically as being one thing or another. I've said I've got a belief and I've got a sense of my own spirituality and I like to think that that connects with other people's spirituality but that's not rigid by the way you know. We're bound by the human condition that's what I was saying really and I think that's been very, very helpful because it hasn't set up anything oppositional you know

JB- yeah I do

George- it doesn't always help to do that but I think with this particular client it was very, very helpful at that stage.

Hazel described another example, where the client introduced the idea of spiritual comfort. The client experienced a transference reaction to Hazel, experiencing feelings of comfort from her that were similar to feeling that she had experienced with a monk at a difficult time in her life. The client's reference to this comfort enabled discussion around the subject of spiritual comfort that she found helpful.

There are also examples of spiritual aspects or encounter in the work through the participant bringing spiritual thinking into the work. Brian's work with a depressed client is an example here, with his introduction of the poetry of St. John of the Cross to a client that led to his deeper understanding of his depression:

Brian (01: 1190)

Brian- I've been working a lot with a client especially on the poetry of St. John of the Cross

JB- oh right

Brian- happened to like Spanish and then I introduced him to St. John of the Cross and he went wow what's this about and St. John is writing about depression

JB- mm

Brian- and so you go here we go and I gave him a St John of the Cross. He has got an English and a Spanish version and so he said to use that as an exercise in translating the Spanish into English. He said I think this is slightly wrong here and all that sort of stuff yeah take your word for it but it has led to a real understanding of what's going on in depression and what is going on in this dark night of the soul

JB- mm

Brian- you see and how you can express it in different ways, a real understanding for himself, starting to make sense of it for himself.

This work helped the client to understand something of his depression and manage it better.

These explicit encounters with spirituality in psychodynamic work illustrate the openness of the participants to working in this area and that clients feel able to initiate talk and thinking about this when this is the case. The need for counsellors to be alert to this in order to encourage it was stressed by some participants.

## **11.6. Tensions in working with spirituality**

Several tensions are noted in working with spirituality in psychodynamic work. Before exploring these it is important to note that some participants experience few tensions here.

### **11.6.1. Minimal tensions in working with spirituality**

This first subtheme was seen in those participants who had spent a great deal of time thinking about this subject, often over many years and continued to do so. They did not want to sound idealising here but they recognized that they had rejected the parts that did not fit for them and felt more settled and sure about their thinking and practice here. Janet is an example:

Janet (01: 715)

I don't experience an awful lot of clash. But maybe it's because I've done so much searching and exploring along the way.

Whilst these participants feel more settled in their thinking they equally recognized the need to continue their thinking here, that this is a continuing process. This is explored in Section 11.8.

Tensions that were identified by participants in the work were not aspects that were major challenges to their thinking or approaches to their work in this area more external aspects causing some tensions in

counselling work. These tensions or subthemes are grouped into aspects of the spirituality of the client, the denial of spirituality in the client, aspects of the client and conflicts with the aims of organizations. These will now be explored.

### **11.6.2. Aspects of the spirituality of the client**

Some participants identified that aspects of the client's spirituality and religion were often blocks in counselling work. This included religiosity and religious "niceness" being a block to accessing the more difficult and hurting parts of people's lives. For example:

Janet (01: 1186)

Janet- I have enormous problems with religiosity. I get really fed up with Christian niceness for example. I mean one of the things I value about the psychodynamic approach is that it allows for the not nice side of life and when it's all covered up and it can become quite sickly and sweet and you know constantly hearing stories of people who have been hurt JB- mmm

Janet- by not being accompanied at their point of need.

Some participants also argue that spirituality and religion can be used as a defence against working with aspects that the client needs to work with. In order to be able to work with this Hazel argued for the need to be aware of spiritual and religious terminology and language and at the same time enable the good object, that is the client's spirituality and/or religion to remain in place (02: 473). The difficulties with rigid beliefs of clients including a punitive sense of God (a God that is critical and punishing) and a sense of handing all decisions and thinking over to God and their religion were also explicitly mentioned (Andrew, Brian, Deborah).

A final factor identified as causing possible tensions in the work is when the client has a very different and alien spirituality to the counsellor.

Andrew recognized this. Although he recognized his ability to hold a variety of spiritual positions very occasionally there were clients where the gulf between them was too large to enable effective working. He recognized the work of Schreurs (2002) as having useful detail about working with such tensions in the work. She provides comprehensive detail here including working with divergent, manipulative and counterproductive spiritualities,

### **11.6.3. The denial of spirituality in the client**

The difficulties in working with people who were closed to the spiritual aspect of their being is recognized. Brian identified this and included working with 'followers of Dawkins', those who he experienced as denying the spiritual aspect to the psyche. He also explicitly referred to his work with clinical psychologists. He stated that he frequently experienced it as difficult to access a sense of their spirituality and often struggled to make a connection with them, encapsulated by the description:

Brian (02: 978)

at first sight it seems to be barren, a desert.

### **11.6.4. Aspects of the client**

There were various aspects of the client that caused tensions in the work. This included the degree of mental illness of the client and what they were able to address in the work. A further tension was the use of medication in some types of depression in that it 'dumbs down as it were the spiritual insight' (Brian 01: 863).

Aspects of the client's thinking were also mentioned including clients with perverse thinking or those clients that think in very hierarchical ways, making it hard to equalise or engage in relationship with the client (Deborah). Further aspects causing tension in relating and working with

spirituality in the work were clients who think in concrete ways, looking for concrete solutions, and clients who find it hard to trust and engage in relationship (Frank). Frank felt that it is only after establishing trust that such clients can begin to explore the spiritual dimension.

#### **11.6.5. Conflicts with the aims of organizations**

A further tension identified was the tension between the role of a counsellor and the functions of human resource departments. Brian stated this. He had a role as a workplace counsellor in a large organization and he experienced tension at times in what the organization required from the counselling and what the client needed. There was tension for him in trying to balance these factors.

#### **11.7. The exclusion of spirituality in supervision**

Two participants in this study identified the exclusion of spirituality from supervision. Both Hazel and Kathleen were newly qualified counsellors and they both had experiences during their training of spirituality being excluded from it as well as from their therapy and supervision.<sup>100</sup> During their training they were allocated supervisors for their practice and had no choice in this. They both experienced spirituality as being excluded from it and they were angry about this. Hazel described feeling uncontained by it and Kathleen was cross:

Kathleen (02: 178)

The tutor that initially behaved that way [excluding spirituality from supervision], there were 2 tutors who taught us, I was less certain of where one of them was coming from but the particular session I'm thinking of was with this particular lady that was also my supervisor, while I had was an enormous respect for her as a tutor and a lecturer

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<sup>100</sup> The exclusion of spirituality from Hazel and Kathleen's training and therapy is addressed in the next section.



and a supervisor I think she was absolutely brilliant psychodynamically whatever but I just felt cross with her really

JB- mm

Kathleen- that she wasn't going to explore that [spirituality], let down by her I think as well and I just wasn't going to bring that up with her again

JB- mm

Kathleen- it just made me think I don't talk about that with you sort of thing.

Kathleen repeated in her narratives that there was no space for this.

Several participants in this study stressed the importance of ensuring that they had a supervisor who was willing to address spirituality in the work:

Kathleen (01: 1149)

but I think one thing I would definitely want to know is that they're [supervisor] prepared to work in that area because I do think it's a huge part of the work I think it sounds likely to be as present as some of the other issues that are given a lot of air time [by lecturers and supervisors].

### **11.8. The continuing nature of the journey in understanding spirituality and psychodynamic counselling**

The participants in this study valued thinking and talking about spirituality in psychodynamic counselling particularly those who had not done a lot of prior thinking about the subject. The continuing and developing nature of this thinking and experiencing was a major theme in the data. There were various aspects to this that will now be examined.

### **11.8.1. The struggle of the journey**

The painfulness of developing one's spiritual awareness was identified by several participants who recognized the struggle in the continuing journey in understanding spirituality and in understanding this in relation to practice. This was illustrated in various ways as the following sections will show but Brian summarises the constant nature of the struggle in this journey:

Brian (01: 345)

so what you are really trying to do is to develop your own expression of your own personal spirituality and that's a constant struggle and a conflict

#### **11.8.1.1. Some reasons for the struggle**

Some participants thought during the interviews about the reasons why it is difficult to think about spirituality in psychodynamic practice. They recognized its absence in training and Kathleen and Hazel expressed their anger about this, feeling it was a disservice to clients to do so:

Hazel (01: 1717)

Hazel- you cannot ignore it you do a disservice, these are my words

JB- yeah

Hazel- you do a disservice by not embracing that people do have faith, they have a spiritual nature no more than they're white

JB- yes

Hazel- or they're from Iran or they're Muslim.

Equally, the difficulties in introducing spirituality into counsellor training courses are recognized. Frank was particularly articulate here. He felt that with the expansion of theories within psychodynamic thinking it was hard to know what to include in training courses, with the focus frequently being on the family and dyad rather than any broader or social

issues including spirituality. He equally recognized that spirituality was not yet in mainstream language in psychodynamic counselling qualifying this with the knowledge that it is not in many psychoanalytic books:

Frank (01: 1112)

I can't think of many counselling books which I've ever read, or psychoanalytic, psychotherapy books, whichever books, which have used the word spirituality. It's not in the lingo and yet we're constantly reading, talking, in supervision, and case presentations blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, but it's not something which is part of the currency and so and this maybe part of the task for those who really feel that somehow should come into the work, how do you actually get this into the language.

He recognized that the situation was beginning to change and that literature was emerging.

### **11.8.2. The on-going nature of the journey**

Most participants stressed the long and on-going nature of the journey with spirituality. Janet and Chris both recognized their thinking as being very much about 'work in progress' (J01; 1215; C01:408). Kathleen mirrored this in her narratives:

Kathleen (01: 341)

I think that's another on-going area really [spirituality and psychodynamic counselling] that has made me sort of look at the model and think how's it fits for me, how does that work?

It is interesting that participants' demonstrating both genres that is both the discovery and clarity genres identified the on-going nature of the journey; for the former this was in the sense that in having started or developed it for the research they wanted to continue it and for the latter

there was this desire despite feeling settled in their current thinking about it.

### **11.8.3. The unknowing and uncertainty in the journey**

Brian recognized that there are often experiences of unknowing in his spiritual journey, using the term 'clouds of unknowing.'<sup>101</sup> Although there can be difficulties in this participants who recognized an unknowing and uncertainty in their journey valued it:

Hazel (01: 1844)

I think that I'm in something that I don't know the outcome to yet and I'm OK with that. I can live with the uncertainty now.

Alongside this sense of uncertainty Hazel described feeling more courageous, secure and more available in her work with clients having explored and read around the subject for the research; that she had some comfort in and could manage her sense of unknowing and uncertainty.

Another example of a participant valuing unknowing and uncertainty is Leonard. He used the term 'unrest' here. While he could not understand spirituality or feel that there is a place for it in psychodynamic practice he equally stressed that he did not want to rest in his thinking, stay static or be labelled but to continue this process, to keep moving in it:

Leonard (01: 1564)

my desire is unrest. I don't want to rest anywhere I want to go on thinking

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<sup>101</sup> The Cloud of Unknowing (Backhouse 1997) is an anonymous work of Christian mysticism written in the latter half of the fourteenth century. It's underlying message is that the only way to know God is to abandon preconceived ideas, beliefs and knowledge about God and surrender to the realm of unknowingness. It is through this that glimpses can be experienced of the true nature of God.

JB- mm

Leonard- and moving and so on

An unknowing or uncertainty in the process of thinking about spirituality in relation to their practice is seen in participants demonstrating both genres. Despite feeling clear about their thinking when talking about spirituality in relation to their practice, those participants demonstrating the clarity genre equally recognized, and some explicitly valued; a sense of not being fixed here, that they did not have all the answers and that they felt comfortable with this position. There was thus a sense of clarity in their unknowing, in knowing that they do not know all in this area.

#### **11.8.4. The difference between ontological and phenomenological experiences in the journey**

Some of the challenges of the spiritual journey are managed through an understanding of the distinction between the ontological and phenomenological experience of spirituality. Andrew describes this. Ontologically he saw God as fully present in the world and where he felt distanced from God he understands this as a phenomenological experience, which is that God is present but that he may not feel this:

Andrew (02: 808)

it's all potentially spiritual, it's all actually spiritual ontologically but whether it is phenomenologically whether we're aware of it whether we're making use of it, participating in it or not is another matter.

He was assertive in his understanding of his ontology being associated with God, that everything was ontologically spiritual. This was demonstrated in his firm understanding of spirituality being an essential part of human beings.

### **11.8.5. The loneliness of the journey and the need for support and self-care**

Some participants identified a sense of loneliness or of aloneness in their thinking about spirituality within psychodynamic counselling. This included both those with the clarity genre as well as the discovery genre. It was particularly true of Andrew. Although he felt grounded and provided a clear and well-argued reasoning for his beliefs and understandings of spirituality he described feeling lonely and cut off from people who he could talk to about it. He recognized that he had some friends that he could share this with and that helped to sustain him but he described earlier experiences of loneliness in describing his spiritual experiences to others in the counselling profession. He did though recognize that more recently this was beginning to change. Andrew described the work of McCabe<sup>102</sup> and a local catholic community where he could explore these views as important in helping to counter these feelings. This was especially valued because of his experience of the Christian world:

Andrew (02: 1176)

there is a sense in which the Christian world I inhabit has a very small jewel like core to it and then you go to the outer rings and it's more or less disagreement.

In exploring this topic further Andrew noted the oscillation between coping and not coping with such feelings of loneliness;

Andrew (02: 1196)

sometimes I cope, sometimes I don't.

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<sup>102</sup> Herbert McCabe (1926-2001) was an English born Irish Dominican priest. He was a writer on philosophy and theology, and preacher. He was a prolific writer, deeply interested in the life of Thomas Aquinas, writing on this subject (McCabe 2008).

In order to manage this Andrew had developed ways of managing himself professionally and of caring for himself. In terms of interacting professionally with others he recognized how he kept talk on a lighter level to generate a phantasy of understanding one another rather than go deeper and realize that he had very little in common with some colleagues:

Andrew (02: 1117)

I think I've learnt there to keep conversation at a level where we can all indulge the phantasy that we do understand each other so at [name of a psychotherapy society] I'll sort of exchange nods and smiles and hellos with people and we sort of look at each other with mutual respect and affection. If I think about occasions where you know I've been in groups and we've taken it deeper I've quickly realized I've very little in common with those people at all so I haven't sort of gone back.

In terms of self-care Andrew stated that he did this spiritually through a spiritual discipline of daily prayer, walks and painting from nature. He also valued keeping good client records; as a means of both thinking about his work and of detaching from the work at the end of each day.

Other participants expressed the importance of self-care. As examples Brian did this by going to a wood or a religious service, George by ensuring times of quiet and stillness and Frank through the support of others, of 'like minded souls' (F02: 188).

#### **11.8.6. The privilege of the work**

Despite the struggle in the journey participants recognized the privilege in working with clients and being alongside them in their journey. This is illustrated by Brian who has a model of walking with the client, not of healing him, and understanding this to be a wonderful privilege:

Brian (01: 819)

this journey of discovery and to be paid for it sometimes, it's a wonderful privilege. But it means that there is no model like healing I can't believe I'm into healing not in a million years. I do really believe that I'm simply walking with a person that's all I do.

In summary of this section most participants experienced a struggle in their journey with spirituality and in thinking about it in their psychodynamic practice. They recognized the continuing nature of it and the unknowing and uncertainty involved in this. This included those demonstrating the clarity genre as well as though with the discovery genre. Despite the difficulties in thinking and engaging here participants felt able to continue this process. Various ways of coping with such difficulties were identified and the privilege of working alongside clients was recognized.

## **11.9 Summary**

This chapter has explored the application of participants' thinking about spirituality to their practice demonstrating the impact of their thinking on practice. A variety of ways of working with spirituality was demonstrated including from spiritual but not religious, spiritual and religious and atheistic positions. This was shown in the ways that participants prepared for their work, their approach to clients, how open they are in working with spirituality, in examples of working with it in practice and the tensions of working in this field. Regardless of the nature of participants' understandings, including those who do not see spirituality as part of the psychodynamic model, the continuing nature of the journey in thinking in this area was recognized. Discussion of these findings and the implications for practice will be explored in Chapter 13 following the next chapter on reflexive thinking in the research.



## CHAPTER 12

### REFLEXIVE COMMENTARY

#### 12.1. Introduction

Before discussing the findings of the study it is important to take stock to get an understanding of the research process. As Chapter 7 demonstrated it is important to recognize that as the researcher I bring a range of influences and experiences that impact on the research endeavour. This was a major factor in the reflexive approach taken to this study including its emphasis on reflecting in and on actions within it. It is thus important to record key aspects of this approach and thinking, that is the impact of my personal experiences on the research context and participants as well as their influence on me, my feelings about the research and the resulting analysis and conclusions drawn. This chapter provides an insight into and examples of the reflexive approach taken in the study. Vital to this process is the inclusion of my attempts to militate any bias resulting from this. There are three key areas here that will now be discussed.

#### 12.2. The potential influence of my previous experience on the research

As mentioned in Chapter 6 I was keen to ensure effective narrative interviewing for the study and to this end received feedback in the early stages of the study from a supervisor (SR) to enable this. I was aware of and keen to ensure that my previous personal experiences of the exclusion of spirituality from my psychodynamic training and the resultant feelings of disappointment and frustration did not impact on the interviewing. This was a possibility with two participants in particular who

described similar experiences of exclusion in their training. In developing my interviewing skills, in addition to feedback about them, what helped here was the developing use of open questions, probes and questions that enabled continuation of participants' stories such as 'Can you talk a bit more about that?' This enabled me to attend to and become immersed in participants' unique experiences and understandings of them.

Another factor that could have influenced the research was my experience as a psychodynamic counsellor. I recognized the possibilities of reverting to this role during the interviews and my time with participants particularly because of the similarities in the processes of both, in terms of seeking individuals' understandings of their lives. This would not have been appropriate and drawn the attention away from the meaning of participants' experiences themselves. The use of reflection in and on my practice helped here and was a continuing reminder of the focus of the work, that is, research. This drove and enabled my ability to stay in the role of the researcher. My working experience of switching roles<sup>103</sup> also helped here. There were though overlaps in the skills of both research interviewing and my counselling work that enabled the research process, in particular the need to stay open to the individual and to remain curious about meanings in their lives. These stances were very helpful during the interview and analytic stages.

### **12.3. The potential influences of my experiences of the research setting and encounter**

#### **12.3.1. The research setting**

As mentioned in Chapter 6 the meeting places for participants were their places of work (8), their home (1) or a university room (1). These all ensured privacy and an uninterrupted space conducive to narrative

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<sup>103</sup> During the first half of this research I retained my role as a nurse educator alongside my work as a psychodynamic counsellor.

interviewing. I met one participant in the lobby of a large hotel to enable a mutually convenient meeting point. I was anxious about ensuring a safe and confidential space in which both the participant and I could hear each other. However at our introductory meeting, we were able to find seating such that others could not hear us. This ensured that by the time of the first interview, my anxieties about this were reduced so that I could focus on the interview with the participant. The personal nature of the material discussed indicated that the participant felt safe and contained by the process.

Key aspects of my experiences of engaging with participants will now be explored beginning with the recognition of the impact of the motivation of participants for taking part in the study.

### **12.3.2. The impact of participants' motivation to take part in the study**

The methods of this study demanded a lot from participants in terms of time, energy and space. This led me to consider the motivations for taking part in it, reciprocal elements within it and the impact of this on the narratives obtained. All participants stated that they felt the research questions were interesting. A desire to promote good research in this area was recognized by several participants as a reason for undertaking the study. This may be a factor in producing the resultant in-depth narratives. Similarly the need to make sense of this area personally was stated by some since they had not yet had the means to do this. Yet others were each doing research themselves and were interested from a subject and/or methodological point of view. In these cases some participants asked about my methodology and it felt good to share my experiences in these cases. This together with the reasons that participants stated for taking part in the study enabled a sense of reciprocity in the study; that there was something in it for them that in turn assisted in completing the research (Danchev & Ross 2014). As has been noted this was also the case with the two participants who were

initially ambivalent in thinking about spirituality for the research. Despite this, through the continued engagement in the research they came to recognize that they valued their experiences in it (c.f. Chapter 8.2.2).

### **12.3.3. The nature of the encounter with participants**

The initially ambivalent participants just mentioned highlight the difficulties in thinking about spirituality. There were elements of parapraxes<sup>104</sup> in setting up meetings for the research; one participant (Frank) did not turn up for the initial meeting 'forgetting' that it was arranged and was late for the second having put the wrong time in his diary. Although not open to interpreting his actions, they may illustrate some resistance or difficulty in thinking about spirituality in psychodynamic practice and that there was an unconscious process of avoidance with it. The lack of opportunity to explore this further illustrates the limits and boundaries of working as a researcher; as a counsellor this would be an area to be explored but as a researcher I had to respect Frank's desire not to explore the difficulties in meeting in any depth.

I also recognized the need to manage ambivalence. This was shown by two participants in their initial irritation and hostility to the methods of the study. Whilst this may be due to anxiety about the time constraints of taking part in the study the conscious acknowledgement of their feelings during initial meetings with them enabled them to be recognized and worked through. The helpfulness of this together with an understanding of the conflicted and difficult nature of thinking in this area was demonstrated by the way that, at the second time of meeting, participants were ready and able to engage in the interview.

The need for me as the researcher to manage and to reflect on myself was illustrated through countertransference reactions with participants at

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<sup>104</sup> Parapraxes is a minor error in action such as a slip of the tongue or misplacement of objects thought to reveal repressed or unconscious impulses (Freud 1917: 64).

times. At times I experienced some and in particular one participant as very knowledgeable about the subject and overtly demonstrating this. My awareness of this through the reflective and support processes identified<sup>105</sup> resisted the pull to a novice-expert relationship and helped me to retain the role of an interested researcher. Retaining an open and reflexive stance also enabled me to be aware of and to hold contradictory and conflicting questions and findings such that I aimed to avoid premature interpretations.

As previously mentioned participants were invited to receive and comment on their transcripts. I was unsure what participants' responses would be and whether this in turn would generate new questions and directions in the research. In the event few comments were received. This was largely because several had not read their transcripts; they were long and detailed documents often reaching up to 10,000 words and over 25 sides of A4 paper. Occasionally points were picked up on and expanded in the subsequent interview. Some participants made comments about the style of their talking, particularly their perceived hesitancy and lack of fluidity in their narratives.

#### **12.3.4. The impact of the research on participants**

The importance of ethical awareness was demonstrated by the impact of the study on participants. I recognized the potentially deep nature of interviewing and the need to manage this (Buckeldee & McMahon 1994). Indeed this was the case with participants in this study where encounters were often intense, with them passionately describing and/or developing their thoughts. Because the subject touches on the core of individuals (King 2009; Rowson 2014) it is perhaps unsurprising that some participants became upset during the process. The intensity of their

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<sup>105</sup> Central to the research process had been the support both within the research (supervisors, academic colleagues and researchers) and outside of it (psychoanalytic therapy, spiritual direction and friends).

engagement resulted in raising awareness of their personal needs with, as mentioned, three participants recognising the need for further personal therapy. Mindful of the need to ensure appropriate support I was reassured that they all had effective contacts to enable this.

The research resulted in all participants having fresh insights into themselves but particularly those demonstrating the discovery genre. As indicated through the depth encounters there was a cost to being open and reflexive in terms of self-exposure. There were also positive aspects that were uplifting in many ways including; feeling understood, happy to have conveyed personal understandings, valuing the process in terms of enabling clarity and learning about themselves, happy to have their thinking in this area stimulated and pleased to have helped develop the research. Whilst not overstating the impact of the research, the need for continuing thinking was widely recognized. The research thus appears to have had a transformatory aspect impacting on participants beyond the research process.

### **12.3. What has it been like to do the research?**

Although I was aware of work highlighting the likely and wide impact on students' lives of postgraduate research (Phillips & Pugh 2000; Williams 2011), I was still surprised at times when I felt very lonely and that it was a struggle. This was despite the support from family, friends and colleagues. At times this has been wider than the actual research process; in the first half of undertaking this work my own spirituality and beliefs were greatly challenged and questioned. An initial challenge to my spirituality came with my initial counselling training where I experienced a largely denigratory stance to spirituality and religion. Hearing the diverse narratives of participants in this study compounded this initial challenge. At times this felt unnerving, confusing and anxiety provoking. I particularly valued working with a spiritual director at this time. This work enabled me to separate out my spiritual issues and

questions from those of the participants, and to explore them safely and separately from the research.

I also experienced difficulties as mentioned with the development of the interviewing technique. In seeking to obtain participants' narratives I initially had some uncertainty about how much to intervene in story telling without being too passive or too interrupting. Equally I was initially unsure about how much information to share with participants. At times I wondered if I was too passive in interviews. Reflecting and reviewing the transcripts was helpful here. I was able to observe my role as largely one of clarifying narratives around core issues and of ensuring that all areas were included. This did not though ensure that participants covered all the same areas. Although participants were asked core questions subsequent questions were asked following each participant's story. As a result it is not possible to make comparisons across cases, as not all participants covered the same areas in their narratives.

The in-depth nature of the interviews themselves resulted in them being enriching in terms of the quality of the data but equally exhausting experiences demanding time and energy. Equally and as previously mentioned the engagement in the analysis of the data was particularly challenging; at times it felt confusing, occasionally agonising and frustrating. However there were a number of factors that helped me through these difficulties.

As identified the support of others has been crucial in this work. This includes in the form of support, challenge and enabling an unknowing position in my thinking. This variety of support helped enormously. In addition the desire to immerse myself in the data in order to be able to make sense of it, helped together with the converse, of taking a break and a moving away. There was also a sense of a need to trust this process and the time needed for it along with the research process itself; that it would be worked through at the pace that was required of it. Writing both in a reflective sense and for the research helped here

despite it being difficult at times. I knew of the therapeutic value of this in terms of getting to know ourselves and our subject of interest better (Bolton 2010; Bolton et al 2011).

Through these processes I was helped to move to a sense of clarity in the work (about participants narratives) together with a sense of feeling more truly myself (my own narrative) (Frank 1995). However that is not to say that I know or feel that I know all this subject area or fully know myself; what I can say is that I know much of it a lot better and that there are parts, mainly outside of the direct focus of this study that I would like to know better. As a result like some of my participants and like others have found (Wyatt 2002; Scott 2011) I feel freer and more confident in my practice. Importantly again like some of the participants I feel I can stay with this sense of knowing and un-knowing and feel a sense of peace about this.

There have been other benefits from doing this work and these include:

- Endorsement of my interest in spirituality in practice through discovering pockets of interest and pre-existing thinking about it.
- Encouragement of the research by participants and people encountered in the process as something important to do and to disseminate.
- The discovery of different ways of thinking about and experiencing spirituality in practice.
- Others have felt encouraged to more consciously recognize spirituality in practice through thinking and talking about it.

There have equally been surprises in the research and these include:

- The openness of participants and willingness to engage in the research despite ambivalence and conflict within them.



- The sense of making the client 'visible' through participants' detailed talk of their work, and of their engagement with clients. The detail about practice that participants revealed in their narratives gave a strong sense of the clients that they worked with. In this way there is a sense of their clients being 'seen,' from the participants' perspectives, in the work.
- The need to stand on the edge, in the gap between the academic and professional world in order to be able to write up and complete the work (Scott 2011). During this time and as a result of doing a part-time PhD it felt hard to fully engage in either world.

#### **12.4. Summary**

This chapter has provided examples of the reflexivity in this research. This has included in terms of the possible bias of my previous experiences and how they may have influenced the direction of the research and the conclusions drawn. I have explored the impact that I believe I have had on the participants in the research, what it has been like to carry out the research and what I have learnt from it that contributes to my understanding of spirituality in psychodynamic practice. I have demonstrated the ways in which I have sought to mitigate bias including through personal awareness and development as well as the support and challenge of others. Of particular note was the nature of the encounter; participants' openness in the research process enabled deeper feelings, understandings and ambiguities to be explored that in turn they came to value.

## CHAPTER 13

### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

#### 13.0. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapters 8-11 in relation to the relevant literature. The findings were presented in terms of the genres and themes identified in the narratives. The research questions are used to structure the discussion:

1. The nature of participants' understanding of spirituality.
2. The points of fit and the points of tension between participants' understanding of spirituality and psychodynamic counselling.
3. Issues in working with spirituality in clinical practice.

A critique of the research is included throughout this discussion. Firstly, the focus of the study and the nature of the sample will be revisited as a context for the discussion.

#### 13.1. The focus of the study and the nature of the sample

This study centred on psychodynamic counsellors in the UK. As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated there is very little empirical research in this field, and that which exists often uses very small samples and is focused on religion (Martinez & Baker 2000; Wyatt 2002); is in the psychoanalytic field (Simmonds 2003; Ross 2010); is across all types of counsellors and not specifically psychodynamic counsellors (Davis & Timulak 2009); and/or is in different cultures (Bartoli 2006; Psaila 2012). The work most similar and on which this work builds and extends is that of Simmonds and Ross.

This research is equally a study grounded in practice, focusing on practising counsellors' understanding of spirituality and reports of their encounters with this in practice. This is new work not previously examined specifically in the psychodynamic field. Examining their understanding and work with spirituality in turn enabled exploration of whether and if so how the increasing literature about spirituality has impacted on practice.

The sample recruited for this study demonstrated a range of spiritual positions and are employed in a variety of working environments. The sample included participants who are both spiritual and religious (n=7). Participants from this grouping were among the first to respond to the advert inviting counsellors to take part in the study. In initial meetings with these participants, they clearly showed an interest in spirituality and a desire to contribute to research in this area. In order to ensure that the sample included participants with a range of spiritual positions, I undertook a purposive form of sampling. This was to recruit participants who did not identify themselves as religious. It led to finding participants who are spiritual and not religious (n=2), and who are not spiritual or religious (n=2).

In the spiritual and not religious grouping, one participant was an agnostic and one an atheist. This group reflects the current main cultural trend in the Western world in viewing religion in a more negative light and a hindrance to spiritual experiences (Swinton 2001; Pargament 2011). These participants recognized their difficulties and dislike of institutionalized religion. They thus argue for the need to separate spirituality from religion in order to understand and experience the former. There is another participant who, though identifying himself as Roman Catholic and thus personally religious, also argues for the need to separate spirituality from religion. He understands that it is essential to separate spirituality from religion in order to identify an individual's personal spirituality, and one that is not bound by religious context and archetypes (Brian 01: 333).

Of the two participants who identified themselves as neither spiritual nor religious, one was an agnostic, and one was an atheist. Neither participant in this grouping could embrace or understand the construct of spirituality. As such they reflect the historical ambivalence to spirituality and religion within psychoanalysis. The inclusion of these participants throughout the study is in contrast to the work of Simmonds and Ross: Simmonds's sample only included those with an interest in spirituality and while Ross's sample included atheists and those without an interest in spirituality, the subsequent analysis of data and discussion of it focused on participants with an interest in spirituality. This study sought to be inclusive in terms of understanding of spirituality in order to get as broad a sample as possible, and represent what is happening currently in psychodynamic practice. It thus felt important to include the participants in this grouping throughout the study. The inclusion of this grouping meant that it was possible to explore how counsellors without an understanding of spirituality work with this construct, and what can and cannot be included in relation to spirituality, in clinical practice.

Many participants in the study were aged 60 years and over. An interest in spirituality and religion is likely to increase with age (Coleman 2004), and is often used as a bulwark against loss in later life stages (Coleman & O'Hanlon 2004). Equally, older participants are likely to have been brought up in an explicitly Christian culture in the UK (Coleman 2004). While the Christian-Judaic narrative is argued to be embedded in society (Kirschner 1996), it is likely that participants in older age groups (60 years and over), whether religious or not, may have been more consciously exposed to this than younger people, and in turn aware of its impact in daily and professional living.<sup>106</sup> In contrast there is little

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<sup>106</sup> For example, older participants may be more likely to be aware of the impact of clerical personnel on the development of voluntary counselling agencies including the Westminster Pastoral Foundation. This is a significant provider of psychodynamic counselling and training. It grew out of Christian foundations, and attracted counsellors and clients sympathetic to this religious tradition (Black 1991). Equally pastoral counsellors played an important part in the development of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (West 1998).

reference to religion in current day-to-day living (White 2006) such that younger people, unless brought up in religious contexts, are likely to be less attuned to religious constructs and their meaning. Participants in this study, through being largely in older age groups are thus likely to have been exposed to religion and religious language. This provides them with a language that can be used in relation to thinking about spirituality, whether they are religious or not. Certainly in the spiritual and religious group, religious language and constructs were used to give meaning to their understanding of spirituality. This point is developed in Section 13.3.

Overall the sample provided participants from a wide range of spiritual positions. The depth and qualitative nature of the work meant that the sample size was small. This can be argued to be a critique of the study. A small sample was to enable a deep level of engagement with the data. Because of its range, the sample provided a relevant breadth in relation to the wider universe of psychodynamic counsellors. It thus felt a sufficient sample in relation to the research questions and methods used in the study (Mason 2002), enabling an understanding of how spirituality is understood and worked with in psychodynamic practice.

Having explored the nature of the sample, key issues in the findings of the study will now be discussed. This starts with the exploration of participants' understanding of spirituality.

### **13.2. Participants' understanding of spirituality; making sense of spirituality**

Participants' narratives demonstrated both the range of their understanding of spirituality and the ways in which they made sense of it. In particular, the genres, discovered in the narratives, demonstrated that participants varied in the amount of prior thinking about spirituality in

psychodynamic practice. The two main genres, the discovery genre and the clarity genre, illustrated this clearly. Those using the clarity genre were able to give clear and reasoned thinking about diverse and complex understanding of spirituality. Although those using this genre had a sense of feeling settled in their understanding, they were open to and valued uncertainty, doubts and anxiety, recognizing that they could manage these feelings. They also recognized the need to continue their thinking in this area.

Other participants had not given sustained thought to the subject of spirituality in their practice; the combination of journaling and narrative interviews was particularly helpful for this group of participants. The discovery genre demonstrated that some participants (n=7) largely developed or brought cohesion to their thinking by taking part in the research. They overtly recognized this; Deborah for example, described the usefulness of putting into words thinking that had been around for her for a long time (Chapter 8.2.2.). As Deborah showed, participants valued the opportunity to think about spirituality. Reflecting the psychodynamic process itself, it was through being given space and time that participants developed their thinking here. Participants demonstrating the discovery genre also recognized that they needed to continue thinking about spirituality. They saw the need on two levels; one, because for some their current understanding of spirituality was still developing, and two, that the nature of spirituality meant that it requires continued thinking. For participants using the discovery genre, it helped them to become clearer in their thinking about spirituality and to recognize what they know and do not know. Hazel is an example here. Although she recognized that she did not know all that she could about her sense of spirituality, she can live with the uncertainty and unknowingness of it all (Chapter 11.8.3.).

The narrative approach used in this study was very helpful in identifying how participants make sense of spirituality in practice. The method of obtaining the narratives was developed on the basis that I could not

assume that participants had undertaken sustained thinking about spirituality in their practice. This was the reason for developing the process of journaling prior to two interviews with each participant. This method resulted in rich and detailed narratives, where participants were enabled to talk about spirituality despite its complexities and the difficulties of putting it into words. The methods of this study are in contrast with the work of Simmonds (2003) and Ross (2010). They only undertook one interview, with experts in the field. This study extends work in this area by obtaining narratives of counsellors who had not necessarily had the opportunity to think about spirituality in a sustained way. Through the narratives it was possible to identify how these counsellors make sense in this area. Whilst there is always a developmental aspect to narratives (Riessman 2008), in contrast to Simmonds (2003) and Ross (2010), this aspect is much more marked in this study. The developmental aspect of the narratives was largely identified through the method of narrative analysis developed for this research. In contrast to Simmonds (2003) and Ross (2010), the genres of the narratives were identified, that is, how participants told their stories. In re-listening and rereading the narratives, it became clear that the narratives varied in the ways that they were told. The discovery of the genres in the narratives enabled this aspect to be made visible and explored.

There is a wide range of understandings of spirituality among the sample in this study as demonstrated in the discussion above, ranging from those who understand spirituality by linking it with religion, to those who understand spirituality by separating it from religion, and those who have difficulties with understanding spirituality. This study thus achieved the aim of obtaining a broad sample. In so doing, but not purposively seeking, the sample broadly mirrored UK census levels (2011)<sup>107</sup> in terms of religion; 66% of participants in the sample are Christian, compared to 59.3% in the census. This supports other research

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<sup>107</sup> Accessed via [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/search/religion](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/search/religion) on 25.08.15.

demonstrating that levels of spirituality among counsellors generally are similar to the general population (Smith & Orlinsky 2004; Davis & Timulak 2009; Hofmann & Walach 2011). However, this research does not claim to be representative of all psychodynamic counsellors; a larger study with a broader sampling method would be needed to determine the representativeness of this sample to the general population of psychodynamic counsellors in the UK. What it can say is that there are a number of psychodynamic counsellors with an interest in spirituality, who wanted to discuss and/or explore it for the study. These participants were not difficult to find. It is thus likely that there are many other psychodynamic counsellors in the UK with such an interest. This finding counters the expectation of reduced levels of spirituality among psychodynamic counsellors relative to the general population speculated as a possibility in Chapter 3. It also supports the pilot work of Ross (2006) that there are likely to be a significant number of psychodynamic counsellors with spiritual beliefs, an interest in spirituality and/or an interest in working this out.

Participants who link spirituality with religion in order to understand the former, like others (Meissner 1978, 1984; Rizzuto 1979; Schreurs 2002), see spirituality and religion as enriching each other. They see religion as the context of their spirituality and a large determinant of it. For example, many of the participants here highlighted the importance of their belief in and relationship with God of the Christian religion, and it was this that was the core of their spirituality. In so doing their spirituality was framed within their Christian religion.<sup>108</sup> The merging of spirituality with their religion provides participants with religious language and constructs to describe their spirituality. An examination and examples of this are presented in Section 13.3.

Participants who link their spirituality with their religion demonstrate mature and flexible thinking. This was shown through their often

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<sup>108</sup> Brian is an exception here.



personalized and sometimes non-conformist understanding: Chris, for example showed this through his Zen practices and his understanding of the Gospels in the Christian religion (Chapter 9.2.1.2 and Chapter 10.1.2.). These, together with recognition among this grouping of the need to continue their thinking about spirituality, demonstrate a fluidity and developmental aspect to their religion and spirituality, which are not rigid or constrained. This reflects elements of stage 5 of Fowler's (1981) developmental model of faith, that of conjunctive faith, and Jacob's (2000) personal and polymathic mode of knowing. Features common to both models and to this study are a questioning of beliefs and openness to other forms of discourse, and belief systems such that there is an increasing acceptance of the paradoxes of life. Life is seen as a mystery with less need of certainty. Such understanding demonstrates that participants in this grouping were engaged with their religion; they thought about it, questioned and challenged it, reflecting mature and engaged levels of thinking and experiencing (Fowler 1981; Jacobs 2000). They recognized the developmental nature of religion such that it enabled their spirituality to be seen and experienced as something that evolved and continually developed.

Other participants understood spirituality as separate and distinct from religion. They saw spirituality as relating to goodness, meaning and purpose (Frank) and about a deep connection with another (Deborah). The theme of connection was common to all participants with an understanding of spirituality. These participants understand connection at a deep level as central to understanding spirituality. Although this was often difficult to think and talk about, the connection that participants describe is seen as relating at several levels: within oneself (George 01:334 'it's about looking inside myself'); with another person(s) (Deborah 01:161- 'it's a we-ness [sic] in the sense of being connected'); and with something other/Other/God (Brian 01:302- a connection or communion with something other, Andrew 01: 49- 'a meeting place with God').

The theme of connection at all the levels identified as central to spirituality by this study is well detailed by Swinton (2001) (see Chapter 2.0). It is also empirically demonstrated across counsellors from different counselling traditions and different cultures; for example among psychoanalysts in Australia and the UK by Simmonds (2003); in Christian counsellors in the UK by Scott (2011) and among a range of counsellors and psychotherapists in Malta by Psaila (2012). It thus endorses pre-existing research in this area. It relates to the construct of love, also identified as an aspect of spirituality in this study, discussed later in this section.

Although participants were able to offer their understanding of spirituality by the end of the study, the presence of the discovery genre, together with the themes in the narratives, highlight a general absence of spirituality within the psychodynamic counselling profession. This was shown in various ways and will now be explored.

### **13.2.1. The absence of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling**

The presence of the discovery genre illustrates that for many participants, there has been little or limited space to think about spirituality in their practice, training or supervision. Previous work has demonstrated this to be the case for counsellors across a range of orientations (West 2009; Scott 2011; Tillman et al 2013). In the light of recent psychoanalytic research including Simmonds (2003) and Ross (2010), it was suggested that this might be the case for psychodynamic counsellors. This study empirically demonstrates it.

The absence of spirituality in psychodynamic counselling was discovered in a variety of ways. As the discovery genre showed, some participants had not thought about spirituality in their practice in a sustained way, including those who were deeply spiritual, such as Chris. Some participants (Hazel and Kathleen in particular) were denied the

opportunity to explore spirituality in their recent counsellor training and supervision experiences. Other participants, who recognized themselves as spiritual, recognized that they worked in a boundaried<sup>109</sup> way and, unless clients initiated the subject, did not see spirituality as an explicit part of their practice. These findings suggest that there is no encouragement, need or impetus to think about spirituality within psychodynamic practice. It is not something that psychodynamic counsellors are required to do.

There is a sense of paradox about the absence of the opportunity to talk or think about spirituality within psychodynamic practice. This is for a number of reasons. As Chapter 3 argued, there are a number of theoretical and psychoanalytic concepts that can help with thinking about spirituality within psychodynamic practice. This is particularly true of the work of Winnicott (transitional phenomena) and Bion (ideas around transformation and the concept of O). Similarities and congruence have also been identified between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling that can help with thinking here. In addition, and as illustrated in Chapter 3, spirituality and psychodynamic counselling are ideally suited to work together: the intentional and relational space provided by psychodynamic practice enables working in transitional space, with transference and transforming experiences. This suggests that there is a place where spirituality can be experienced and explored.

Further adding to the paradox is the finding that participants valued the opportunity to think about spirituality. This included those in the spiritual and not religious group, and the not spiritual or religious group, who were recruited through snowball sampling (Mason 2002). Although interested enough to take part in the study, they typically had some initial ambivalence about the study and its requirements. However, as the study progressed, these participants overtly valued thinking about

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<sup>109</sup> A boundaried way of working is one where participants, whilst deeply valuing their understanding of the implicit nature of spirituality in their work do not explicitly introduce this into their practice. They only work with it if the client initiates it. (See Chapter 10 Section 11.3.1).

spirituality. Whilst spirituality was not at the top of their agenda to seek clarity about (they had not done so), it appears that in the absence of training and supervision about spirituality, it remained a dormant issue for several participants. However, given the opportunity to explore their understanding of spirituality, all participants valued this and wanted to continue their thinking in this area after the research. This finding, together with the factors identified above, demonstrates that psychodynamic counsellors value thinking about spirituality, and that there is a range of possible ways of thinking about and working with it in psychodynamic practice.

The discovery of the absence of spirituality in the psychodynamic profession illustrates that there is a tension in its inclusion. It seems that Freud's dominant message of antagonism to religion and spirituality is continuing. The lack of discussion about spirituality within psychodynamic counselling reflects the wider UK culture; despite an increasing interest in spirituality, there is reluctance to talk about it (White 2006; Jenkins 2011; West 2011). The difficulty in talking and thinking about spirituality does not help with its inclusion in practice. Participants often see words as inadequate; 'One runs out of words' (Frank 01: 951), and spirituality 'has a different currency' to words (Chris 01: 858). Instead music, the arts and poetry are recognized as forms to access and experience spirituality. Further militating against talking about spirituality, recognized by some participants, is the possibility of misunderstandings arising. As a result some participants described a sense of loneliness when talking about spirituality; and that they have few people that they can engage with about it. Other participants noted there was little, if anything, about spirituality in psychodynamic texts; despite the increasing literature in this field, these participants felt there was no accessible psychodynamic literature on spirituality. This suggests that there are several factors identified in this study that militate against its inclusion in practice.

Spirituality is, arguably, counter to many of the values of modern society that have been adopted by counselling. As Chapter 3 discussed, values of the modern world, and of counselling, include risk aversion, safeguarding, the setting of clear boundaries, and mastery (McLeod 2011). Whilst these values can encourage desirable aims such as the protection of clients, there can be problems and limitations with them. These values can promote the reduction of humans to component parts and encounters between people as instrumental and purpose-driven (Nussbaum 2010; Sandel 2012). As a consequence, central aspects of humanity and engaging with others, including creativity and openness, can be denied or omitted (Thorne 2009; McLeod 2011). Creativity, openness and working holistically are factors essential to working with spirituality (McSherry 2007; Psaila 2012; Clarke 2014). Also important to working with spirituality is a sense of unknowing. This was identified by several participants, and is explored later in the discussion. An aim of both spirituality and psychodynamic practice is to raise awareness of what is not currently known and omitted from conscious thinking. In order to do this, there is a need to be open with a sense of unknowing in the work, and a desire to work beyond the mental ego state (Bion 1967). Freud (1905) illustrated this in his work. Freud also showed how he made mistakes in it and that this was helpful either for enabling the work to progress, and/or developing his practice. The case study of 'Dora' (Ida Bauer) is an example here. In working with Dora, Freud misinterpreted her dreams and dialogue in the analysis, neglecting the importance to Dora of her female relationships. In particular, Freud misinterprets her anger; in being fixed on heterosexual Oedipal relationships, he saw Dora's anger as desire for her father's love, rather than her rage at being offered as a sexual sacrifice by her father, to the husband of her father's lover (Freud 1905: 32). Freud's misinterpretations resulted in a broken analysis, with Dora ending the work. This case stayed with Freud throughout his working life. He reflected on it and it resulted in deeply informing his thinking on transference (Clack 2013).

These aspects of practice, that is: working at the boundaries of psychodynamic practice; being open, creative and unknowing in the work and valuing this such that mistakes or wrong turns can be made and thought about, are counter to, and potentially challenge the values of modern society. In particular they challenge the focus on clear boundaries and risk aversion. The approach required to think about spirituality is at odds with prevailing attitudes in modern life and in psychodynamic counselling. In consequence spirituality is likely to be excluded from psychodynamic counselling.

The current values of the counselling profession, with its alignment to values in modern society, are likely to largely account for the reticence that participants experience when talking about love as part of their understanding of spirituality in psychodynamic practice. Love is recognized by some participants as a key part of their thinking about spirituality. However, these participants had some concern about being misunderstood in their use of it. The discovery of this finding merits further consideration, particularly because others have found that love is an under-discussed part of spirituality (Rowson 2014).

### **13.2.2. The inclusion of love in understanding spirituality**

Love was recognized by some participants as an essential part of their spirituality and their psychodynamic work. Hazel, for example, saw her work as an expression of her faith and of wanting to love and to give to people. She describes love as 'the central driving force in everything that I do' (Hazel 01: 1521). Love, seen in this way, is an expression of her spirituality. Another participant, Chris, was more explicit in his use of the word love: he sometimes told clients that he loved them. This was in the context of a therapeutic relationship. Chris provided a detailed account of this when discussing spiritual elements to his work (Chapter 11.2).

Although several participants did not mention love directly, it is argued that it is implicit in their understanding of spirituality. If love is central to

the concept of oneness or connection (Sayers 2003), a concept that was identified at the heart of spirituality in this study, it can be argued that love is part of the oneness or connection that participants have with clients. Aspects of such connection with clients, identified by participants, include powerful and profound feelings (Frank), deep silences and stillness in the work (George), and deep connections with another (Deborah). Love is thus argued to be an implicit part of participants' understanding of spirituality.

Connection or oneness is also at the heart of psychodynamic work, as there is a need to relate deeply with clients (Spurling 2004). Because love is central to connection/oneness, love can be seen as a unifying theme for spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. This has been recognized by others including Crichton-Miller (1924), Flintoff-Robinson (1998), Schreurs (2002), and Hoffman (2011). Richards & Bergin (2005) understand love as a key quality enabling the integration of spirituality into counselling practice, and both Simmonds (2003) and Ross (2010) argue that love is an essential and underpinning part of the transformation process in psychoanalysis, through enabling the client to feel loved. Clients value the experience of feeling loved in counselling, and understand the unconditional love of the client by the counsellor as a spiritual attribute (Gockel 2011).

The recognition of love in psychodynamic counselling connects it to its roots; Freud saw psychoanalysis as a cure through love and a manifestation of it (Lear 1990). More recently psychoanalysis is rediscovering love as part of its practice, and in relation to religion (Sayers 2003). Sayers, in discussing major psychoanalytic writers, illustrates how love has inspired them, and contributed to making therapy what it is today.

Some participants used the notion of vocation to explain their work as counsellors, seeing their work as a vocation, or calling from God. A sense of vocation implies a calling, strong feeling or desire towards a

particular role or career (Collins Dictionary 2015).<sup>110</sup> This may evoke aspects of love, particularly because vocations referred to in this study related to a Christian sense of vocation. A core Christian requirement is to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27).<sup>111</sup>

Although love has been found to be an explicit and implicit aspect of spirituality and psychodynamic practice, participants in this study demonstrated wariness in talking about it and fear of being misunderstood. This is a feature also seen in psychoanalysis, where few mention it in published writing (Sayers 2003). Kristeva (1987) is an exception here; she has a great deal to say about love. She equates the love that psychoanalysts have for their patients to the call that Christ, in the Christian religion, makes to love one's neighbour as oneself. In this study the wariness of talk about love was reflected in Hazel's (01: 1520) comment that 'it is never used in psychotherapy'. As demonstrated so far, there is in fact thinking around love in psychodynamic counselling and calls for its recognition in practice (Flintoff-Robinson 1998).

There are though risks in acknowledging and working with love. It can collapse into self-love, or one can be submerged or destroyed by it, as Milner (1969) describes in her work with a schizophrenic patient, Susan.<sup>112</sup> Acknowledging love can involve working at the boundaries of psychodynamic practice where there can be misinterpretations and misunderstanding by the client. It is thus not easy and such factors account for some of the wariness in its inclusion in spirituality in practice.

Although there are clear reasons for wariness around love in professional practice, love connects us at our deepest level (Rowson

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<sup>110</sup> Accessed from [www.collinsdictionary](http://www.collinsdictionary.com) 12.09.15.

<sup>111</sup> English Standard version of The Bible.

<sup>112</sup> The patient, Susan lived with her mother who had a severe mental illness. Susan's mother idolized her and could not bear for Susan to be separate or different from her. She insisted that they were the same. Susan went on to develop schizophrenia and described herself as losing her soul.



2014) and is important in enabling connection and oneness with clients (Sayers 2003). It has been shown to be central to both spirituality and psychodynamic practice, enabling access to the deepest parts of ourselves, and of our clients. It thus demands attention and conscious recognition in the psychodynamic profession. There is a need for exploration, discussion and writing so that it can be fully understood and its place in spirituality and psychodynamic practice overtly recognized. Psychoanalysis has begun to do this through the work of Lear (1990) and Sayers (2003). Lear, in particular, calls for the need for science to account for the centrality of love to human beings and their continuing development and individuation. Psychodynamic counselling would do well to build on this work.

### **13.3. Points of fit and points of tension between participants' understanding of spirituality and of psychodynamic counselling.**

The generation of participants' narratives in this study enabled the ways that they make sense of spirituality in their psychodynamic practice to be identified. While the narrative approach to interviewing meant that the same material was not necessarily covered by all participants, a range of ways of making sense in this area were uncovered. The analysis of genres and themes in the data enabled this. The data could have been dealt with in different ways, and some insights may have been missed. Equally, because of the volume of data, the analysis is not exhaustive. A number of themes could have been added and explored in more detail for each participant. However, this study focused on the breadth of qualitative data rather than on the great depths of it. As a result, the study provides a range of responses illustrative of a variety of issues involved, rather than more detailed analysis of fewer cases. Key issues in the points of fit and points of tension in understanding spirituality in practice were identified and will be examined. This is important to make explicit because, as has been argued, what counsellors think matters.

This is because of the nature of transference and what clients pick up in the room (Heimann 1950; Rizzuto 2005; Ross 2006).

Participants with an understanding of spirituality make sense of it through identifying connections, commonalities and points of difference between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. This will now be examined.

### **13.3.1. Ways of making sense of spirituality**

A central process in identifying connections, commonalities and points of difference between spirituality and psychodynamic practice is that of translation. This process is whereby participants interpret their psychodynamic work into their spiritual language and vice versa in certain areas. They bring together their spiritual and psychodynamic understanding and language in particular shared areas so that there is translation across each of them but with each retaining their own identity. This process has been recognized by others including Rizzuto (1979); Meissner (2001); Wyatt (2002); Ross (2010) and Scott (2011). In doing this participants demonstrate a bilingual ability in spiritual and counselling language (Scott 2011), and a way of accommodating their spiritual beliefs and understanding in their work that allows correspondence and communication between them.

Participants gave numerous examples where they translated across spiritual and psychodynamic language and understanding. While this endorses previous research and theorizing (for example, Meissner 2001; Simmonds 2003; Scott 2011), it equally extends it to psychodynamic counselling specifically.

One of the processes that participants used for making sense in this area was identifying the spiritual aspects or resonance with psychodynamic theorists and theory. This included repositioning Freud as a spiritual man. This was accomplished by re-interpreting the nature

of Freud's actions and his work with clients, in particular his attention to the inner world of clients and addressing their deep emotional and psychological needs. Some participants argue that his work has a spiritual quality about it. This helped such participants to see their work as spiritual. The repositioning of Freud's work is not new (Rizzuto 1979) and is continuing (Clack 2013). Initial mistranslations of Freud's work from German have been well argued by Bettelheim (1984). As Chapter 3 discussed, Freud in fact had a complex and paradoxical relationship with spirituality and religion and had a lifelong fascination with them that is often overlooked (Clack 2013). Some of the analysts in Ross's (2010) sample recognized this in re-visioning Freud in terms of his Jewish identity, and by recognizing his religious engagement in terms of his relationship with his Catholic nanny, his correspondence with Pfister, a Swiss pastor, and his ambivalence to the experience of oneness and spirituality around the term 'oceanic experience'. Whilst they did not go as far as my sample in re-positioning Freud as a spiritual man, like my sample they understood him beyond his dominant atheistic image.

A further way of identifying similarities between spirituality and the psychodynamic process was through identifying parallel processes. This again involved using the language of each understanding (spirituality and psychodynamic) to identify the processes common to both but in so doing retaining the distinctive identity of both. Parallel processes were identified in both the thinking about, and skills of, working with spirituality in psychodynamic practice. Examples of parallel processes include the understanding that through paying attention to the inner world, both spirituality and psychodynamic counselling enable increased self-awareness. Parallels were also recognized in terms of ethical and moral principles such that both psychodynamic counselling and spirituality encourage individuals to live morally responsible lives. This challenges Freud who insisted that psychoanalysis had nothing to do with ethical or moral inquiry (Phillips 1994: 138). However others disagree (Clifford 2005) and some support this study in arguing that they have the common teleology of living a good and fulfilling life (Coltart 1993;

Cottingham 2013), together with concern for others (Symington 1994). Parallels in the skills between them were also identified, for example, some participants recognized the similarities between the kenotic emptying of the self in relation to their spirituality, and the removal of memory and desire in order to focus on, and be with, the client (Bion 1970).

The examples cited in this section illustrate the ways that some participants equate or merge their understanding of spirituality with their religion. In understanding spirituality in a religious framework, there are religious constructs and language that can be used to talk about spirituality. For the spiritual and religious grouping in this study, this was largely the case. The language of their religion, largely Christianity in this study, was a point of reference and frame for their spirituality. Several participants illustrate this clearly through the use of religious constructs in making sense of spirituality in counselling practice. An example here is the understanding by some, including Andrew, Chris, Janet and Kathleen, that God is always present in their work, giving them comfort and support. A further religious construct used in this study is the image of Christ being crucified on the Cross in the Christian religion, as a means of helping to understand clients suffering at a deep level, and the alchemy of this, the transformative nature of it into client health. With this understanding participants were in effect identifying parallel processes in both.

The use of religious constructs in psychodynamic work has strong early precedents including by theorists who are not overtly or at all religious. This includes Kristeva, Winnicott and Bion who all use religious constructs to help explain their thinking and experiences (Sayers 2003). Kristeva (1995), for example, locates anorexia in a religious context through the story of a seventeenth century saint, Catherine of Siena. More recent work has affirmed the value of religious constructs like those used in this study. This includes both Simmonds (2003) and Hoffman

(2011). Both found that the process of psychotherapeutic transformation is an analogue to the ancient redemptive Christian narrative:

...the redemptive Christian narrative of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection may be traced in its theories...as an analogue of a relational psychotherapeutic transformational process of identification, surrender and gratitude.

(Hoffman 2011: 17)

Hoffman (2011) illustrates her thinking through the presentation of her work with her patient, Mandy. Through this case study she demonstrates movement in the work from incarnation and resurrection to redemption. This has resonance with some participants in this study. Hoffman (2011) relates incarnation with identification in psychoanalysis; she argues that the process of relating and identifying with the client can be viewed as the incarnation of the transcendent God into an immanent relational experience, where he walks 'in the rhythm of humanity' (p.31). This is similar to the understanding of several participants who experience God as present in their work. Hoffman (2011) relates surrender in psychoanalysis to crucifixion in the Christian narrative. She argues that through bearing the client's painful figures in the past, often through transference, the analyst experiences at first hand the devastations that the client has had to live with. Some participants describe the image of a crucified Christ as a means of understanding their clients' suffering. Hoffman (2011) equates gratitude and resurrection with the arrival of hope, goodness, newness and rebirth in the work, where there is separation and individuation for the client. Several participants identify the transformation and specifically resurrection experiences in working with clients. Chris reflects Hoffman's argument well:

Chris (01: 538)

I take this view of well the central facts of Christianity, the Incarnation, number one, as seeing the divine as constantly present so that's in the now of the counselling room (pause). And the other central fact of Christianity, the Passion, which goes with the resurrection as you know like a horse and carriage so to speak (pause) that people come to us as therapists because they're hurting and the Passion is (pause) all about humankind hurting in general and in the specific as well. So if I'm sitting with a client who is hurting we're right there in the Garden of Gethsemane as it were. So it's probably about me needing to be unconsciously but very firmly as if I'm in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This suggests that like others including Hoffman (2011), participants in this study use and find religious constructs helpful in understanding and working with spirituality in practice.

A further way of making sense of spirituality used by participants is understanding spirituality as beyond psychodynamic thinking and language. This is true for all participants who have an understanding of spirituality. For those who merge or align their spirituality with their religion, their religion is essentially their ontology. For example, Andrew sees the God of Christianity as 'synonymous with existence' (A02: 874), and regards this as his ontological reality (see Section 11.8.4).<sup>113</sup>

In contrast, participants who are spiritual but not religious have little concrete knowledge to make sense of spirituality as something beyond psychodynamic thinking. While they value their understandings of spirituality to be beyond psychodynamic thinking and language, they have minimal ways of understanding it, other than through their own personal experiences. One participant, Frank, is aware that there is research emerging about spirituality, but is not familiar with it. He recognized that there was little in psychodynamic textbooks to help him

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<sup>113</sup> Brian is an exception here. As mentioned, while he identifies himself as both spiritual and religious, he argues for the need to separate spirituality from religion in order to understand personal spirituality. He is deeply influenced by the work of Otto (1923), a philosopher and theologian. Brian understands spirituality as numinosity. This is seen as the non-rational part of religion, not equated with a particular religion but something that underlies all religions (Otto 1923: 6). This is essential to Brian's understanding of and engagement with spirituality (Brian 01: 158 in Section 9.1).

here. Another participant, Deborah, was keen to keep it this way. She argues that understanding spirituality within psychodynamic terms and language would reduce it to a form of technique. Deborah felt that this would take away its essential meaning and value. She argues that learning to work with spirituality can only be developed experientially. Experiential and reflective practice has been argued to be essential in psychoanalytic practice (Sachs & Shapiro 1976; Sandler 1983; Schön 1987). This type of learning, which requires thinking and reflecting on practice, involves managing uncertainty (Kolb 1984). Indeed the psychodynamic process is one that aims to be open to uncertainty and facilitate un-knowing (Jacobs 2000). It can be argued that learning in practice, through being open to uncertainty, is one that is ideally suited to working with the elusive and complex construct of spirituality. Although Deborah did not articulate this thinking, her understanding has coherence with pre-existing literature about learning the artistry of counselling practice (Schön 1987). This is an important point that is developed further in the discussion exploring the use of theory in practice.

Making sense of spirituality in psychodynamic practice is not easy. Participants identify a variety of ways of doing this, some of which are not fully understood. The point above, argued in relation to Deborah and Frank, about spirituality being beyond psychodynamic language and theory, illustrates this. There are some participants that, through not having an understanding of spirituality, experience some tension with it, and do not see that it has a place in psychodynamic practice. This will now be explored.

### **13.3.2. The lack of fit between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling**

There are two participants who see a lack of fit between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. They see spirituality through the lens of 'an

Occam's razor' (Leonard 01:1133). The participants with this understanding thought hard during the research period (Elizabeth) or deeply, over many years before the study (Leonard), so had given the subject consideration. Whilst these participants could recognize that clients had experiences that they regarded as spiritual, the preference for both Leonard and Elizabeth was for psychodynamic interpretations of them. Psychodynamic constructs were central to their thinking, in both their work and their lives; 'It's the way I approach everything really' (Elizabeth 02: 1274).

Although these two participants do not see a fit for spirituality in psychodynamic counselling, that is not to say that they do not work in depth with their clients. On the contrary they are both very experienced counsellors, having worked with a wide range of clients, and been involved in the education of counsellors. Their narratives, which include details of their client work, illustrate the depth of work that they do. Questions need to be asked about the nature of this work and how it compares, and differs, to those participants who identify themselves as working with spirituality. Both Leonard and Elizabeth stated that they did little relating or engagement with spirituality, or with constructs understood by clients as spiritual.<sup>114</sup> However, they appear to be equating spirituality with religion when they reference their examples, for example, through talking about the Holy Spirit or Roman Catholic faith. They seem to largely understand that working with spirituality requires engagement with religious constructs. Other deep levels of engagement that these participants describe are referenced through psychodynamic understanding, such as reverie. It may be that at a deep level of engagement with clients there is little difference in the depth and nature of their work to those working with spirituality. The only difference may be

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<sup>114</sup> Leonard and Elizabeth could only give a few examples of what they thought could be considered by others as spiritual: Elizabeth described a client mentioning the concept of the Holy Spirit within the Christian tradition (and her difficulties in taking this seriously), and an experience of viewing a sunset with a client as he was leaving her office as a possible experience of what could be seen by others as a spiritual experience. Leonard mentioned a client's reference once to her Roman Catholic faith.



their frames of reference; Leonard and Elizabeth do not relate to religious and spiritual constructs and language.

Chapters 10 and 11 demonstrate that working at a deep level of connection, beyond words, where the quality of the nature of the counselling relationship changes, is a feature common to participants who understand the construct of spirituality and to those who do not. Those who recognize the construct of spirituality may describe this as engaging with it while those who do not understand spirituality recognize it as deep and engaged psychodynamic practice.<sup>115</sup> It seems that the main difference is the nature of understanding; whether a psychodynamic framework is used that includes understanding of spirituality in the work, or excludes it. Elizabeth is an example here. In exploring how the experience of being 'at one' (E02: 806) with the client may be seen by some as a spiritual experience, she identifies that she would use the psychodynamic terms of trust, holding, containment and letting go (Section 10.1.4.).

Similarities in understandings of working in depth in psychoanalytic work with understandings of spirituality have been recognized by others. Bomford (2006) argues that it is not possible to talk about either God or the unconscious at a deep level. He thus stresses the need for narratives in both, and different levels of knowing to get there. This includes empirical, mystical and mythical forms of knowing. MacKenna (2008: 481) recognizes that there are 'remarkable similarities between the Attributes of God as described in traditional Christian theology, and Freud's description of the qualities of the unconscious.' He gives the example of the quality of timelessness where in the unconscious there is

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<sup>115</sup> The deep and engaged level of practice of Leonard and Elizabeth has resonance with the experience of 'relational depth', which evolved from the person-centred tradition. This is 'a state of profound contact and engagement between two people, in which each person is fully real with the Other, and able to understand and value the Other's experiences at a high level.' (Mearns & Cooper 2005: 1). Key workers in this field note the parallels with the concept of third space within psychodynamic counselling (Wiggins, Elliott & Cooper 2012). Sue Wiggins et al (2012) discuss how empathy, compassion and relational interaction are possible in both the third space and person-centred counselling.

no before or after. He argues that it is similar to the idea of the eternity of God, 'who simply Is' (MacKenna 2008: 481). This demonstrates the possibility of different interpretations for the same or similar experiences in therapeutic work. The impact of using a psychodynamic framework that sees spirituality as an unhelpful and unnecessary construct is that it results in minimal engagement with spirituality and spiritual constructs, ones that are understood, by participants in this study, as associated with religion.

However, the question remains about the nature of difference in counselling practice between participants, who do not see a fit for spirituality in their work and those that do, in terms of their engagement with material beyond explicitly religious constructs. As argued, it may be that the deep levels of engagement that Leonard and Elizabeth have in their work is similar to that described by those who understand their experiences of deep connection in the work as spiritual. Elizabeth's experience of hearing a client's experience of watching the sunset (E02: 1460) may be similar to the experiences that some participants describe of spirituality in deep silences with clients (Section 13.3.2.). The differences may be one of interpretation. This adds to the difficulties in understanding and defining spirituality. It illustrates the personal and variable nature of understandings of spirituality, and that it is a construct that some may use spiritual or religious terms to help make sense of, while others reject it as a construct and understand it solely through a psychodynamic lens. It seems that there is overlap in understandings; that there is a common ground between spiritual understandings in the work and psychodynamic understandings; they can be understood differently, either in a psychodynamic and/or spiritual way.

The nature of psychodynamic counsellors' understanding of spirituality may not be important for some clients. Although clients often seek counsellors who integrate spirituality into their practice, for some this does not have to be addressed explicitly (Gockel 2011). What is important for such clients are the qualities of the counsellor including

warmth, openness, genuineness and being fully present (Gockel 2011). While the client may understand these as spiritual qualities, these features can be argued to be the work of those who do not see a place for spirituality in their work. The resulting depth and nature of the work may be such that it meets the client's needs, and while the client may understand this as a spiritual quality in counselling practice, the counsellor may interpret them solely through the lens of the psychodynamic framework. This is an area that merits further study. What are the differences, for the client, between counsellors working with spirituality in their practice, and those who do not see a place for it, particularly in relation to spirituality beyond religious understandings? The inclusion of participants who do not see a fit with spirituality in psychodynamic counselling raises important questions for psychodynamic counsellors in understanding spirituality in practice.

### **13.3.3. The person of the counsellor**

A final tension explored in this section relates to the person of the counsellor. The counsellor is key in enabling a safe and authentic therapeutic relationship; the counselling relationship is where development and healing takes place (Shedler 2010). Authenticity is about a sense of genuineness about who a person is, that they are real and not false (Collins Dictionary 2015).<sup>116</sup> Authenticity is key to psychodynamic practice since an authentic counsellor relinquishes control in the work and enables a sense of not knowing in it (McCloughlin 1995). In so doing, the counsellor relies on their capacity for authenticity and engagement in relatedness (McCloughlin 1995). The need for counsellors to be authentic, to be themselves, was recognized in this study by several participants: Brian, Hazel and Leonard all explicitly stated that their practice was essentially them, not the psychodynamic model. Brian argued that it is important that you 'are simply yourself' (B01: 965).

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<sup>116</sup> Accessed via [www.collinsdictionary.com](http://www.collinsdictionary.com) on 15.09.15.

The need to be authentic was recognized by those using the clarity genre and those using the discovery genre in their narratives. In the former group, participants are clear about their understanding of spirituality or their non-understanding of the construct; they can articulate and reason this. In contrast, participants using the discovery genre were not clear about themselves with regard to spirituality prior to the study. They had not consolidated their thoughts in this area. In this sense they were not fully authentic or clear about themselves. This is important because uncertainties and dissonances in participants' thinking about spirituality can be picked up by the client, and be experienced by them as an area to be avoided (Jenkins 2006; West 2011). This research was an intervention for participants using the discovery genre, in the sense of enabling them to develop their thinking and practice with regard to spirituality. It increased their clarity in this area, often considerably. This suggests that in order for counsellors to be themselves in spiritually inclusive practice, they need to be explicitly encouraged and enabled to develop their understanding about spirituality and its place in psychodynamic practice.

Participants' narratives were very varied and unique, reflecting their personal life experiences. This highlights the personal nature of thinking required here, and the need for individual counsellors to do this for themselves. In such a way counsellors can identify their personal understanding and resonances about spirituality in psychodynamic practice. This research suggests that counsellors are likely to value this process, regardless of their spiritual understanding.

#### **13.4. Issues in working with spirituality in psychodynamic practice.**

This section explores some of the issues identified in this study in working with spirituality in psychodynamic practice. It begins with

examining the factors helpful in enabling thinking about spirituality, and the determinants of how it is worked with in practice. This is followed by an exploration of the limited awareness by participants of current research and theory in this area. This section ends with an examination of working with uncertainty and managing the boundaries of practice.

#### **13.4.1. Factors helpful in thinking and working with spirituality**

An important finding in this study is that many participants had not given sustained thought to the place of spirituality in psychodynamic practice, prior to the study. However, there were some participants who had done so; they gave clear and reasoned thinking about it. This provides useful data in that, through their narratives, it is possible to identify factors that assist participants' thinking about spirituality, and why they thought about it, in contrast to others who had not done so. These participants, demonstrating the clarity genre, also illustrate that sustained thinking about spirituality does not determine how it is understood and worked with in practice; there are other factors that determine this. Each of these points will now be examined.

In terms of factors enabling thinking about spirituality in practice, a variety of personal factors were identified. This includes the perceived need to think about it, and the support systems needed to sustain thinking in this area. Participants demonstrating the clarity genre all experienced a need to think about the relationship between spirituality and psychodynamic counselling, and all had spent a considerable amount of time doing this, over many years. They thus demonstrated a personal motivation that they chose to give priority to. This has been identified as one of the key factors of being able and open to working in this area (Bartoli 2006; Tillman et al 2013).

These participants recognized the value and importance of their personal support systems in sustaining their thinking and practice in this area. The forms of support discovered are in line with other research; this ranges

from the recognition of spiritual practices and discipline to strengthen and sustain themselves (Psaila 2012), to a range of other activities including art and exercise, and the support of like-minded friends (Ross 2010). Some participants regard such support as essential, especially given the struggle and difficulties that they experience at times, in thinking about spirituality itself and its application to their practice; Andrew is an example here (See Section 11.8.5).

A number of factors were revealed in the work and professional culture of participants that are helpful and unhelpful in working with spirituality in practice. In a broad sense, participants illustrate that where their work culture and clients are open to and/or explicit about spirituality and religion, there is an increased likelihood of the presence of spirituality and spiritual issues. This was shown through those participants who worked with spiritual and religious clients, notably clergy or ordinands and/or religious institutions and agencies. In all examples given here openness to spirituality was described and utilized in the work. The converse of this was equally described and endorses previous work (Crossley & Salter 2005; Psaila 2012) and extends it to the psychodynamic context. Where participants experience their workplace as denying and/or not recognizing the importance of spirituality, it is rarely experienced in the work. Examples given were work within counselling training organizations and their supervisors, and with the needs of human resource departments in large organizations. In the former, spirituality was ignored and participants learnt that it was something not to be brought into the organization. In the latter, it was recognized that the needs of the organization were often focused on skills and performance; this, combined with a limited number of sessions, was not seen as helpful to spiritually inclusive practice.

A limited number of counselling sessions were a factor identified as impacting on the inclusion of spirituality in practice, that is, whether counselling organizations undertook long or short-term work. The participants (n=2) that identified this felt that spirituality was largely

encountered in long-term work; that a relationship had to be developed over time before work in this area was possible. One participant with this view worked in an organization that averaged three sessions per client. It may be that unless spirituality is a presenting issue, it is unlikely to be encountered in such an environment where work focuses essentially on the presenting problem (Coren 2009). However, the argument that long-term work is needed for spiritually inclusive practice is countered by other work that argues that it is possible in short-term work (Heron 1992; Benner 2003; West 2011). It is relevant to note that while this was the experience of two participants in this study, their thinking was in the process of development as both were discovering their thoughts during the research. It would be interesting if this view remains after a further sustained period of thinking.

It can be seen that within each of the cultures described, (personal, work and professional), there are factors discovered in this study which can help or hinder thinking about spirituality. The findings show that it is the interaction between these cultures that impacts on participants work with spirituality. For example even if a participant deeply values spirituality the impact of the professional culture may be that it prevents or hinders thinking about spirituality in practice. Even if a participant has clarity about working explicitly with spirituality, the nature of the work environment such as a limited number of sessions with a client may hinder this. The complexity within each of these cultures and the interaction between them highlights the difficulties, and the time and energy required in order to be able to think about spirituality in practice.

The narratives of those showing the clarity genre illustrated factors that determine whether, and if so how, spirituality is worked with in practice. Although previous research states that the more importance counsellors' place on spirituality and religion, the more likely they are to see it influencing their work (Davis 2008), this research shows that this relationship is more complex than this. This study demonstrates that alongside seeing spirituality as important to themselves, counsellors also

need to see it as an explicit part of their practice. There was a discrepancy here for some participants who, despite seeing their spirituality as central to their being, did not see it as an explicit part of their practice. This is demonstrated by the presence of a boundaried way of working. Participants with a boundaried way of working felt that while they were open to clients' spirituality they would not exclude it in the work, they only recognized it when the client brought it up.<sup>117</sup> This stance is also true of Leonard, the participant using the clarity genre who did not see a place for spirituality in psychodynamic practice. However, this approach does not indicate a desire to know the client in relation to their spirituality; this is illustrated by the minimal prevalence of spirituality being dealt with explicitly by these participants. Arguably the presence of the unconscious makes it impossible for clients not to know something of the counsellor, including their beliefs for and against spirituality and religion, and what they see as inclusive of their practice (Ross 2010). In relation to these participants it may be that their clients are unconsciously picking this up; that this is an area not positively encouraged by counsellors (West 2000; Jenkins 2006). This finding supports Bartoli's (2006) study of training analysts in the US in that it is not just the opportunity to work through their understanding of spirituality that is key to openness in practice, but that they need to see it as part of the work.

This discovery of a boundaried form of working also supports early research suggesting a difference between the personal value of psychodynamic counsellors' spiritual beliefs and the importance that they place on it in practice; 52% of the sample compared to 26% respectively (Ross 2006). The findings in this study indicate that whilst it is helpful for counsellors to work through their understanding of spirituality in order to

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<sup>117</sup> There were many participants in Simmonds's (2003) sample who were wary of explicitly bringing up the subject of spirituality. However, unlike Chris and Janet who did not see spirituality as an explicit part of practice, addressing it only if the client brought it up, those in Simmonds's sample did see spirituality as an explicit part of their work. The wariness in Simmonds's sample was largely about their therapeutic stance in that while they were happy to work with spirituality, it was important that clients were enabled to raise the topic themselves rather than the analyst do this for them.



be open to working with clients' spirituality, they also need to see it as part of psychodynamic practice. It is the interaction between their understanding of spirituality and what they see as inclusive of psychodynamic practice that determines the degree of openness and willingness to work with it in practice.

#### **13.4.2. The limits in awareness of current theory and research about spirituality in counselling practice**

Because of the nature of the unconscious, and of transference and countertransference, what counsellors think about spirituality matters (Jacobs 2000, 2010). This study demonstrates that the ways in which participants' think about this subject impacts on their practice. It shows how their understanding of spirituality affects how open they are to it in the work and how explicitly they choose to work with it. For example, some work explicitly with it by asking clients directly about it (Andrew),<sup>118</sup> others by 'floating' it into the work (Frank). Others only work with spirituality if the client brings it up. Participants gave a lot of detail about their spiritual experiences and encounters in the work. A consistent theme across much of this was the absence of theory or reference to the source of their understanding. For example, Hazel was unaware of the literature about love, and Frank and Deborah unaware of possible psychoanalytic explanations for their understanding of spirituality being beyond psychodynamic understanding.

However, this is not to say that participants in this study work in an unthinking manner. They relied on their personal experiences to make sense of their work with spirituality. The discussion above illustrated the

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<sup>118</sup> Working explicitly in these ways is in contrast to other studies which suggest that clients like to bring the subject of spirituality up themselves or mutually with the counsellor, and do not like counsellors introducing it into the work (Knox et al 2005; Ankrah 2002). Although further research is needed to test this more fully, through the examples that participants gave, and through their continuing use of an explicit approach, it is inferred that they are judging accurately when to initiate talk about spirituality, that is, when they experience that the client is feeling safe and able to trust the therapeutic relationship.

ways in which participants made links between spirituality and their psychodynamic practice. For example, how they identified similarities, connections and differences between them. As Chapters 3 and 4 showed there is much relevant pre-existing theory and research that can help inform this. Participants were often not consciously aware of this work, particularly those demonstrating the discovery genre. For example, little reference was given to Winnicott's idea of transitional space and how it can be used to think about spirituality. This can be seen as surprising given its prominence in psychodynamic theory.

The lack of reference to theory by many participants is in contrast to the sample of experts in Simmonds's (2003) and Ross's samples, who were able to cite wide-ranging sources to illustrate their understanding. The lack of reference to theory or research may be unsurprising, on one level, in that counsellors rarely read research (Fitzpatrick et al 2010; West 2011). They also are deeply influenced by their training organizations, which largely exclude the concept of spirituality (Post & Wade 2009; West 2009; Scott 2011).

In the absence of exposure to pre-existing theory or research, participants use their personal knowledge and experiences (of spirituality and psychodynamic counselling) to form an orientation or understanding of their practice. The importance of personal and practical knowledge and experience or theories in use (Argyris & Schön 1978) has been shown to be important in the orientation to practice of other professions such as teaching (Larsen-Freeman 1999) as well as in terms of developing counsellors (Schön 1987; Wong-Wylie 2006; Fitzpatrick et al 2010) and counsellor educators (Connelly & Clandinin 1999). Although unaware of much of the theoretical and empirical work about spirituality in practice, participants' reflections on their practice were frequently in line with current theories. For example, a finding in this study was that participants demonstrated that they often saw spiritual encounters as positive for the client, and ones that are often transformatory, enhancing their growth and learning. Examples in this study of such growth from

explicit spiritual encounters include increasing clients' abilities to cope with suffering and depression (Brian), experiences of spiritual comfort and healing (Hazel), exploring what is important in life (Frank), developing their spiritual understanding such that they lead to positive changes in their relationship to their god (George), helping clients to gain greater appreciation and understanding of themselves (Brian), and to become more whole and authentic (Frank). Examples from implicit spiritual encounters are where client development occurs through changes in the silences in the work through enabling a deeper level of relating and engagement where clients are seen as equal (Deborah) and deeply heard (Janet).

Participants' understanding of these spiritual experiences made no reference to the expanding knowledge about the commonalities in engaging with spirituality in counselling practice. This includes the work of Simmonds (2003), Ross (2010), Scott (2011) and Psaila (2012). Key processes commonly identified across these studies and endorsed by mine are the processes of translation, transition and transformation. As discussed earlier, participants engage in translation processes to make sense of spirituality in their practice. All the previously cited studies have found this, with Scott helpfully stressing the importance of understanding the culture of the language that is being used in order to avoid mistranslations and to ensure mutual understandings. Participants equally detail the transition into different states of experiencing in their work with clients, through a sense of deep connection, that lead to spiritual experiences that can be transformatory or growth enhancing.<sup>119</sup> Although largely not aware of the aforementioned research or the explicit processes that they engaged in, participants' narratives reflected the

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<sup>119</sup> Clients recognize the potential for growth from spiritual encounters in counselling (Rose et al 2001; Gockel 2011). The same is true for counsellors as shown in more recent studies including Scott (2011) and Psaila (2012) and particularly Simmonds (2003). Like this study, Simmonds found that engaging with spirituality can enable a change inside the client leading to an increased capacity to cope and a sense of feeling loved and accepted so that they can move to self-acceptance and transformation.

common processes of translation, transition and transformation in their spiritual encounters in their practice.

Experiential learning with reflection on practice thus appears to be a method that helps counsellors to be consciously aware and enable thinking about their practice. It helps them to make sense, particularly in areas where there may be limited conscious awareness of relevant theory or research. As mentioned earlier, experiential learning is a process that enables participants to reflect deeply on their practice. It encourages openness to thinking, a key feature in psychodynamic practice. Hazel demonstrates this vividly through her unusual experience of an aura, or light around a client.<sup>120</sup>

However, personal experience alone is not enough to make sense of practice; there is a requirement to be informed and trained appropriately for practice (BACP 2015). Current theory and research can help inform counsellors' understanding of working with spirituality. However it needs to be in tandem with experiential learning so that it is not applied in a rigid or tight way, and can be applied and adapted appropriately to each client. The provision of learning about working with spirituality combined with checks and challenges to counsellors' current thinking enables effective and safe practice (Danchev & Ross 2014; BACP 2015). This can be in the form of seminars, up-to-date books and articles about how spirituality can be understood and worked with in psychodynamic practice, and through supervision and support groups. Through experiential learning and the provision of appropriate training and support, the therapeutic space can be one of openness and safety. This is important in working with spirituality because, as has been shown, it

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<sup>120</sup> Hazel described an experience of an aura in her work with a client (Section 11.5.1.3.). She experienced incredulity about it. As a result she did not talk about it with the client, but on reflecting on it, wondered if this was a spiritual experience where the client experienced healing. Because this experience was of surprise to Hazel, she clearly had thus not intentionally sought to do this or have this experience. However she sought 'to be a facilitator in the healing process,' she was open in her practice, and in so doing can be argued to have enabled the possibility of such experiences (West 2011: 135).

involves working in depth, with uncertainty and often at the boundaries of practice. This study has shown that such work is complex. This complexity of managing a sense of openness and uncertainty in the work is the final issue to be explored in this discussion.

### **13.4.3. Working at the boundaries of practice; managing uncertainty**

The need for counsellors to be open and authentic in psychodynamic practice has been demonstrated in this study. Equally important is the need to remain open to uncertainty; this is central to both psychodynamic practice and to working with spirituality. Bion (1970: 26) emphasizes this in terms of the need for the counsellor to focus on O which 'is represented by terms such as ultimate reality, absolute truth, Godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself,' and the 'unknown and unknowable' (Bion 1967: 272). Participants also demonstrated this through the genres in the narratives. Openness to uncertainty, where the demarcation between reality and fantasy is suspended, enables a sense of boundlessness and space in the work, as well as a sense of the counsellor being undefended. It also enables the counsellor not to pre-judge or narrowly interpret the work (Totton 2010). In order to practice in this way, counsellors need, at times, to work at the edges of practice and with flexible boundaries (Totton 2010). Working in this way provides a means to apply and adapt theory to each client, adjusting it to each unique counselling situation (Spence 1982). Although this happens in practice it is often not reported or cited by well-established professionals, who are 'partially protected by the exceptionalism which attaches to celebrity: well it's alright for them' (Totton 2010: 12).<sup>121</sup>

There are several factors that militate against working at the boundaries of practice in current psychodynamic practice. As Chapter 3 discussed, the culture of modern society includes an emphasis on mastery, managing clear boundaries, and risk management (McLeod 2011). In

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<sup>121</sup> Examples here are of Thorne (1987) who describes working naked with a client, and Lomas (1974) who writes about taking a session out of doors.

terms of boundaries, distinctions have been made between boundary crossings and boundary violations (Gutheil & Gabbard 1993).<sup>122</sup> These authors see boundary violations as always harmful and that boundary crossings may be neutral or beneficial. However, reflecting the current risk adverse culture, Thomas Gutheil & Glen Gabbard argue that on the basis of a possible adverse appearance in court, boundary crossings should be avoided. With this understanding, clients can be seen as a potential threat, a danger to be negotiated. This attitude may be projected into their clients, who are then mistrusted and feared. Tight boundaries and defensive practice are thus not helpful in psychodynamic work. They can impede the potential for connection and relatedness. This risk adverse approach needs to be challenged if there is to be a therapeutic environment that encourages uncertainty in the work. While for some clients, at some times, it is crucial for counsellors to act within a defined frame, it is equally important that counsellors work authentically and in an open rather than a predictable way (Totton 2010). This may require counsellors to work at the boundaries of practice. Such work may be vulnerable to misunderstanding, and if not sufficiently self-monitored, to misbehaviour. However, self-monitoring combined with the requirement for supervision and on-going training helps to mitigate this. This seems important to consider because of the centrality of uncertainty and un-knowing in psychodynamic practice.

If uncertainty can be managed in the counselling relationship this, together with other factors highlighted in this study, including that they have similar aims and processes, demonstrate that spirituality and psychodynamic counselling are well suited to work together. Uncertainty, an aspect at the heart of spirituality, can be explored if the client needs this. This study showed that the skills required for relational and intersubjective psychodynamic practice are suited to working with

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<sup>122</sup> Although Gutheil and Gabbard's (1993) work is American and thus a different context to the UK, their work, and its derivatives, is widely cited in work about boundaries including in counselling (Totton 2010) and other contexts such as psychiatry ([www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/18%20on %20boundaries\\_finalpdf](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/18%20on%20boundaries_finalpdf) accessed on 21.09.15) and psychoanalysis ([www.bpc.org.uk/boundary-violations](http://www.bpc.org.uk/boundary-violations) accessed on 21.09.15).

spirituality. This includes in terms of counsellors' preparations for practice (for example, emptying the mind and letting go of self) and the approach to practice (for example, the ability to work implicitly and explicitly with it). Participants recognize the developmental aspect to both; that spirituality and psychodynamic counselling, through the aim of raising awareness of what is not consciously known, lead to growth and learning. Similarities were recognized in both processes. For example both require being open to different levels of experiencing, including beyond the mental ego state, and both involve aspects of love. The dynamic nature of the relationship in both spirituality and in psychodynamic practice together with the points highlighted suggest that they are ideal for one another; psychodynamic practice can enable thinking about spirituality and spirituality can enable psychodynamic work. The complementary nature of spirituality to psychoanalysis has been well argued by Simmonds (2003) and theorized in psychodynamic counselling by Flintoff- Robinson (1998). This study provides empirical evidence of this within psychodynamic counselling.

Holding uncertainty in the work enables the counsellor to hold the paradox of wanting to know more about themselves in relation to spirituality in their work, and in doing this holding and valuing that there is much that they do not and cannot know. At its best, when spirituality and psychodynamic counselling are mutually enhancing, it enables the counsellor, in the simple yet profound words of Brian to:

simply be yourself. And the other person's [client's] psyche can feel that it's in a place where it can be accepted, and really start to reflect on itself.

(Brian 01: 965)

This chapter demonstrated the range and particular insights that were gained from participants' narratives. These insights provide in-depth knowledge that contributes to current understandings of spirituality in practice and towards developments in this area of practice. The conclusion to the study will now be presented.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **14.1. Introduction**

In this chapter I present a very brief summary of the research: the background to the study and its main findings. I also present the implications that result from the study while making recommendations for practice. I end this chapter by exploring areas for further research.

#### **14.2. Revisiting the background to the study**

The study explored psychodynamic counsellors' understanding and experiences with spirituality in practice. Little is known in this area other than from a psychoanalytic perspective (Simmonds 2003; Ross 2010), and that tends to deal with ideas about religion rather than spirituality (Martinez & Baker 2000; Wyatt 2002).

The focus of this study on psychodynamic counsellors may have been surprising. Firstly, it may have been surprising because of recognition of commonalities between the various traditions and approaches to counselling as exemplified in the five-modality model developed by Clarkson (2002). Secondly, there has been a recent push towards integrative and pluralistic approaches to counselling e.g. Cooper & McLeod (2011), rather than a focus on the development of individual approaches to counselling. However, this study focused on psychodynamic practice because it might be especially difficult for psychodynamic counsellors to integrate spirituality into practice. This was largely because of the dominant atheistic message from psychoanalysis that originated from Freud. This was felt to be in contrast



to more humanist approaches that are seen to be more spiritually inclusive (West 2004; Psaila 2012; Thorne 2012). Equally research has shown that psychodynamic counsellors see spirituality and religion as less important in counselling than integrative and humanistic approaches (Hofmann & Walach 2011). For these reasons it was important to examine spirituality within psychodynamic practice specifically exploring both commonalities and differences with other therapeutic approaches. At the same time this study develops research in the psychodynamic field, an area of limited research.

A narrative methodology was developed that countered the difficulties in thinking and talking about spirituality. Because of the pivotal role of narratives in psychodynamic counselling, this was a methodology well suited for the research questions. It enabled participants to be able to talk and explain and/or explore their thinking in the interview process. This process captured the ways that participants made sense during the interviews. Because of participants' increased confidence and awareness of their practice as a result of taking part in the study, the research was an intervention in counselling practice.

Since the aim was to obtain in-depth understandings, the sample was limited to 11 participants. Through purposive sampling, a breadth of spiritual positions and working environments among participants was obtained. The sample was based in Southern England.

### **14.3. Summary of the main findings**

This study is grounded in practice focusing on currently practising psychodynamic counsellors. A primary finding of the study is the discovery of the absence of spirituality within psychodynamic counselling. Although some participants had been able to think about this subject, most had not been able to think in a coherent and consistent way.

However, although participants found it hard to think about spirituality, and about it in relation to their practice, by the end of the research process they were happy to have done so, and valued the process. They became vitally engaged in the subject and like those who showed clarity in their thinking about spirituality, they wanted to continue their thinking in this area. The process of thinking for the research initiated and/or revived a desire to engage more with their thinking about spirituality and how it relates to their practice. This demonstrates that there are counsellors who have spiritual beliefs and/or are interested and wanting to engage in thinking about spirituality. It might be argued that these participants form a biased group in that through the very nature of taking part in the research they were interested in working out and/or discussing their thinking here. It was after all a largely self-selecting sample, with just over a half of the participants volunteering to take part in the study. Even if this is the case the study demonstrates that there are psychodynamic counsellors who want to think about spirituality and how to work with it in practice, despite all the complexities in doing so. These findings counter expectations that psychodynamic counsellors do not want to think about spirituality, argued in Chapters 3 and 4. This study thus shows that there is disparity between the messages from the psychodynamic profession generally, (that spirituality is not important and thus does not need to be thought about) and from participants in this study (that they want to think about it).

The variety of ways in which participants make sense of spirituality in their psychodynamic practice was also illuminated. This ranged from re-positioning the work of Freud, seeing it as spiritual or having spiritual overtones, to looking for similarities and differences between spirituality and the psychodynamic counselling. The process of translation, whereby participants interpret their psychodynamic work into their spiritual language and vice versa in certain areas, is evidenced here. Those who link their spirituality with their religion often use religious constructs to make sense in this area.

Other participants cannot see a fit for spirituality in the psychodynamic process. They cannot recognize the construct or understand what others may see as spirituality or spiritual experiences, preferring and using a psychodynamic frame of reference for these experiences. This research showed the ways in which these varied forms of making sense of spirituality impact on how participants understand and work with spirituality in practice.

The focus of the sample was particularly helpful in identifying the unique features to consider for psychodynamic practice. Key aspects identified relate to psychodynamic theory. Although little theory was mentioned across the participants as a whole, some illustrated the ways that they re-positioned or reinterpreted it in the light of their spiritual positions. Equally important to be addressed is the need for some psychodynamic counsellors to be challenged to move away from its traditional psychoanalytic roots, to see spirituality as part of psychodynamic practice; there was a perception among some that this was either not part of practice or not an explicit part of practice.

These findings have several implications for psychodynamic practice that are now explored.

#### **14.4. Implications and recommendations for counselling practice**

This section explores the implications of the findings from this study and makes recommendations for practice.

##### **14.4.1. Enabling thinking about and work with spirituality in psychodynamic practice; the need to see it as part of practice**

Given that participants in this study valued thinking about spirituality an implication for psychodynamic practice is the need to consider how to support psychodynamic counsellors to do this. The clarity genre demonstrated that there are some psychodynamic counsellors who are able to think deeply in this complex area. A number of different factors were identified that help here, including having the personal motivation to do so: seeing spirituality as personally important; various types of personal support systems; and a supportive work culture. However central and crucial to all these factors is the need to see spirituality as part of psychodynamic practice.

In order to help counsellors to understand that spirituality is part of psychodynamic practice, a professional sea change is required. This can be achieved through a variety of means:

1. Introducing spirituality from the beginning of initial training as one of many important factors in psychodynamic practice. Although some participants recognized the demands of teaching counsellors and the breadth of theory involved spirituality needs to be included if it is to be seen as integral to practice.
2. There needs to be accessible and presentable theory and literature here. Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated the range of theorizing and thinking about spirituality that can be used but much of this was not easy to find and not initially easy to understand. Making literature more accessible and available to counsellors has the potential to make more explicit understanding of their work and extend it beyond their personal experiences and understanding. A potentially particularly helpful concept is that of third space or transitional space. Transitional space can be used and explicitly encouraged as a theoretical construct in which to think and work with spirituality. This was not a concept mentioned by participants in this study; they largely use implicit theory.

3. There needs to be post-training opportunities and courses to continue counsellors thinking in this area. Key aspects of my methodology can be used to underpin some of the training opportunities; that is providing the means to think about spirituality (exercises and journaling), together with a deep and open engagement with another. The combination of prior thinking together with a deep encounter with another enabled participants to develop and to know their understanding of spirituality in their practice. This would certainly assist with the struggles and loneliness that can be experienced in the journey of thinking about spirituality in practice (Chapter 11.8.1.). Peer support would in turn be provided, a factor that is identified as a support in thinking about spirituality in this study and by others who recognize it as a key factor in developing confidence in this area (Tillman et al 2013).

There are pre-existing professional groups that focus on spirituality such as the BACP Spirituality Group. It provides a range of training and sharing opportunities, ones that provide the means for translating and sharing understanding of spirituality in practice. This group is one whose membership is currently continuing to grow (BACP 2015a). However, membership is optional. Encouragement and emphasis on the inclusion of spirituality into practice from the beginning of training and its continuation post training and beyond by specialist groups may further enable support of working with spirituality. As the study shows peer group support needs to be encouraged, as this is particularly valuable in enabling thinking about spirituality. Such forms of support enable increased discussion and discourse. This in turn helps understandings of spirituality in practice to be more widely shared and more fully understood.

4. Key to effective support of spiritually inclusive practice is the provision of supervision that enables spirituality to be explored. Supervisors need adequate training for this aspect of work. Through spiritually inclusive supervision, psychodynamic counsellors will be able to reflect on the spiritual aspects of their work alongside all other factors. This enables

insight and reflection with another, or others that is key to ensuring effective practice. Spiritually inclusive supervision will also enable exploration of the boundaries and limits of psychodynamic practice. In providing spiritually inclusive supervision supervisors will be providing a process parallel to counsellors' practice, exploring, demonstrating and mirroring ways in which spirituality can be thought about and worked with with clients in practice.

Through the recommendations made above, psychodynamic counsellors can be enabled to think for themselves, be given input to help their thinking, be supported by others in doing this, and be given the means to continue thinking and reflecting on spirituality in psychodynamic practice. Such means would enable counsellors to work authentically, a key feature of practice identified in this study.

#### **14.4.2. Working authentically with spirituality**

The counsellor is key in psychodynamic counselling, and central to the therapeutic relationship. Participants showed that they wanted to work authentically in their practice, including with spirituality. They illustrated the ways in which they reflected deeply on their practice through their narratives. The desires to reflect deeply, alongside the drive to be themselves in their work, were strong features of participants' narratives. They wanted to be themselves in their practice, including with regard to spirituality; being authentic is seen as essential to their work. Participants' valued thinking about spirituality as part of the research since this helped them to be clearer about it in practice, and in turn reflect a practice that has congruence with their understanding. It enabled them to be more fully themselves with regard to working with spirituality.

In the absence of limited access to and/or knowledge of explicit theory or research about spirituality in psychodynamic practice, participants use their personal experiences and understanding to make sense here. The

lack of inclusion of spirituality in supervision means that this is largely unchecked or unchallenged. The research process ameliorated this to some extent for the participants; through being asked about their understanding of spirituality they were checked in their thinking about this, and they were challenged in it when I sought clarity in the research interviews, to ensure that I fully grasped their understanding.

Participants demonstrated their authenticity and uniqueness through the personal and varied nature of their understanding of spirituality. In so doing they affirmed the multidimensional nature of this construct, with different aspects of it identified in very different ways. An extension to Cook's (2004) definition of spirituality used in this study was argued, to include the aspect that spirituality occurs between people or small groups of people.

This study also shows the importance of considering and recognizing love as part of spirituality and of psychodynamic practice. Love is an implicit and explicit part of participants' understanding of spirituality and as such needs overt recognition. This is important if participants are to be themselves and authentic in practice. Because love is argued to be a theme in terms of connecting and relating deeply to clients, it can be seen as a unifying theme between spirituality and the psychodynamic practice.

This research suggests that helping counsellors to fully be themselves is an important factor in helping them to engage and relate deeply with clients, and of helping to allow the possibility of encountering and engaging with spirituality in practice. Forms of training and support identified above would enable this.

### **14.4.3. The complexities of working with spirituality; managing the challenges**

A further implication of this study is the need to acknowledge the complexities in working with spirituality. Although a spiritually inclusive approach is not easy, it seems essential to enable the client to be heard and to experience their dreams and illusions in the work. Clients' illusions may be with something 'other' metaphorically or actually divine but what is crucial is that their dreams and illusions get space to be explored if the client needs this. A central aspect to enable this is the need to remain open to uncertainty and doubt, and for continued thinking about spirituality. This was recognized as not easy and often complex. It demonstrates a maturity of thinking; knowing that one does not know all that one can, is Socrates definition of a wise person (quoted in Plato 1978).

By remaining uncertain in psychodynamic work the counsellor is more likely to be undefended and open to the client (Bion 1965,1970; Jacobs 2000). This study showed that it promotes a deep level of engagement with clients that may require working at the boundaries of practice. This can be risky (for example telling clients that you love them) and difficult (for example, working with spiritualities very different from one's own). The current professional climate, with its emphasis on safety and risk management, often militates against working at the boundaries of practice. However, being open to working at such boundaries is important in terms of working with a construct that is hard to put into language, that is open to multiple meanings, and to different levels of engagement in the therapeutic relationship. Through being encouraged to think about the construct of spirituality, and being supported and challenged in this through peer and supervision groups, and accessible reading, counsellors can be helped to manage the complexities and challenges in this aspect of their work. The provision of appropriate and accessible training, challenge and support would help ensure that



encountering spirituality is an ever-present possibility in psychodynamic work.

#### **14.4.4. The ever-present possibility of spirituality in psychodynamic work**

At the heart of psychodynamic counselling is a specially constructed space, of talk and of silence, for the client to explore what they need to. When the counsellor is open to multiple levels of meaning and connection there is always a possibility of encountering spirituality in the work. The goals of enriching self-awareness, increasing personal growth and of developing ethically and morally responsible lives have been identified as common to both spirituality and psychodynamic counselling. This, together with the common skills identified in them, demonstrate that spirituality and psychodynamic counselling are ideally suited to one another. It shows their complementary nature, and of the possibilities of them mutually enhancing one another.

This study shows a variety of ways that psychodynamic counsellors understand and work with spirituality, both implicitly and explicitly. It highlights that spirituality needs to be seen as part of practice in order for psychodynamic counsellors to work in an open and explicit way with it. The need to see spirituality as part of psychodynamic practice, together with factors supporting its inclusion in practice, is important to identify because this is a subject that will not go away; for many spirituality is an innate and important part of human beings and thus has to be included in practice (Martinez & Baker 2000; Swinton 2001; Ross 2010; Pargament 2011), clients want it included in counselling (Jenkins 2006; Gockel 2011) and counsellors want to think about spirituality in their work (as shown in this study). It is therefore a subject that needs to be thought about. In order to help with this, further research is needed; recommendations for this are identified below.

#### **14.4. Recommendations for further research**

There are numerous areas for further research that can be identified from this work. Key areas that I identify are:

1. A follow-up of participants in this study in terms of whether they continued their thinking about spirituality in their practice following the research. If this is the case, factors that were helpful and unhelpful can be a further focus for research.
2. To repeat the study with a broader-based sample. This would include people with other religious faiths, an increased number of people who are spiritual but not religious as well as people from a wider geographical area in order to increase the ethnicity and diversity of the study.
3. Research on the impact of training on counsellors understanding of and work with spirituality in practice. It would be helpful to include in such research the usefulness of explicit theory such as transitional space on understanding, and whether it helps integrate counsellors' theoretical understanding in practice.
4. Evaluate the impact of the implementation of a range of support factors including peer and support groups, as well as spiritually inclusive supervision, on counsellors' work with spirituality.
5. Building on this work, an in-depth exploration of the nature of the work of those using only a psychodynamic frame compared to those who report working with spirituality and spiritual issues; specifically what are the differences in practice between these types of counsellors when working with spirituality understood as separate from religion and religious constructs?

#### **14.5. Conclusion**

In pulling this thesis together there is a sense of wanting to continue my thinking here, and recognizing that there is lots more to do. Equally I want to stop, realizing that I have done enough for now, for this part of

my journey. Like the participants in this study, while I recognize that I know more about spirituality in practice than when I started, I am also in a place of unknowing, one that requires continued thinking and journeying. An increased professional push towards the inclusion of spirituality in psychodynamic practice would enable and encourage the provision of support for continued thinking.

This study has shown the integrity of the participants in it: they want to be authentic in their practice and to do their best for clients. They demonstrate that they value thinking about the difficult subject of spirituality and are able to work with their conflicts, whatever their spiritual position. In turn they recognize what they can and cannot do in relation to spirituality in their practice. There are clearly groups of psychodynamic counsellors who are spiritual, who want to include it in their practice, and who have identified ways of doing this. Others were less clear about this prior to the study. A professional sea change in the psychodynamic profession is needed to help counsellors to think about spirituality and for it to be understood as part of its practice.

Such a change in the psychodynamic profession is arguably possible given that its very nature is one of continuing adaptation and development. Psychodynamic practice is a process that is ideally set up to incorporate spirituality; it is one that enables mutual benefit and support between them. The inclusion of spirituality into practice meets clients' needs holistically. It gives them what they would like in counselling practice, enabling them to talk about what it means to be fully human and therefore say things that otherwise might be difficult to say (Rowson 2014). The provision of professional input to encourage and enable work with spirituality in turn enables counsellors to become who they are and:

*When we are whom we are called to be,*

*We will set the world ablaze*

St. Catherine of Siena, 1347-1380

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

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School of **Health** and **Social Care**

#### Participation Information sheet

**Study title:** Spirituality and psychodynamic counselling

**Name and position of Researcher:** Jill Buckeldee, PhD Student, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.  
Contact address: School of Health and Social Care, Oxford Brookes University, Jack Straw Lane, Marston, Oxford OX3 0FL  
Email: jill.buckeldee-2010@brookes.ac.uk  
Mobile: XXXXXXXXXX

**You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.**

#### The purpose of the study

The aim of this research is to explore how spirituality\* and spiritual issues are experienced in psychodynamic counselling. Spirituality has been shown to be important to clients and research has shown that they want this included in their counselling. Similarly many counsellors see religion and spirituality as beneficial and experience spirituality as important personally. However there is research that suggests that the inclusion of spirituality in psychodynamic counselling may be problematic. Given the importance of the unconscious in psychodynamic counselling it is important to know how this is managed and the impact of this in the counselling relationship. Data collection for the whole study will take place over one year.

#### Why have I been invited to participate?

You responded to an advert asking for participants for the research and so are formally being invited to participate.

#### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

\* Spirituality is a complex phenomenon and the following definition is offered as a starting point for your thinking:

"Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as relationship with that which is intimately 'inner', immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as relationship with that which is wholly 'other', transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values."  
(Cook 2004 p549)

**What will happen if I take part?**

If you take part in the study you will be asked to keep a journal for at least one month. You will be given detailed guidelines about how to do this. The aim of the journal is to raise consciousness of your understanding of spirituality and spiritual issues in psychodynamic counselling. After approximately three-four weeks you will be asked to meet with the researcher for about an hour to explore aspects of journaling that you feel happy to talk about. A further interview will take place two-three weeks later to clarify any points from the first interview and to explore any further issues. You will also be invited to comment on the process of taking part in the study. Subject to your consent the interviews will be audio recorded. You will be invited to comment on the transcript of the interview to see whether you would want to add or withdraw anything from it. However there is no obligation to do so.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

Reflecting and thinking deeply about aspects of one's life including about spirituality may initially result in some confusion or uncertainty about once clearly held views. Some anxiety may be experienced during this process. Such experiences however typically result in increased personal awareness and confidence (Bolton 2010).

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Although there are no direct benefits from taking part in the study you may benefit from the general findings. In addition the information that you provide will increase our understanding of the research topic, helping to identify good practice and identify where further support, education and development may be helpful.

**Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?**

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). This includes handling all communications carefully and keeping them secure. Numbers will replace names on all data collected and demographic information will only be presented in summary form. Tapes and transcripts of interviews will be kept securely. All material including that used for publication will be anonymous. Although the sample size in this study is small, your anonymity will be protected by the use of pseudonyms in the publication of findings. All data generated in the course of the study will be transferred to Oxford Brookes University for secure storage for up to 10 years and memory sticks used in the research will be security encrypted to comply with Data Protection legislation.

**What should I do if I want to take part?**

If you would like to discuss your participation in the research please complete the reply slip enclosed and return it in the envelope provided. Please include your contact details on the form and your preferred method of contact.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study will be used in the thesis for my PhD. Some of the results will also be published in academic journals. Copies of these papers can be provided if you would like this. A summary of the findings can be sent to you if you provide an address for this.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting this research as a PhD student in the School of Health and Social Care at Oxford Brookes University. A University bursary is supporting this work.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.  
If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University:  
ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Contact for further information.

Further information can be obtained from Dr. Sally Richards, Director of Studies, Oxford Brookes University, sallyrichards@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Jill Buckeldee

28.05.10

Reference

Bolton G. (2010) *Reflective practice. Writing and professional development* London, Sage Publications

Cook C. (2004) Addiction and Spirituality *Addictions* 99,539-551

**Reply Slip**

**Spirituality and psychodynamic counselling**

**Your name :**

**Please provide details for your preferred method of contact:**

Phone number :

Most convenient times for contact are:

Email address:

Address :

I would like to discuss my participation in the proposed study Yes/ No (please circle)

Thank you

**PLEASE RETURN THIS SLIP IN THE PREPAID ENVELOPE ATTACHED**

## APPENDIX 2 JOURNAL EXERCISES AND INSTRUCTIONS

### PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW 1.

#### Introduction to the journal

This journal is to help you uncover, articulate and/or develop your thoughts with regard to your understanding of spirituality and spirituality within a psychodynamic context. After doing this for 3-4 weeks (more if you would like) you will be interviewed by the researcher. This interview is about exploring how you reconcile your spiritual understandings and beliefs with the theoretical framework of psychodynamic counselling and in particular looking at the points of tension and the points of fit between them. It will be useful to have explored this in your process of journaling prior to the interview.

The guidelines below are offered to help with this process. There is a preliminary exercise that you are encouraged to do each time you start your journaling.

A variety of other exercises is offered following this to help with your journaling. You may want to try some or all of them that is up to you. If possible you are encouraged to spend a minimum of 30 minutes twice a week on this process for up to 3-4 weeks.

**You are not expected to share your journal with the researcher but you will be asked about what keeping the journal has been like for you when you are interviewed. It is important that you retain client confidentiality when thinking about your counselling practice and thus do not report any identifying features or histories in your interview.**

If you have any questions at all about the journal, your writing, your thinking or anything else to do with this research please do contact me. My details are:

Jill Buckeldee  
Email: [jill.buckeldee-2010@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:jill.buckeldee-2010@brookes.ac.uk)



## **PRELIMINARY EXERCISE**

Start with a six minute write- write whatever is in your head, without stopping, uncritically, do not worry about grammar, syntax, write about anything and encourage that whatever is written will be right (Bolton 2010).

**ENABLING EXERCISES:** to help uncover and write about your thoughts about spirituality and psychodynamic counselling.

1. Immediately following the six-minute write, write anything in relation to spirituality or psychodynamic counselling either from a remembered event or from your imagination. Allow 20-40 minutes to write it, allowing emotional responses and writing in an uncensored manner. Reread it with an open mind, noting your responses. What has the writing said?
2. Write 'spirituality' or 'psychodynamic counselling' in a box in the middle of a page and write words or phrases that arise in relation to the word, allowing them to cluster. Reread and note any thoughts arising from this. Read back to yourself with care.
3. You may like to use a twilight dreaming technique or spiritual positioning (Progoff 1992). These methods enable thoughts to move freely and place yourself in your present inner life. (See Exercise A ). Stay with this process for as long as is helpful. Record your experiences and thoughts in the journal in a hurried non-judgemental manner.
4. You may like to use structured reflection models (c.f. Bolton 2010) to
  - a. reflect on your practice of working with clients. (See Exercise B for
  - b. suggestions on how you may like to do this).
5. Sketch or draw any images that you may experience in journaling.

## **PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEWS**

You will be offered two interviews: one following your experience of keeping the journal after 3-4 weeks and another one 2-3 weeks later. The second interview is to follow up on any points from the first interview and to focus more specifically on your clinical work. You will be given additional guidelines on how to do this in terms of your journaling.

**Prior to each interview you will be asked to summarise up to one side of A4 your thinking, experiences and any images that you have had in keeping the journal that you are happy for me to see. It will be helpful for you to look at the journal before the interviews.**

## References

Bolton G. (2010) *Reflective Practice. Writing and Professional Development*. Third edition , London, Sage Publications.

Progoff I. (1992) *At a journal workshop. Writing to access the power of the unconscious and evoke creative ability*. New York, J.P. Tarcher/Putnam.

## Exercise A

### **Spiritual positioning (based on Progoff 1992)**

This requires you find a comfortable position where you are able to sit in stillness. Sitting with your eyes closed you need to encourage the inner movement of your thoughts, feelings and images. You are allowing them to move freely so that they can reflect any aspect of your life. (This may take several minutes to achieve this stage- do not rush it and trust that it will arrive).

Ask yourself: How is it with me now on the spiritual level of my life? On the creative level of my life? On the believing level?

Spontaneously as it comes to you without considering intellectually or analytically write a few quick sentences to record and to briefly describe the situation of your inner life at this time. Two or three sentences- four at the most—is all that is needed right now. This is just a brief entry to record what you find when you look at your inner situation at this time. No censorship, no judgement, no interpretation. As spontaneously as you can record what you find when you look within to see and to describe your inner condition during this recent period of your life.

Following this rest in stillness and consider the present situation of your inner life. What is the atmosphere, the sense of meaning, the tone of our inner life at this time? What are the main contents? What are the messages we have about it from our dreams or other spontaneous experiences that have come to us? What are the beliefs that are holding strong in us? What are the doubts, the wonderings, the explorations? What are the concerns about the ultimate of truth in human existence? What are the commitments of our life? And what are our hesitations?

Describe the contents and conditions that you find there when you look inside yourself, experiencing your feelings and awarenesses but recording them as an impartial observer of your inner life. Put it on paper

quickly, you do not have to write the whole thing now but just a few sentences.

These sentences provide the starting point for further work. When you feel ready to and in silence if possible begin to write more extensively leading to an open-ended description of the recent development and content of your inner life. How did you arrive at your present beliefs and opinions? What questions were you asking that called those issues to your attention? Who are the persons who influenced you and played a role in your inner experiences? What are the chains of circumstances that have led to our present beliefs? The aim is to focus on the present condition of your inner life however full or empty it may currently seem to be. You need to let the controls of your intellectual mind drop to a relaxed state at the twilight level so that memories and thoughts can move within you as a free flowing stream.

You need to go back in your mind over what has been in your inner life that has led to where you are now, no matter where it is that you are now. Record as much as you can recall without judgmental selecting or censorship.

When you sense you have finished you may now feel in a different position to when you first started this exercise. For this reason reread your first brief statement of your inner life. Read it back to yourself slowly, giving it full consideration. If you would like to re write this statement reflecting where you are now- it can be as short as you like but let it express the beliefs and issues that you most profoundly care about, as far as you are presently aware.

## **Exercise B**

### **Structured reflective model (adapted from Bolton 2010).**

Following the 6 minute mind clearing exercise:

#### **Stage 1**

Write an account of a time when you thought something about either spirituality, your understanding of spirituality or your understanding of spirituality in your counselling work (10-20 minutes).

- Allow an event to surface in your mind, rather than reaching for the most critical. Often the routine everyday experiences need dwelling on. Or it may be a puzzling occasion.
- Write about this as descriptively as possible, including all detail.
- Give it a title as if it were a film or story.

#### **Stage 2**

Reread and reflexively ask questions like these:

- What strikes you particularly about this story?
- What have you missed out? Go and put it in, however insignificant it seems?
- What do you feel (and felt then)?
- What did you think (and thought then, but perhaps did not say)?
- What assumptions have you made?
- Does it tell you anything about your spiritual values in action? If so what?
- What are the areas of non-understanding?
- What do you find challenging?

### **Stage 3**

Write a further account attempting to gain a wider perspective.

- Write the story again from the point of view of the client.
- Or write the story from the view of an omniscient observer, such as from the perspective of your pen, who observes everything.
- Ask similar questions to those in Stage 2.

### **Stage 4**

Reread your journal over the next day or two and ask yourself:

- Where has this taken you?
- What patterns can you perceive, such as repeated behaviour?
- Where might further explorations go?
- Why, how, when, with whom?
- What challenges does this all present you with?

## **JOURNALLING QUESTIONS IN PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW 2.**

In terms of this phase of journaling I would now like you to focus on your clinical work and in particular individual client sessions with the following questions in mind:

- did you experience any explicit spiritual issues relating to you or the client? What is your understanding of these? What is your understanding of these psychodynamically?
- what has been your experience of spiritual issues, concepts, experiences and/or content in your counselling work?

- is there an absence of spiritual issues, concepts, experiences and/or content in your counselling work for you and/or your clients? If so why do you think this is?
- any other thoughts, unexplained experiences that you would like to comment on e.g. countertransferential experiences or unusual experiences in relation to thinking about spirituality and psychodynamic counselling?

It may be helpful to use these questions at least weekly following your clinical work. It may also be helpful to think of both current and previous clients in this phase of journaling.

**As before can you please provide approximately an A4 summary of your thinking, experiences and any images that you have had in this phase of the journaling for the interview.**

## **Call for participants- Spirituality and Psychodynamic counselling**

### **Jill Buckeldee**

Psychodynamic counsellors sought in Central Southern England who are interested in exploring their understandings of spirituality and spiritual beliefs within the framework of psychodynamic thinking and practice. Counsellors may have experienced working with clients' spirituality and/or spiritual beliefs in the context of loss and bereavement for example. Participation involves reflecting on these issues by keeping a journal and taking part in two interviews of approximately one hour. No travel is necessary as interviews will take place in a place convenient to you. This is part of a PhD study undertaken at Oxford Brookes University.

If you are interested or would like to discuss this further please contact Jill Buckeldee on XXXXXXXX or [jill.buckeldee-2010@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:jill.buckeldee-2010@brookes.ac.uk)

The closing date for this study is 05.06.11



School of **Health** and **Social Care**

**Full title of Project:** Spirituality and psychodynamic counselling

**Name and position of Researcher:** Jill Buckeldee, PhD Student

**Contact address:** School of Health and Social Care, Oxford Brookes University, Jack Straws Lane, Marston, Oxford OX3 0EL.

**Please initial box**

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

**Please tick box**

**Yes      No**

I agree to the interview being audio recorded



5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications



I am aware that the sample size may be small and that this may have implications for anonymity



I am aware that the confidentiality of the data can only be protected within the limitations of the law.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS OF THEMES IN A NARRATIVE**

An excerpt from an interview with Chris (01) is provided to illustrate how initial themes in the data were uncovered, using the format described in Chapter 6. The interview data is presented first, followed by the beginnings of the analysis of the narrative.



## APPENDIX 5 EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS OF A NARRATIVE

Excerpt of first interview 1 with Chris.

An excerpt of text is included to demonstrate how themes were identified in the narratives.

- 500 JB- you talk about living in the present moment that that's your dominant  
501 way of being, in terms of preparation and doing your work  
502 Chris- it is to me. It's very interesting talking about it because it makes me  
503 realize that I don't do it as much as I 'm saying I'm doing it or as much as I  
504 would like to do it  
505 JB- mmm?  
506 Chris- (small laugh) you know am I bluffing you really here, I don't know I  
507 hope not but you know (pause). I do find myself sometimes saying with  
508 the client, I find myself often saying with a spiritual direction person, isn't  
509 this fantastic here we are sitting here this afternoon you and I and it's a  
510 lovely calm evening and the sky is cold but blue, or it's a gloomy day and  
511 we're both pretty tired or whatever and actually just recording the fact of  
512 now, can be I think really very helpful. Certainly spiritually, it can be helpful  
513 and I think that might (pause) I mean, as I say, I bring, I work with  
514 whatever the client brings so it's important not to try to sort of drag them  
515 into a sort of spiritual  
516 JB- no  
517 Chris- debate but because clients may well not be believers at all (pause).  
518 But sometimes you know they will if you explore what the word spiritual  
519 might mean. I do this in coaching one of the questions in my coaching  
520 questionnaire which I send to a client before we start is sort of how is your  
521 life in the following areas and one of them is spiritual  
522 JB- yes  
523 Chris- and sometimes they don't know what that means. And so then  
524 when we have the assessment appraisal session through the  
525 questionnaire I would help them, I would say well is that important to you?  
526 does it mean anything? what it is what is most important to you? and that  
527 may lead to what they may consider spiritual, (cough) I'm mean I'm afraid  
528 it's a matter of trying to unhitch spiritual from the religious isn't it?  
529 JB- yes  
530 Chris- which  
531 JB- and the impression I get is that religious is less prominent now for you  
532 or is it  
533 Chris- I suppose it is I think my religion is Christianity and my spiritual  
534 practice is zen and the two tick along very happily in parallel and do inform  
535 each other  
536 JB- and how do they tick along with the counseling that's the bit I feel less  
537 (pause) is it that it is not explicit for you unless the client brings it up?  
538 Chris- well the Christianity ticks along with it because I take this view of  
539 well the central facts of Christianity, the Incarnation, number one, as  
540 seeing the divine as constantly present so that's in the now of the

541 counselling room (pause). And the other central fact of Christianity, the  
542 Passion, which goes with the resurrection as you know like a horse and  
543 carriage so to speak (pause) that people come to us as therapists  
544 because they're hurting and the Passion is (pause) all about humankind  
545 hurting in general and in the specific as well so if I'm sitting with a client  
546 who is hurting we're right there in the Garden of Gethsemane as it were.  
547 So it's probably about me needing to be unconsciously but very firmly as if  
548 I'm in the Garden of Gethsemane  
549 JB-yes yes  
550 Chris- without actually mentioning it or even necessarily being very  
551 conscious of it  
552 JB- yes (pause) that was the impression you were giving in the sense  
553 there's a sense of integration but it can be very implicit  
554 Chris- yes I think it's got to be implicit really, I mean, I think, you know, I  
555 could sort of go and train as a zen therapist but I wouldn't want to do that  
556 because I think it would reduce my usefulness in a way  
557 JB- really  
558 Chris- because people would sort of know that they're coming for this  
559 rather rarified form of therapy. And I want to be available to people who  
560 have just got ordinary problems and you know likewise with the Christian  
561 stuff it's even more so you know isn't it?  
562 JB- mm?  
563 Chris- you know if you actually say, as somebody did years ago to a  
564 member of my family who went to a therapist, this must be admittedly 20  
565 something years ago, and that you know if she prayed more everything  
566 would go right. I mean most of us have got horror stories of Christians  
567 doing that kind of stuff. And I mean even as it is I had a client 2 years ago  
568 who knew that I was involved in [name of church] and was very very  
569 cagey about coming to me because she felt that she'd been damaged by  
570 a church experience with her husband, who'd been a minister of some  
571 sort. And you know that's fine actually I can work with that sort of situation,  
572 that's meat and drink, that was happening at [name of counselling  
573 organisation] all the time people who had been damaged by their church  
574 experiences coming to [name of counselling organisation] and wanting to  
575 let rip about it. And I feel very comfortable helping people through that sort  
576 of thing  
577 JB- mm  
578 Chris- very sympathetically and you know agreeing that the damage is  
579 often done like that  
580 JB- yeah and that sort of thing I don't know if you remember there is a  
581 second interview  
582 Chris- yes  
583 JB- that can we talk abit more about this OK more of the specifics  
584 C- sure yeah  
585 JB- I'll just check where we are  
586 Chris- OK

Line No.	Theme	Notes
502-507	Questioning himself - is he doing what he is saying that he does? Sense of developing his thoughts here	Surprised by this-speaking about it may be challenging him- ? something about how little this subject is explored for him
508+	Spiritual direction (SD) client- talks easily about spirituality in this- Helpful for SD client	Small story ?harder to think about spirituality in counselling work than in SD
514		Sense of staying open to clients needs
515-517	Work with whatever client brings  Talk about spiritual debate- ? link of spirituality with religion.	Possible aspects of concern about introducing religion into the work- check/follow this up
519		Small story Sense of C feeling comfortable about talking explicitly about spirituality outside of counselling- but not case in counselling
529	Talking about spirituality with coaching client- again ?easier to talk about spirituality outside of counselling	NB Need to follow up in second interview- not followed through
535	Need to separate 'unhitch' spiritual from religious	C happy with link between spirituality and religion- and how inform each other
37	Link between his Christianity and his Zen  Nature of explicitness of spirituality- is it only implicit for C?	Sense of assuredness here  Does C explicitly work with spirituality or only if client brings it up?

Line No.	Theme	Notes
540-550	Use of Incarnation and passion to link Christianity with counselling. Garden of Gethsemane as model of client hurting Implicit nature of understanding Garden of Gethsemane	Understanding of Christianity is such that sees divine as ever present  Need to check if has any explicit spiritual experiences
557+	No desire to be trained as explicitly religious counsellor- reduced usefulness	Wants to be available to wide range of clients 'ordinary problems'
563+	Potential problems with explicitly religious therapists Small story to illustrate this, about member of his family with religious therapist.	Sense of C. not wanting to be explicitly associated with a religion, or at least with a rigid or narrowly defined religion, in his counselling work.
570+	Example of own client way of working with him because of C's connection to a church.	Small story Sense of confidence in this work- 'that's fine'- 'meat and drink'
574	Very happy/comfortable to work with people who have had damaging church experiences.	Depth of experience in working with damaging church/religious experiences- can see how damage often done.

## APPENDIX 6

### FRAMEWORK FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Stage One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Notes were made immediately after the interview to record initial thoughts and contextual details. Reflections on encounters with participant were noted.</li></ul>
Stage Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The digital recordings of the interviews were downloaded to a computer. They were transcribed verbatim into a Word document. The first stage of transcribing was to transcribe the verbal content including main sounds and pauses. The second stage was to relisten to check for inaccuracies.</li></ul>
Stage Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Digital recordings and transcripts were listened to and read simultaneously until I was familiar with the data. Notes and thoughts were recorded as memos during this process. The narrative parts of the interview were identified during this part of the process.</li></ul>
Stage Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Life as lived text was separated from life as narrated text as a means of developing an initial introduction and sense of each participant.</li></ul>
Stage Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holistic thematic analysis was undertaken; themes in the data were identified through immersion in it and through following them and their transitions in the narratives. Themes were reviewed and similar themes grouped together to build up and clarify them. These were then summarised and related to the research questions and further notes made. The contextual information and reflective notes about the interviews was used in this process. Line numbers relating to themes in the interviews were noted so that they could be easily accessed.</li></ul>
Stage Six	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holistic form analysis was undertaken: the form or genre was identified by examining the form and direction the content of the narrative took, and through the identification of particular forms of speech. Initial thoughts were challenged and refined by revisiting the data, leading to the production of a summary of genres. Notes of thoughts, reflections and analytic thinking continued. Line numbers relating to genres in the interviews were also noted so that they could be easily accessed.</li></ul>
Stage Seven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Copies of emerging themes and genres were sent to supervisors and colleagues for review.</li></ul>
Stage Eight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Themes and genres were refined and related to the text and wider theory and literature.</li></ul>
Stage Nine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A final interpretation was created by the grouping together of the wider themes and genres.</li></ul>
Stage Ten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The analysis of data was compiled into general notes to help facilitate the writing up of the analysis.</li></ul>

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **SUMMARY OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES**

A summary of the number of participants in each theme and subtheme is detailed below.

#### **THE MAIN WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUALITY**

##### **Theme 1**

Understanding spirituality by linking it with religion - 7

The importance of belief in and a personal relationship with God - 5

The importance of spiritual practice - 5

The centrality of spirituality and religion in participants' lives - 7

##### **Theme 2**

Understanding spirituality by separating it from religion - 3

Understanding spirituality as a connection with something other or greater than oneself and/or between people - 3

##### **Theme 3**

Difficulties with understanding spirituality; a problematic concept - 2

##### **Theme 4**

The difficulties in talking about spirituality - 10

##### **Theme 5**

The innateness of spirituality - 8

#### **SPIRITUALITY AND THE PSYCHODYNAMIC MODEL**

##### **Theme 1**

Relating spirituality to aspects of psychodynamic thinking - 7

The repositioning of Freud: understanding his work as spiritual - 5

Linking spirituality with psychodynamic theories and theorists - 4

The parallel processes within spirituality and psychodynamic counselling – 7

##### **Theme 2**

The use of religious constructs and understanding in the work - 6

##### **Theme 3**

Understanding spirituality as beyond psychodynamic thinking and language - 9

##### **Theme 4**

The lack of fit between spirituality and the psychodynamic model - 2

### **Theme 5**

The need for counsellors to be themselves and to know themselves; an essential part of practice - 11

## **THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHODYNAMIC COUNSELLING**

### **Theme 1**

Participants' preparations for meeting the client - 7

### **Theme 2**

Approaches to the client in counselling work and the need to respect their beliefs - 11

### **Theme 3**

Variations in the degree of explicitness in working with spirituality:

Working in a bounded way - 2

Introducing spirituality into counselling work - 5

### **Theme 4**

The prevalence of a conscious sense of spirituality or spiritual encounters in the work - 7

### **Theme 5**

Examples of spiritual encounters in practice:

Implicit spiritual encounters in counselling practice - 9

Explicit spiritual aspects to or spiritual encounters in counselling Practice - 6

### **Theme 6**

Tensions in working with spirituality:

Minimal tensions in working with spirituality - 3

Aspects of the spirituality of the client - 5

The denial of spirituality in the client – 3

Aspects of the client – 4

Conflicts with the aims of the organisation - 3

### **Theme 7**

The exclusion of spirituality in supervision - 2

### **Theme 8**

The continuing nature of the journey in understanding spirituality and psychodynamic counselling:

The struggle of the journey - 6

The ongoing nature of the journey - 11

The unknowing and uncertainty in the journey - 8

The difference between ontological and phenomenological experiences in the journey - 2

The loneliness of the journey and the need for support and self-care - 6  
The privilege of the work - 6



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