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WALKING IN TWO WORLDS:
LIVING AN ANIMISTIC SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEW
IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Antioch University Seattle
Seattle, WA

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Psychology

By
Joanne Dorpat Halverson, MA

April 2011

WALKING IN TWO WORLDS:
LIVING AN ANIMISTIC SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEW
IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

This dissertation, by Joanne Dorpat Halverson, has been approved by the committee members signed below who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of the Antioch University Seattle at Seattle, WA in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

WALKING IN TWO WORLDS: LIVING AN ANIMISTIC SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEW IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

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Seattle, WA

An abundance of culturally derived ideological influences inform our lives. The dominant culture exerts a powerful influence on understandings of reality. For some people, their spiritual way of being in the world deviates from cultural norms.

In this qualitative study I sought to understand the lived experience of people who hold an animistic spiritual worldview and yet function well within society. They walk in two worlds. The research design employed both phenomenological and heuristic methods. To understand the socio-cultural-historical context of the study a lengthy background was provided.

Six individuals who self-identified as adhering to animistic spirituality living on the West Coast of the USA participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews about their experience of *walking in two worlds*. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. An individual summary depiction derived from the transcripts was provided to each participant to give each the opportunity to make modifications to the depictions and increase the soundness of the study. Data analysis brought forward essential themes: prejudice; a private relational way of being in the world; and an expanded sense of identity. The general structure was a dynamic between connection and separateness. The researcher's heuristic journey was included. Complementary to the final written depiction of the phenomenon, the researcher crafted two poems and a painting.

Besides disclosing a lived human experience, the aim of the study was to challenge taken-for-granted dominant culture assumptions of animistic worldviews and modernist knowledge systems. Hopefully, by facilitating deepened understanding, prejudice and discrimination towards these and other marginalized peoples will be decreased. Clinically and ethically, it is important for psychologists and other clinicians to assist those they serve to have a voice in the cultural discourse. The field of psychology and perhaps our culture at large is enhanced by honoring a multiplicity of worldviews and a decolonized “hybrid multiculturalism” (Duran, 2006).

The electronic version of this dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, www.ohiolink.edu/etd.

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Dedication

To my loved ones:

My family, friends, Cascadia, the Red Cedar Circle, and
all who are intimate with the Earth and each other.

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I would like to thank the following: my mate Jim, my daughters Alisha and Helen, my grandchildren Aeva, Quillan, Fallen, Leif, and Clara, and my spiritual mentors, Colette Crosnier, Roy Wilson and Johnny Moses, my spiritual brother Ed Gottstein, my intellectual mentors Dr. Steen Halling, Dr. Karen Barta, Dr. David Mc Closkey and Dr. Andy Benjamin. Of course, there are other people, animals, experiences and natural wonders who have nurtured me and this life work. Finally, a special thanks to Shelley Stump, wise woman, friend and editor. You have all been my inspiration.

Terminology

Animism	The attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects and natural phenomena. The belief in a supernatural power that organizes and animates the material world.
Earth-based spirituality	Earth-based is a broad term for related spiritual practices. Shamanism, Wicca and Neo-Pagans among others are designated earth-based sects. (Berger et al., 2005).
Epistemology	The theory of knowledge especially with regard to its methods and validation.
Imminence	Forthcomingness, nearness, closeness, immediacy, immediateness (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Inspirit	Put life into; animate (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Monotheism	The doctrine that there is only one God (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Natural Attitude	An everyday, taken-for-granted interpretation of reality which tacitly informs people of values and existential understandings (Husserl as cited by Finlay, 2008, p. 8).
Ontology	The branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).

Terminology (cont'd)

Pantheism	The belief that God is identifiable with the forces of nature and with natural substances. Worship that admits or tolerates all Gods (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Phenomenology	The science of phenomena (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Polytheism	The belief in or worship of more than one God (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Relational	Of, belonging to, or characterized by relation. 2. Having relation (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Spirituality	Concerned with sacred or religious things; holy; divine; inspired (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).
Transcendent	(Especially of the Supreme Being) existing apart from, not subject to the limitations of, the material universe (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996).

“None of this sensual participation with nature is supernatural or extraordinary. Rather it is the result of an ancient and naturally conditioned response to nature . . . as we experience the world, so we are also experienced by the world.”
- Gregory Cajete

People live in and navigate in many interpenetrated life–worlds where they may encounter different perspectives. Still, for many in the United States there seems to be a consistent ideological “natural attitude” -- a common “taken-for-granted” interpretation of reality which tacitly informs people of values and existential understandings (Husserl as cited by Finlay, 2008. p. 8). However, this “natural attitude” may be less applicable for immigrants, gay people, and others whose worldviews and or lifestyles are on the margins of our society. Such people, like the participants in this study, encounter and function in two somewhat disparate experiential and ideological worlds.

Those who identify themselves as adhering to an “animistic” spiritual worldview are a minority in present day North America. “Earth-based” or animistic spiritual worldviews are common in cultures with close connections to their ancient roots. These spiritual paradigms of reality have a history of being seen with suspicion in western culture. Animism is the theoretical heart of Earth-based spirituality which includes the practices of Pagans, Neo-Pagans, and Shamans, including Indigenous peoples. These are polytheistic (multiple gods/goddess) and Pantheistic (everything is of god/goddess) spiritualities founded on a perception of the natural world as relational and inspirited (Berger, Leach & Shaffer, 2005). In comparison, mainstream monotheistic religions include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism (Berger, Leach & Shaffer, 2005). Throughout this writing the terms “Earth-based spirituality” and “animistic worldview” will be used interchangeably.

Those who subscribe to Earth-based spirituality are confronted with the dominion of a predominantly Eurocentric, western paradigm in the social discourse. This is not to suggest that the prevailing worldview exerts an unvaried influence on all people in all walks of their lives. However, within the Eurocentric, western cultural treatise, especially in the scientific community, spirituality or unusual experiences -- which may or may not be interpreted as spiritual in nature -- are often disavowed. Those who hold animistic spiritual worldviews, or who have unusual experiences deemed spiritual or not, may remain clandestine while they function in the dominant culture. Mayer (2007) recognized this pattern among the medical personnel she interviewed in her research into anomalous experiences: the majority of them were not only secretive about such experiences out of fear of reprisal, but also, with the passage of time, often came to doubt their own experience. She stated:

Science no longer lives inside official domination by the Catholic Church. Contemporary disavowals of knowing that challenge established knowledge are no longer enforced by threats of literal excommunication. But established knowledge has not stopped exerting its influence. Nor has it stopped exercising its constraints. (Mayer, 2007, p. 38).

She concluded that this propensity to doubt was due to pressure to conform to consensus reality along with the fear of the disdain of others and of being ostracized by their peers.

In present time many people who practice this study's spiritual worldview in the open may face stereotyping, misunderstanding and social stigma in various arenas of their everyday lives. Indigenous peoples worldwide who have ascribed to animistic worldviews and practices for millennia have been the recipients of such negative dynamics. Today people of varying backgrounds adhere to forms of an animistic worldview. As a multicultural worldview, these forms exist cross culturally.

This research explores how people in the western United States who subscribe to animistic spiritual worldviews navigate their lives within two epistemological and ontological worlds: how do they cope with the significant differences between some of the ways they know and experience the world and the dominant cultural norms of sanctioned understanding and perceiving? Within paradigms of reality are certain accepted forms of knowledge which affect how people understand and perceive the way they live. To investigate the phenomenon of “walking in two worlds” the following foundational questions were explored: what is it like for these people to function within mainstream culture where their spiritual orientation is not well understood, or accepted, and sometimes is maligned? What does walking in two worlds mean for them?

The social stigma attached to this worldview may be the reason there is a dearth of full and in-depth research on the existential experience of walking in two worlds. This study was unique in that it sought to disclose the lived experience of North American people on the west coast who came from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and yet shared this orientation in common. Qualitative researchers recognize that we are each unique individuals with unique stories; however, we share common existential experiences and struggles. In addition to disclosing a lived human experience, this research challenges taken-for-granted dominant culture assumptions of animistic worldviews and modernist knowledge systems. The aim is to challenge the authority and power of labeling; to give voice to an often silenced group; and to contribute to the body of qualitative work which explores multiculturalism and diversity. Hopefully, by facilitating deepened understanding and giving voice to those who are often silent, prejudice towards these and other marginalized peoples is decreased and the social discourse is broadened.

I. Background

Earth-based Spiritualities

“The earth wisdom of the surviving native traditions of our planet speaks of a simplicity that our world lacks. It is a wisdom that addresses the heart, recognizing our kinship with each other and the rest of creation.”

- Caitlin Mathews

Given the potential for misunderstanding and the prevalent social bias and stigma towards Earth-based spiritual worldviews, a thorough socio-historical contextualization of the study was warranted. “[S]ituating persons within their local environments, yet still acknowledging they are also situated within, and impacted by, broader historical and socio-cultural frameworks (Mishler, 1999, as cited by Etherington, 2004) is crucial when exploring their lived worlds.” A fairly comprehensive and clarified socio-historical context of the study may engender a fresher and more open response in keeping with the “phenomenological attitude” -- a profound departure from the everyday taken-for-granted manner in which we comprehend our world (Finlay, 2008).

Earth-based spirituality is more than a set of beliefs; it is a deeply relational way of being in an animated world (Ingold, 2006). “Earth-based” is a broad term for related spiritual practices. A national survey of Neo-Pagans (new Pagans) designated these earth-based sects as Neo-Pagan: Wiccans, Pagans, Goddess Worshipers, Druids, Shamans, and Unitarian Universalists (Berger, et al., 2005). Other associated spiritual practices are “Shinto, spirits, tribal spiritualities, Afro-Latin and Afro-American spirituality, Western Paganism, and Chinese folk or traditional religion” (York, 2003, p. 10). The following is a discussion of the terminology often used in the literature.

The origin of the word Pagan is *Pagan*, which means country dweller in Latin. In the fourth century, under the influence of the Christian church, this term became a derogatory

one to refer to those who clung to old gods and goddesses and nature spirits. The term heathen, coined by Christian authorities, has the same derivation in German as the word “hidden” and refers in a similarly derogatory way to forbidden practices such as worshipping the old deities (Walker, 1983). Earth-based spiritual worldviews meld the spiritual and the material. Earth-based spiritualities are founded on animistic epistemological and ontological foundations cross-culturally world-wide. Simultaneously, these cultures may have some locally based differences in beliefs and practices. Thus, Earth-based spirituality is a term which poses the challenge of being too general and not acknowledging of such distinctions. (Ingold, 2006; Narby, J. & Huxley, F., 2000)).

The term “indigenous” is similarly awkward because it lumps together distinct populations as if there were no differences among them: it is a “reductionist” term (Smith, 1999). However, while acknowledging local differences in traditions and rituals, the epistemology underlying Indigenous and Pagan worldviews is consistent. This underlying knowledge system is described as experiential and holistic knowledge -- found within an experiential rather than analytical relationship to the natural world (Ermine as cited by Iseke-Barnes, 2003). Hornborg (2006) suggests animism is a natural/relational way of being in the world cross-culturally. Many people tend gardens and treasure childhood teddy bears as if they were alive and in relation to them. Animism lingers underground in western lives. It would seem that animistic worldviews are an upside-down lived-world in terms of western culture. Today, in the western view animism is considered archaic. For those who are of an animistic worldview, a Coast Salish medicine man once said, “Materialism and the ego are unevolved. Respect for relationship with our animal brothers and sisters is evolved.” (personal communication, February 12, 2009).

York (2003) concluded that 5–6% of the world's population practices some form of Paganism. Some researchers categorize all animistic spiritualities under the term Paganism while others make further distinctions such as shamanism, Wicca and others. Paganism has two essential traits: an of-this-world orientation and recognition of spirit-in-matter. Other aspects of Paganism include: magic, multiple gods/goddesses, ceremony, and a close affinity between divine and human. "Its rituals revolve around the life cycle of birth, death, and regeneration, thus making it a humanistic religion" (York 2003, p. 10). Animistic spiritualities are embodied polytheistic spiritualities which include a cosmology:

Earth-based spiritualities' understanding of the divine is pluralistic: Pluralistic concept of divinity would appear to be typical Pagan identity. But this polytheistic bias does not preclude the possibility of a monistic understanding of the sacred cosmos. . . . Consequently Paganism's corporo-spirituality allows for the perception of the divine in nature, for idolatry, for appreciation of the sacredness of place, . . . and for multiplicity of manifestation. (York, 2003, p. 13.)

The present day mainstream culture in the United States places technology over nature, and continually shows a bias against nature in many policies and technologies. The philosophy underlying Western knowledge systems, Mander (1991) stated, has exhibited a bias against not only spirituality, but, in particular, animistic spirituality. However, among indigenous peoples spirituality is integrated with all aspects of life. In the dominant culture, and mainstream science especially, spirituality is separated from everyday life – "progress" is valued over traditional time-tested ways of living in the world. Yet the overall and long-term impact and meaning of "progress" seems to be rarely considered or confronted – considerations for living in balance with nature are neglected in policy making, environmental visioning and human consequences. In our capitalist technological culture people are seen as superior to nature whereas seeing people as a part of nature "throws wrenches in the wheels of progress" (Mander 1991, p. 219).

Also of significance is the often-overlooked influence of linguistic privilege. Awareness of unearned power and privilege is the heart of becoming multi-culturally adept (Gallagher & Goertzen, 2007). Present day English, our predominant language, holds in each word the historic story of the Western worldview including the story of its grasp of privileges and sanctions of *outsiders*. The values, prejudices, privileges and journey of developing meaning are held in the words (Walker, 1983). Those who are privileged and are reared in the dominant culture, with primary use of the dominant language, consistently experience the reinforcement of the dominant culture's worldview on a subtle and usually subconscious level.

Language is commonly thought of as primarily a left hemisphere function. However, here statements about right and left sides of the brain are simplified as physiologically brain function is far more complex. Is a preference for what is chiefly a left hemispheric function privileged because of a bias towards logic and linear thinking in education and socialization? An interesting overlap between social sciences and hard sciences as of late has been the studies of brain hemisphere function and dominance (Taylor, 2006). Labeling and separating are usually functions of the left hemisphere. Is our dominant culture, at least metaphorically, a "left hemisphere" culture which by its very nature is formulated against readily being able to grasp the life-world of collectivist cultures (cultures which seem to be more right hemisphere or dual hemisphere in nature)? Taylor, (2006) stated that right hemisphere function is undervalued by the majority of scientists, as well as in our society at large.

According to Cajete (2000) the Native mind is more attuned to the metaphorical or right hemispherical mind. The right hemisphere is the ancient foundation of the mind:

When language is developed and used extensively, the holistic experience of the metaphorical mind begins to get chopped up and labeled, until, eventually, it recedes

into the subconscious . . . as the rational mind develops, and the metaphoric mind slowly recedes into the subconscious, there to lie in wait until its special skills are called upon by the conscious mind Language and its use are the ways a society conditions the mind towards particular ends. Language and its codified meanings are a created structure of culture. (Cajete, p. 28).

Lakoff and Johnson (as cited by Spretnak, 1999), discovered that language emerged from “embodied understanding” and, as such, language is co-constituted between an embodied relationship with the world around us and our innate capacity to formulate symbols of experience. What we consider objective, rational understanding has to resonate with lived and physical experience (p. 75). A Coast Salish medicine person (who remains unnamed at his request) explained at a local gathering that several of the coast Salish languages he speaks emerged from the sounds of the ecosystem, for example the clicking sounds created by whales and the soft “sh” sounds of the surf (personal communication, May 12, 2009).

For humans, both our individual understanding of the world and our individual identity is formed by our self-world relationship (Valle and Halling, 1989). For each individual, a complex web of relationships and cultural influences has an effect on self-world understanding. It would seem concepts of reality may vary among different groups of people in an individual’s life. Unusual and or transcendent experiences may challenge cultural notions of perception and belief. For some a process of exploration may be encouraged by these encounters.

A decade ago, Spretnak (1997) critiqued *modernism* and its negative influence on humanity and the environment by portraying the world as mechanistic. Western society continues to function under the influence of this conceptualization. By comparison, Earth-based spirituality is founded on the perception that the Earth is alive (Ingold, 2006). Out of synchrony with prevalent modern world ideologies, some people seem to keep their spiritual

lives hidden; others may risk unpleasant judgments when they are more disclosing. The topic seems to be taboo in many social contexts. Is this or is it not a troubling issue to many who follow this spiritual path?

Throughout much of the Western world, suspicion has been directed at Earth-based sects. In the predominant Western worldview they have often been regarded as bizarre, primitive, and sometimes dangerous. Historically, monotheistic religions have contributed to these attitudes (Mathews, 2001). When the Europeans began their explorations of the Americas, they encountered individuals among the various indigenous peoples who said they could speak with spirits and that they had the power to heal. Such people performed dramatic rituals (Narby and Huxley, 2001).

In 1557, for example, French priest Andre Thevet visited Brazil and described the people who behaved in this way as “ministers of the Devil.” Thevet questioned these people’s quest to learn what he considered to be forbidden knowledge: “What need is there to research with too much curiosity into the secrets of nature and other things, knowledge of Our Lord has reserved for Himself? (Narby and Huxley, 2001, p. 1.)

Scientific and mainstream religious beliefs have strong social influence. Spretnak (1997) expounds on *modern* science’s perspective towards the worldview of Earth-based spirituality. She remarked that, in contrast to the aforementioned attitudes of the church, the knowledge of nature espoused by both Indigenous and Asian societies -- both of which saw in their own ways that all events and life were connected -- were belittled as naive. Only the knowledge of Western science was considered mature and well-reasoned enough to truly comprehend reality. “Moreover, the perceptions of ordinary people who were intimately familiar with the creative strategies of nature were uniformly ignored as childlike and unscientific.” (Spretnak, 1997, p. 21.) Knowledge still tends to be restricted to particular

people sanctioned by culturally-designated authority. Modernism remains very much with us in a post-modern society.

Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples have been affiliated with Pagans and Neo-Pagans by their central beliefs (York, 2003). For Native Americans, their spiritual experiences may be commonplace within their cultural upbringing, for others their spirituality may be outside of their cultural (including religious) heritage. Experiences that are considered irrational, naive, compensatory, or delusional in the dominant culture and scientific community may be understandable and valued from the perspective of Indigenous and other cultural groups (Deloria, 2006). To some, the world is spiritual: paranormal is normal. For Native Americans, delusions and psychosis were discerned from spiritual experiences by their validation in everyday life:

Often in dreams, a bird, animal, or stone would speak to them, offer its friendship and advice, or reveal the future, information they could not possibly derive from the most intense observation of the physical world. The people had no good reason to doubt these dreams, because their content was always later empirically verified in their daily lives--- they dreamt about what happened. (Deloria, 2006, p. xxv.)

The ontological orientation of an animistic worldview is fundamentally different and often obscure to most in the dominant society. From their field work with Indigenous peoples, ethnographers have grappled with understanding this way of being in the world. Ingold (2006) described astonishment and openness as the intrinsic ontological positions of those who live an animistic way of being. Astonishment, he commented, may look like primitive naivety to those observing from the outside. To the Western world, conclusions and categories are routes to grasping knowledge. Often mysteries are to be overcome rather than encouraged. “Astonishment has been banished from the protocols of conceptually

driven, rational inquiry. . . .seeking closure rather than openness, scientists are often surprised by what they find, but never astonished” (Ingold, 2006, p.18).

Terms like “Wicca,” “Shaman,” and “Pagan” seem to be socially loaded with meanings and assumptions (Mathews, 2001). Concerns and questions are raised. How are pseudo science, escapism, and psychosis distinguished from spiritual experience and practice? Furthermore, how might prejudice, disbelief, misunderstanding, and sanctions impact those who embrace and experience an animistic world and worldview? How and with whom do they find validation for their spirituality? For, “[t]he society in which we live tends to isolate the facts of experience and then to accept only those facts that support already popular beliefs and dogmas” (Deloria, 2006, p. xviii).

In his book *Human Nature and the Limits of Science*, Dupre (2001) wrote:

. . . science as it has traditionally been conceived has serious limitations in its ability to answer some of the most profound questions we are given to ask and, more specifically, to answer questions about the nature and causes of human behavior. My more positive thesis is that the only hope for serious illumination of such questions is a pluralistic one (p. 4).

Currently in the social sciences, discussions about multi-culturalism and diversity abound. Respect for other than mainstream beliefs and customs is a core value of the American Psychological Association’s ethical standards, guideline # 4 (2002). Yet, this topic seems to remain difficult to broach in an open way, and in many spheres of our society. Indigenous peoples around the world have testified to the dire consequences they experienced under colonizing cultures. Smith (2005) identified knowledge as a part of the oppressive system of Western science. Oppression and discrimination through knowledge systems touch all who live under the authority of that knowledge. Beyond tolerance, an equitable approach to different knowledge systems has been presented:

It is important to mention that I believe we must transcend the notion of “cross-” “cultural sensitivity,” and other such ideas that have been in vogue for some time in our field. It is critical that we engage in epistemological hybridism (literal translation: being able to think or see the truth in more than one way). Epistemological hybridism takes the actual life-world of the person or group as the core truth that needs to be seen as valid just because it is. (Duran, 2006, p. 14.)

II. Literature Review

“The history of spirituality is as old as human culture, ever since the first stone age men buried their dead and painted ritual symbols on the walls of their underground caves. The word spirit comes from the word for breath and is related to inspiration.”
- Boadella

To further contextualize this study and to envision how it may contribute to the field of psychology, this researcher surveyed the pertinent principals underlying assumptions and theories revealed in the professional literature: from the broadest topics of ideology and spirituality, science and spirituality to the more specific issues of cultural acquisition, mental health, discrimination, and prejudice.

Context of Spirituality and Ideology

There is a large body of current and historical literature and research on Spirituality and religion, including Earth-based spiritualities. Present day attitudes in society towards the topic of spirituality and religion cover a wide range of perspectives and subjects. Scholars in the growing field of the psychology of religion have studied religiosity as coping mechanism as well as the issue of prejudice, particularly anti-Semitism, elicited by some religious doctrines (e.g., Raven, 2009). However, “outlying” Earth-based spiritualities were not included.

Boadella (1998) undertook a general survey of world philosophical, religious, and ideological movements up to present day. He provided an overview of the cultural contexts of spirituality with the aim of tracing the roots of negative attitudes towards the subject of

spirituality within the therapeutic community. His premise was that “Spirituality is our birthright and is not owned by any of the formative traditions within which practices and principles have been developed” (p.15).

There is a substantial body of work under the broad umbrella of Earth-based and nature-based spiritualities. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have contributed to the literature. Topics have included: culture, epistemology, ideology colonization, therapy, alternative medicine, ethnography, rituals and more. Shamanism, Wicca, Paganism, neo-Paganism, and neo-shamanism have been considered and explored through the lens of numerous disciplines: anthropology, ethnography, religious studies, philosophy, archeology, law, health care and more. York (2003) wrote *Pagan Theology*, the study of Paganism as a world religion. He compared present day and historical Paganism. Hund (2004) critiqued the ideological and cultural conflict between Western law and African customs. He advocated for reversing the legal sanctions on African healers, also called witches. The problem, he proposed, was in the labeling constructed from the perceptions of outsiders in authority (from the view of the tribal peoples). He explained:

Labeling theory is inherently relativistic. . . . We need to think of the African experience of witch craft (and spirit worlds) from the inside and not just from the outside as phenomena “heard about” in the waking state. From the inside of African life, witchcraft is an objective feature of reality which invites an appropriate response from the community. (p.79.)

Ethnographers (Chiappari, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Hornborg, 2006; Ingold, 2006; Winkelman, 2002) have undertaken studies into the epistemology, ontology, cosmology, and states of consciousness which found Earth-based spiritualities. Chiappari elucidated the cosmology of Mayan (Earth-based) theology and discussed its theoretical relationship to

Liberation Theology. Ingold (2006) illustrated the ontological orientations of Earth-based spiritualities. He reported that animism is the on-going processes of becoming.

Numerous written autobiographical works, several from authors of multicultural backgrounds, relate individuals' lived experience of Earth-based spirituality. For example, Prechtel (1999) grew up on a reservation in the Southwest. His father was Swiss and his mother Native American. He wrote an autobiographical account of his apprenticeship to a Mayan shaman in Guatemala. Somé (1994), an African spiritual leader, wrote in his autobiography of his encounter with two cultural life-worlds. He was born in East Africa in a native village; subsequently, as a boy he was kidnapped by a missionary priest. He lived in a mission school for over 9 years, where he was educated in a Western manner and also sexually abused until he escaped and, at the age of nineteen, and made his way home. He provided insights not only into the everyday differences between these cultures, but also into their understandings of what is real.

In another autobiographical account Randell (2003) disclosed a remarkably similar story. He was taken by the white authorities as a child from his aboriginal family in Australia and educated in the Western manner. He spent his youth reclaiming his ancestral knowledge and reconnecting with his people.

Avila (1999), a Chicana elder, wrote of her study and practice of the traditional healing ways of the Aztecs and Currenderism (traditional healing). She discussed the difficulties of meshing her Western working career as a psychiatric nurse with her work as a currundera (traditional healer). Although several individuals have noted the conflict of Western and animistic worldviews in their stories, none were specifically focused on this issue.

Other autobiographical accounts are anthropological in focus. For example, in the sixties, as a young anthropologist Harner (1982) traveled to the Amazon to study an Indigenous tribe in their jungle habitat. He studied these people in the accustomed Western manner (by observation for an extended period of time) until he was told by the medicine man he could not understand their religion unless he underwent their initiatory experiences and rituals as a participant. Harner agreed to this arduous undertaking. He underwent what he described as a life-altering spiritual occurrence which transformed his fundamental worldview. In Western vernacular terminology he had “gone native.” After this event he went on to establish The Foundation for Shamanic Studies whose primary endeavor is to return shamanic practices to Western culture as well as to support shamanic (Indigenous) societies and healers globally.

Although the scientific community tends to have been dubious of spirituality in general, in the social sciences Boadella (1998) noted an increase over recent years in an open-minded exploration towards both the subject of spirituality and religion. Moreover, Earth-based spiritual tenants have been implemented in some kinds of therapy. Tick (2005), a psychotherapist who treats war veterans, has applied some of the concepts and healing practices he learned from the Lakota, as well as dream healing rituals from ancient Greece, in his therapeutic interventions. Duran (2006) has employed the primary beliefs and rituals of Native American peoples along with Western therapeutic practices in his clinical work with native peoples. Transpersonal psychology includes a focus on consciousness, personal growth and development, and spiritual psychology. In the search to understand how these overlap and impact the person, Transpersonal Psychology investigates the spiritual traditions of Indigenous cultures and other world religions (Frager, 1989; Wilbur, 1996).

In the field of nursing there are numerous qualitative research articles on spirituality/religion which have explored therapeutic applications of spirituality and cultural sensitivity. For example, one article surveyed five spiritual assessment tools. Several of these assessment tools focused on culture and ethnicity (Hodge, 2005).

As previously noted, some written works have investigated the cultural and ideological context of spirituality while others have explored the clash between Earth-based and mainstream spiritual/religious traditions. Kirsch (2004) examined the history of monotheism and polytheism. He argued that many of the values held dear in the liberal West today, such as cultural diversity, plurality, and religious freedom, are founded not in monotheism, but Paganism.

Goddess spirituality is polytheistic and/or pantheistic as is Earth-based spirituality. There is a sizeable body of literature about Goddess spiritualities, rituals, and practices. Feminist scholars, theologians, and anthropologists have asserted the theory, which they espouse has substantial evidentiary backing, that in various ancient cultures the primary deity was feminine. “The birthing goddess has been replaced by the Father, Son, and Spirit. Physical creation from the Goddess and Woman has been polarized to the preferred metaphors of mental creativity, the divine masculine and Man” (Mathews, 2001, p. 13).

Prevalent in the literature are historical accounts (Deloria, 2006; Spretnak, 1998; Tikaki 2008), political activism and scientific activism (Smith, 2005), philosophical treatises (Fixico, 2003; Highwater, 1981; Mander, 1991) related to animistic worldviews, as well as to the prejudice and the discriminatory practices against this worldview within Western societies.

For example, Dupre (2001) wrote about science and scientism in the social sciences. He challenged the prevalence of modern scientific principles applied to the treatment and study of humans. In a similar vein, Spretnak (1998) provided a historical context for modern North American attitudes towards animistic worldviews. She described ideological movements, from modernism to postmodernism, which have discriminated against Earth-based spiritualities and the Earth.

Cultural Appropriation and Cultural Insensitivity

Cultural appropriation is a critical issue. Cross-culturally, writings address this issue from many Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures: New Zealand, India, Africa, Canada, South America, the United States, India, and more. In numerous articles and books, Indigenous people have spoken about their distress and outrage at the use of their sacred rituals and artifacts by those outside of their culture. Aldred (2000) noted that those Earth-based spiritual practitioners who have used such Indigenous ceremonies and objects, such as, the sweat lodge and the Didgeridoo have been called “Plastic Shamans” and “Wannabes.” Of concern is the commercialization of Indigenous cultures and “Euro-Americans” professing to be medicine people who have profited from publications and workshops. “Mass quantities of products promoted as ‘Native American sacred objects’ have been successfully sold by white entrepreneurs to a largely non-Indian market” (Aldred, 2000, p. 329).

Iseke-Barnes (2004) and Welch (2002) examined how cultural acquisition and appropriation are forms of colonization. Aldred (2000) summed up a prevailing Native American perspective of non-Native Americans aspiring to be like them: “Moreover, their imperialistic nostalgic ‘fetishization’ of Native American spirituality hinders any recognition

of their own historical and social complicity in the oppression of Indigenous peoples” (p. 341).

Inquiries have been undertaken into the reasons non-Natives have been drawn to Earth-based cultural beliefs and practices. Welch (2002) and Aldred (2000) noted that neo-Pagans, neo-shamans and others may be drawn to Indigenous spiritual practices out of a sense of the social and spiritual emptiness in postmodern Western culture.

Welch analyzed the issue of cultural acquisition and the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge from a variety of perspectives, addressing issues such as Indigenous agency, inter- and intra- cultural appropriation, the lack of New Age and new Pagan involvement in Indigenous politics, and the arguments that surround the question of who should teach Indigenous knowledge and to whom. She concluded that although cultural appropriation has many negative effects on Indigenous people, nevertheless, there have been some positive or neutral effects as well. For example, some cultures have actually relearned lost rituals through white anthropologists and some Indigenous teachers believe sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous peoples is in-service to humanity and increases intra-cultural and environmental empathy.

The literature addresses other facets of cultural insensitivity which have occurred through Western knowledge systems and methodologies. Anthropology, research methodologies and archeology (Harner, 1982; Smith, 1999) have been Western tools for understanding the cultures and lives of people. However, the Western worldviews inherent in these fields have frequently had oppressive and disempowering consequences for Indigenous peoples and others who practice Earth-based spiritualities.

For Indigenous people, a study of the past and/or of a culture may have different implications and meanings. In the educational institutions of the United States, the subject of Earth-based spiritualities has been explored and taught primarily by people who are outsiders to such worldviews. In these circumstances, cultural acquisition has often been in concert with cultural insensitivity. Indigenous understandings of their culture and epistemologies have usually not been comprehensively included (Gallagher & Goertzen, 2007).

Iseke-Barnes (2003) explained that Indigenous knowledges are contextual: “information is tied to context and importance. These knowledge forms are described as: heart knowledge, spirit knowledge, blood memory, experiential knowledge, or holistic knowledge, and are often shared through narrative or story in oral transmission” (p. 214).

Spirituality, Mental Health and Madness

A substantive body of work from the scientific community is critical of and/or skeptical of Earth-based spiritual practices and concomitant animistic worldviews. Several periodicals like *The Skeptical Inquirer* research and debunk Earth-based spirituality and commonly allied subjects, such as parapsychology, transpersonal psychology, the paranormal, and the New Age movement (Santomauro, 2005; Truzzi, 2001;). Moreover, social scientists and researchers have been concerned with potential and documented misuses of so called “spiritual beliefs” which have been adapted to various therapies. According to Lilienfeld, Lynn and Lohr (2004), the validity of such therapies is under scrutiny. “In general, their proponents promulgate New Age therapies without the critical evaluation of their therapeutic methodologies from the scientific community” (Lilienfeld, Lynn & Lohr, 2004, p. 182). Roland (2002) argued that the Freudian notion of spirituality as inherently regressive and resembling of an infantile state, due to the desire to merge, is a reductionistic

characterization of spirituality which rests on the assumption that all non-verbal adult thought is the same as preverbal baby-to-mother experience.

Of concern as well is the vital question of whether psychotic disorders or episodes can be distinguished from spiritual experiences and if so, how? Wilbur (1996) posited that some psychotic episodes may lead to spiritual awakenings. Drawing from an amalgam of Eastern and Western thought he put forward a “full spectrum” theory which posits that spiritual development follows from healthy psychological development. Wilbur traces development from infancy through adulthood on into the transpersonal, “transconventional” stages and then through the various stages of enlightenment (Wilbur, 1996, pp. 547-548).

One theoretical paper, through the use of conceptual analysis, addressed the conundrum of discerning spiritual from psychotic experiences with intriguing conclusions: “Benign mystical experiences therefore can be seen to involve an identical disintegration of the mundane worldview....” Still, the author describes how this is not a permanent dissolution of the everyday worldview “...the experience can be passed through and reintegrated because an appropriate perspective is taken towards the process” (Brett, 2002, pp. 321-335).

Similar findings occurred in another mixed methods research study undertaken by mental health nurses. They concluded that the criteria for identifying non-mentally disturbed spiritual experiences were the clients’ ability to function well in everyday life, maintain or improve their relationships, preserve contact with reality, as well as demonstrable self-discipline and ordered thought processes (Eeles, Trevor, & Wellman, 2002).

Harner (1982) related an occurrence with an Indigenous tribe in the Amazon during the time of his field research, nearly forty years ago. He asked an elder if the solitary man he saw talking aloud to himself in the jungle was a medicine man. The elder replied (in rough

translation) something like – “that man is crazy.” The elder explained to Harner that the Shamans of the tribe were able to access the spiritual world at will and otherwise were regular folks; in other words, they controlled their experiences, their experiences did not control them. Similarly, Deloria (2006) stated that many incidents in Native American tribes, such as prophetic dreams, were confirmed and normalized by their everyday usefulness among Native American peoples.

The New Age Movement

There is a large body of literature on the broad topic of the New Age movement. Opinions on the nature of the New Age movement vary. People with an animistic spiritual worldview vary in how they see themselves as a part of this movement. Berger et al. (2005) regarded Earth-based spiritual practices as part of the New Age movement. Yet, Boadella (1998) conceived of the New Age movement as a negative divergence from the roots of universal religious and spiritual values and tenants, including Paganism and Indigenous beliefs. “In a world where God is dead, the Self is a personal construct, and the Church is largely empty, where Scientism has become the new religion, a vacuum is created, and into this vacuum came the new age movements, offering a superficial mish-mash of pseudo-spiritual methodologies for self-realization” (p. 4).

Although Earth-based non-Native spirituality practitioners (Neo-Pagans, Neo-shamans, Wiccans etc.) may or may not identify themselves with the New Age Movement, many Indigenous writers have considered them a part of this movement and have expressed their displeasure with the disrespect afforded them by some members of this group. “Both New Ageism and new age Paganism are contemporary religiosities that emphasize personal transformation and healing . . . often achieved by using the appropriated sacred traditions of

Indigenous cultures” (Welch, 2002, p. 21). Although sacred traditions have been procured and used by these groups, all too often such groups are not politically involved in advocating for improved conditions for the Indigenous cultures they are appropriating (Welch, 2002). They are taking without giving back.

Scientific Research and Animistic Spirituality

The neurobiology of the states of consciousness of shamans and neo-shamans from various cultures has been the focus of extensive study by Winkelman (2004). In his recent book, he concluded that shamanism is the “original neurotheology.” He substantiated his thesis by drawing on extensive recent research in neurosciences and social sciences focused on brain research and consciousness. These studies bear out that certain parts of the brain and brain neurotransmitters are associated with transcendent and/or shamanic states of consciousness. Such states of consciousness are often described as blissful, expansive, and serene but alert and are experienced as outside of a time and space orientation.

Mayer’s (2007) research uncovered similar findings in brain research on the states of consciousness of Sages and Gurus. The sensations and emotions described by people who have experienced such states seemed to be analogous to the states of consciousness of individuals she interviewed who had had “anomalous” or spiritual experiences. Many of those she interviewed were colleagues (psychiatrists, psychologists, and medical personnel) who were taken by surprise by unsought, often disturbing and usually transformative experiences.

A number of renowned scientists have contended that physical systems in biology and physiology, when observed at the tiniest, micro levels of existence, show a life-like character. For example, they (atoms and molecules) do unexpected things: “they may behave

cooperatively, spontaneously adapt to their environment or simply arrange themselves into coherent entities with a distinct identity. We are a world away from Newton's inert matter" (Krieglstein, 2003, p. 118). Herbert purported a concept he called "quantum animism" (as cited by Krieglstein, p. 116). He found evidence that human "brains' materiality influences human actions" and that "behind every physical process lies an invisible mental experience or 'quantum animism.'" Herbert's theories are nondualist: mind and matter are not differentiated. "Quantum animism," which focuses on the smallest units of matter, intimates an "inspired" substance (as cited in Krieglstein, 2003, p. 116).

Goldman's (2006) book, *Social Intelligence*, challenged commonly held individualistic and self-centered views on human motivations and behavior through recent findings in the neurosciences and social sciences. Goldman reported that when we see someone else in distress, similar circuits reverberate in our brain, a kind of innate empathic resonance, which seems to be the prelude to compassion.

Such findings may be relevant to a discussion of Earth-based spiritualities because they have uncovered neurophysiologic human responses which are analogous to the experiences of connection described in the epistemology and ontology of an animistic spirituality. Further research may offer insights and alter commonly held Western understandings based on outdated and or biased philosophies.

A Social Stigma, Discrimination and Prejudice

When the word "spirituality" is mentioned, different people may have different associations. For some in the human sciences, spiritual pursuits may call to mind the New Age movement which is often seen as an anti-intellectual kind of spiritual materialism. For some, identifying oneself as spiritual may be tantamount to admitting to being off-balance

and superficial or perhaps even connected with certain fundamentalist religious groups and their agendas. Although spirituality is talked about in a limited way in the field of psychology, it has been studied in the field of multi-cultural counseling psychology -- linked with the study of culture and identity (Tisdell, 2006).

Comprehension of spirituality is inextricably linked to cultural context. People who are of the non-dominant culture, such as many people of various ethnicities, sexual preference, immigrants, etc., may have a more integrated epistemology, which does not separate spirituality or religion from everyday life in the scientific rational understanding of the world (Tisdell, 2006). However, it is important to note that there is diversity of understanding among the spiritualities within the same ethnic, cultural or sub-cultural group. Cynthia Dillard (2000; as cited by Tisdell, 2006) suggested that an epistemology that embraces one's cultural identity, spirituality, and personal history -- a holistic, contextual understanding of spirituality -- may decrease the social stigma associated with this topic. Furthermore, Tisdell (2006) stated that many people come to gain insight into “the privilege and oppressed parts of their own identity, recovering from and reclaiming parts of that identity in a positive way, as a spiritual experience” (p. 20).

Indigenous peoples, and to some extent women, have experienced oppression by way of the Western culture's reductionistic understanding of their relationally centered way of experiencing and being in the world. People long to be viewed as unique and complex rather than squeezed into a confining and stereotyping label. “Like women in the West, primal peoples balance between two impossible images: innocence or evil, loftiness or lowness, perfection or imperfection” (Highwater, 1981, p. 27). Diversity is not encouraged within the dominant ideology. Many people feel as if they are alien within the dominant society or

certain contexts with the dominant society. They may be disturbed by their sense of “otherness.” Children reared in the dominant society are inclined to have the beliefs of the dominant society reinforced so that they assume there is only one valid worldview and reality which they live within everyday. They are predisposed to perceive and believe only one brand of reality and to reject what is unfamiliar. However, for those whose heritage is not of the dominant culture they encounter multiple points of view by living within several cultures simultaneously (Highwater, 1981).

Herek and Capitiano (1996) citing Allport (1954) noted that forms of prejudice -- negative attitudes towards someone or something as well as discriminatory acts -- may be lessened when majority and minority groups of relatively equal social and economic status are united to seek a common goal. Their study focused on the intricacies of relationships and attitudes between heterosexual and gay people. Capitiano and Herek citing Goffman (1963) noted many minorities wish to avoid social stigma. If they are able, they may hide their stigmatized minority status to escape pre-existing assumptions and beliefs connected with the stigmatized group.

Like others who fear the effects of social stigma and hide or alter important aspects of themselves, those who identify as practicing a spiritual tradition, especially non-mainstream spiritualities, may choose to hide their spiritual lives or to be cautious about with whom they disclose their spirituality. They may even purposefully present a spiritual life and worldview more palatable to others. While some who present their authentic spiritual selves may have a sense peace, others may also feel more exposed and endangered (Herek & Capitiano, 1996).

Spirituality is a topic which usually seems to reside on the margins of the field of psychology. Earth-based spiritualities are even further afield from the mainstream. This

search of the literature revealed a wide spectrum of subjects (from science and psychosis to prejudice and new ageism) which are pertinent to a study of people who live an animistic worldview. Although, as noted above, there are numerous academic studies and autobiographical accounts of individuals (Native and non-Native) who adhere to Earth-based spirituality, absent from the literature is a qualitative study which delves into how individuals in North America navigate Earth-based spirituality/ies within the Western cultural environment in which they reside.

III. Methodology

“In the Western mind-set, getting from at point A to point B is a linear process, and in the Indigenous mind-set, arrival at point B occurs through fields of relationship and establishment of a sense of meaning, a sense of territory, a sense of breadth of the context.”

- Gregory Cajete

The aim of this study is to delve into the experience and worldviews of people who self-identify spiritually as “earth based” and/or “animistic.” Out of respect towards those involved in this study whose cultural background may be different from the mainstream and whose experience may readily be misunderstood or disregarded, a qualitative research method – one that is both open ended and which values the setting aside of preconceptions -- was selected. The following sections explain the reasons for choosing a qualitative methodology and outline the implications of that approach for this study.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative methodologies are designed to discover the social, cultural and experiential contexts for human experience as it is lived. In line with Cajete’s description of the process of Indigenous epistemology quoted above, qualitative research is a non-linear exploratory

undertaking. The journey of discovery may be circuitous or ambiguous, surprising and open to a multiplicity of interpretations. “Whatever we know of our world, the qualitative research inquiry opens up fresh horizons, showing us how much more lies waiting to be explored” (Finlay & Ballenger, 2006, p. 8).

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to as fully as possible explicate a lived human experience through the perspectives of those who have lived it. Both researcher and participant share an intimate experience delving into a human phenomenon. The researcher maintains an open standpoint while acknowledging her own values and biases in a methodical introspection or “reflexivity” (Creswell, 1998). Because the impetus for this research emanated from the researcher’s own personal experiences, the researcher strove for both subjective reflection and attentive openness to the experience of the participants. The researcher’s and the participants’ particular style, social standing, and manner enter into and influence the research process and understandings (Finlay and Ballenger, 2006). This is a particularly salient issue since most researchers in the United States are of the dominant Eurocentric culture. The responsible researcher is acutely aware that research has social and political implications (Smith, 1999).

The overall framework for this study was existential phenomenological with the inclusion of important aspects of the heuristic method (Moustakes, 1990). The heuristic method and the existential phenomenological method, both described below, are methods concerned with being faithful to human experience. I chose existential phenomenology because it explores the most significant human experiences of life and death shared by human beings, experiences of being in the world and the meaning of those experiences. The aim of phenomenological methods is to reveal a lived experience rather than to create theories.

Such a perspective, I believe, seems to be a fitting methodology with which to explore a life-world rooted in everyday embodied relational ties to the Earth. Phenomenology is closely allied with an Indigenous worldview which is founded “by rooting the entire tree of knowledge in the soil of direct physical and perceptual experience of the earth. (Cajete, 2000, pp. 23-24).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology’s maxim is “fidelity to the phenomenon” (Giorgi, 2008, p. 42). The philosophy of phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s. Husserl sought to approach phenomena afresh with as few influences from prior knowing and presuppositions as possible (Giorgi, 2000; Spiegelberg, 1982) and to uncover the “Life-World” (Lebenswelt). Husserl described the Life-World as the primary world directly experienced by an experiencing being. The Life-World is immediate. It precedes theory, including scientific theory, and the prevailing socially sanctioned worldview. (Spiegelberg, 1982, pp. 144-146). De Castro (2003) explained that phenomenology considers natural sciences methods to distort research into human experience:

Psychology has attended human beings as mere objects because it has been adapting human experiences to some quantitative and abstract methods, about which we can only know facts. In this way, the meaning of experience is ignored because the most important thing is to quantify that experience and to know if that experience is right or wrong. (p. 46.)

Epistemologically, phenomenology takes the philosophical stance that there is an underlying reality, yet reality is “mediated” by the social and historical contexts, as well as the personal understandings and experiences of an individual (Finlay & Ballenger, 2006, p. 258). Underlying this study is a “critical realist” epistemological position. The premise of this epistemological position is that there is a common reality; however, social and historical

contexts shape perceptions of reality. In studies such as the current study, of people who live in some manner or another outside the mainstream, there is potential to give voice and empowerment to those who are marginalized (Creswell, 1998; Finlay & Ballinger 2006). By means of “critical theory approaches,” this study probes and challenges the status quo of the dominant culture and a taken-for-granted underlying ideology. Therefore, this study has the potential to be individually and socially transformative from which novel insights may emerge (Creswell, 1998).

Phenomenology is rooted in the narrative of the participants’ Life-World and the researcher is a part of this Life-World (Finlay & Ballenger, 2006). Phenomenological studies seek out the collective common (eidetic) structures of human experience and, out of high regard for the participants as well as the phenomenon, reveal the significant structure of the phenomenon. To this aim, a sound reliance on the participants’ own account is central to the inquiry. The phenomenological method is particularly well suited to this study of animistic spirituality because both the methodology and the type of spirituality derive understanding from direct perceptual “rootedness” in the environment in which we live (Cajete, 2000, pp. 24-25).

To reveal the lived structures of the Life-World, the phenomenological attitude requires a suspension of the “natural attitude” which is facilitated by the phenomenological reduction. There are several types of reduction which assist the researcher in uncovering the phenomenon under study in a fresh way. The specific reductions employed in this study will be made clear in the following sections which describe the specifics of the research process. The “natural attitude” is the everyday, taken-for-granted understanding of the world. Frequently, people overlook the significance of their own assumptions and that such

assumptions inextricably affect what they experience (Valle & Halling, 1989). As Giorgi (2008) pointed out, the phenomenological attitude is more than an attitude for it suggests a way of being present with the phenomenon.

Heuristic Research

The heuristic method evolved from a phenomenological foundation. It is distinct in that the personal experience of the researcher is included in the research. This personal connection to the phenomenon becomes the contextual touchstone of the study. The researcher and the participants alike share a profound experience of the phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). In placing a high value on creative, unique, and intuitive ways of coming to know, heuristic methodology's modes of inquiry incorporate dreams, sensations, synchronicity, and artistic expressions. In brief, the heuristic investigation begins with a personal experience of the phenomenon from which the researcher engages in an intense exploration of self and the phenomenon. After initial personal engagement, the researcher recruits and interviews appropriate participants. The researcher then fashions an "individual summary depiction" capturing the essential quality and meaning of the phenomenon for each individual. Each participant reviews the individual summary for his/her opportunity to edit and/or confirm the description which is completed with their feedback incorporated. From this feedback, the researcher writes a both a final "composite summary depiction" derived from the essential meanings and themes of several participants' descriptions of the phenomenon, and 2) in depth portraits of several participants who typify the phenomenon. Finally, the researcher crafts a creative synthesis (art, poetry or other form of expression) (Moustakas, 1990). Out of a desire to honor each of the participants, I adapted the method in the next-to-the-last step in the research process. I changed the method of

crafting the composite summary depiction by drawing from the individual summary depictions of *all* the participants, combined with a sense of the whole of their and my own experience. I presented brief portraits of all the participants as well portraying the themes and structure of the experience with inclusion of the direct voices of the participants.

I followed the phases of the heuristic process as elucidated by Moustakas (1990). I found them a useful guide into the wild lands of this research. The first phase, *immersion*, is analogous to the “familiarity” stage in Giorgi’s method where the researcher is fully engaged with the narratives. The Moustakas heuristic process phases are: 1) *immersion*, a delving deep into the material, 2) *incubation*, a kind of gestation period, leading to 3) *illumination*, a coming to life of insight and comprehension of the phenomenon, then 4) *explication*, the revealing and explaining of the phenomenon. Finally phase 5) is the *creative synthesis*, synthesizing the knowledge gleaned through the study while also bringing in the researcher’s own process and inspirations. (Dreier, 2003; Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic methodology has been criticized for having a propensity toward “self-indulgence, narcissism and solipsism” as well as for its “inward focus,” which does not fully recognize the context of the experience of relationship between the researcher and participants (Speedy, 2001, as cited by Etherington, 2004, p. 62). Moustakas (1990) described the heuristic method of interviewing as one which allows a free-flowing conversational style between interviewee and interviewer. But it seems such an interview style might risk an excess of focus on the interviewer.

Additional concerns about the heuristic method include both the possibility that the method may leave an excess of subjective latitude in the hands of the researcher, and/or that an overemphasis on the subjective perspective of the researcher could overshadow the

discovery of the emergent subject as well as the experiences of the participants. Aware of these concerns and possible limitations, this study was designed to include the self-exploration and creativity of the heuristic method within the careful, and central, attention to the other and to the *general structure of the experience* found in the phenomenological method.

The Credibility of the Study

Quantitative research methods have standards for validity based on statistics and test measurements. In qualitative research the credibility of the study relies on rigorous methodology throughout the life of the study. Validity, often referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research, is “the extent to which claims for the findings truly reflect the nature of the phenomena under study” (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006, p. 238). Credibility is of utmost importance in the context of the study, the interviewing process, the analysis, the significance of the study, and the trustworthy representation of the findings (Creswell, 1998). In this study the phenomenological attitude and the phenomenological reduction which aims to bracket out prior knowing and thus reduce bias lend reliability to the process. Reliability is “the degree to which findings can be deemed accurate and repeatable” (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006, p. 238). By challenging the assumptions of hard sciences, bracketing assumptions and prior knowledge that is not a part of the particular phenomena under study, the phenomenon may be more authentically brought forward. Still, there is no absolute objective finding claimed in this or other phenomenological studies. The phenomenon as it has been revealed cannot be assumed to be the phenomenon exactly as it is experienced. Human experience and meaning are unique and complex. Researchers cannot entirely reduce or push back the influence of our own partiality and enculturation (Giorgi, 2008).

Ultimately, a study may be deemed credible if the study is faithful to the lived experience of those who contributed to it and to the general structure of the phenomenon, and if the study is able to hold up to scrutiny. (Moustakas, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1998, pp. 54-56).

Doing the Research: Gathering and Analyzing the Data

My priorities for this study -- disclosing the essentials of the experience and the voices of the research subjects, including my own experience -- were consistent with the heuristic method. As an artist, inclusion of creative processes in the study suited and inspired me. From the onset of this study, I began an intense personal exploration. I immersed myself in a historical and socio-cultural exploration of the subject of animistic spirituality as well as aspects which I surmised would be pertinent to *walking in two worlds*. I realized that because this subject matter was far outside the mainstream to most people and because the topic was both controversial and personally evocative, I needed to establish perspective and a broad contextual foundation for the study. This is the reason for the extensive background and introductory sections.

Simultaneously, and following the suggestion of Heppner, Kivlighan & Wampold (1999), I began a personal journal where I recorded thoughts, sketches, emotions, inspirations, dreams, questions, surprises, related memories and assumptions. In both my own journaling and exploring the lived world of the participants, I found the process complex, evocative and, not infrequently, confounding -- a kind of wandering in the wilderness. Journaling lent me both a measure of distance from myself when I was deep into the wild lands of my or another's experience as well as the means to contain my inspired

thoughts and overwhelming emotions when I needed to linger there regardless of what was comfortable.

Participant Recruitment and Interviews

Because my topic was unusual and sensitive, variations in the experience were anticipated but the essential meaningful structure of the experience was expected to be common to all participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Marshall, 1996). Sample size for the study was determined by the standard of profundity and penetration over scope. Giorgi (2008) has suggested a minimum of three participants. To seek out participants I used a purposive sample called “the snowball method” whereby participants were recruited by word of mouth (Marshall, 1996). I received the names, phone numbers and emails of three individuals from two professors whom I had told of my study, five names with email contacts and phone numbers through two members of a Native American lead community group I attend, and the same contact information for five individuals from friends of friends. I contacted individuals both by email and phone. In both I introduced myself, told them who had given me their names, explained the nature of the study and the interview requirements, and invited them to participate. I explained that I embraced an animistic/shamanic worldview myself. Explaining that I also held this worldview proved to be profoundly rapport building. With several people I could hear the change in their tone of voice and a sigh of relief.

Three potential participants did not answer my initial emails and phone calls, two decided they were too busy to participate and one explained that his primary practice was Buddhism although he was interested in Wicca. Because an animistic spirituality was not primary for him, I declined to interview him. I recruited the first participant through a friend. Finally, in all, six individuals, ranging in age from the late thirties to mid-sixties, participated. Each met the criteria for participation as self-identified persons who adhered to an earth-based spiritual worldview (self-described as Shamanism, Wicca, and traditional

Native American). All had a well-developed, committed spiritual worldview. This was an important criterion as many individuals, perhaps younger individuals, may not have a fully defined ideology. Also, by self-report, the participants had no history of psychosis or psychiatric hospitalizations. Each participant 1) signed an informed consent form which had been approved by the Instructional Review Board of Antioch University Seattle (Appendix B), and 2) either filled out or reported to me simple demographic information (Appendix C).

As recommended by Brinkmann & Steinar (2009), in-depth, semi-structured interviews of approximately sixty to ninety minutes in duration were conducted in person with each participant. Interviews occurred in a place of their choosing: either at their homes or in a park or cafes which afforded sufficient privacy. Each interview was audio recorded. Follow-up interviews occurred either face-to-face or by phone. Interview questions were constructed to encourage the participants to open up about the topic. Interviews followed a funneling technique: an initial general question was “Describe your spiritual story.” Follow-up questions, although still open ended, were slightly more particular in nature. In the first interview, I followed the prepared research protocol (Appendix A) but, over time, the interview questions evolved from interview to interview in keeping with the philosophy of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews begin with suggested questions at hand and yet the process allows for new questions to arise as unanticipated dimensions of inquiry appear to be explored Brinkmann & Steinar (2009). I felt free to probe new areas of inquiry and to follow the participants’ particular narration path. In keeping with my aim to immerse myself in the material generated, I transcribed the interviews myself.

The interviews occurred over a period of several months. Unlike the typical conversational quality of heuristic interviewing (Moustakas, 1990), I chose to restrain my own input during the interviews. My aim was to offer the interviewee the opportunity to be heard without interpretation or comment. During the interviews I was aware the participants were speaking of an intensely personal subject. Given that there is a social stigma attached to an animistic worldview, I was aware that the participants might feel vulnerable in discussing their experience, perhaps especially the two people who were from a Native American background. I aimed to be compassionate and respectful; to honor the sacredness of their experience.

To preserve the intimacy and immediacy in the interviews, I transcribed them as soon as I was able to (within a few days after each interview). I chose to analyze the transcripts without computer assistance which would create a distance from the material. I relied on my own skills to bring forth the pertinent information and to subsequently draw out common themes and the essential structure of the phenomenon. Given my concern for doing justice to the subject and participants, I imposed discipline on myself to be vigilant and thorough. In the slow and tedious process of transcribing, I came to appreciate a reconnection with the interviewee intertwined with the subtle meanings suggested by intonation and inflection. This active, empathic listening helped me to hone in on subtle meanings in a first brush with data analysis.

The Phenomenological Attitude and the Phenomenological Reduction

Throughout the study, I experienced the back-and-forth nature of attending and learning, noting assumptions and suspending them, stepping back from the subject and my reactions to gain perspective and moving in closer through empathy and attending: “a dance

between the reduction and reflexivity” (Finlay, 2008, p. 1). I strove to adhere to the phenomenological attitude -- assisted by means of the phenomenological reduction, I facilitated a deliberate yet open sense of wonder towards the phenomenon under study (Giorgi, 2008).

The *phenomenological reduction* is an ongoing process like peeling away the stiff outer layers of an onion to get to the soft useable core -- except that there is never an end to the unpeeling. The reduction can never be completed because a person cannot wholly escape pre-knowing, assumptions and cultural influences. The forms of the reduction are designed to assist the researcher to remove layers of presumption and bias in order to reveal the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2008; Valle & Haling, 1989). Each of the several types of reduction aim to reduce pre-understandings and interpretations which may obfuscate the phenomenon as it is given. As Giorgi (2008) stated, it is not assumed, or even the goal, that a concrete reality will be revealed but that the general meaning as it is lived by those experiencing the phenomenon will be revealed.

Because the “natural attitude” is richly influenced by “the spell of the scientific interpretation of the world,” Husserl instructs that the first reduction is the reduction, or putting aside, of the assumed precepts of science (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 145). For the purposes of this study I employed this form of the reduction. For example, I put aside the precept that knowledge is restricted to Western knowledge systems. The other form of the reduction I employed is bracketing (or the *epoché*) where one suspends ones biases, prior knowing and interpretations (Finlay, 2008). I noted in my journal assumptions, reactions, and biases in response to readings of pertinent literature, relevant personal experiences, as well as to the responses from the participants. I was able to enter into use of the phenomenological

reduction as a rich ground for reflection and further enquiry -- as a way to encounter and contain my pre-knowledge and to be open and present to the phenomenon and the analysis of the data.

During the interviews I was mindful of the reduction. The rhythm of the interview with each participant evolved between the two of us, with the participant leading in her or his own distinctive way. Taken by an unforeseen image or thought, new questions and understandings often occurred to me. Sometimes when judgments or feelings of perplexity arose along the way, I noted them, then swiftly turned away, to evaluate them later, to re-turn towards the participant. For example, when I interviewed Brianna, sitting by a woodland pond, I was taken aback by her continued mention of “physically” as the source and support of her spirituality. This was an important moment for me as a researcher. I felt her words awaken my own embodied response, a warm settling into the physicality of relational spirituality. Her reference to embodied spiritual experience opened up a fresh path in the research for me to pursue. This encounter with embodied spirituality made its way into my follow-up questions with other participants. At the time I was with her, I contained my astonishment while holding on to her words to ponder at a later time.

The analysis was an iterative progression. I stayed true to the creative approach of the heuristic method which allows each researcher to craft a unique scrupulous methodological approach (Moustakas, 1990; Moustakas & Douglas, 1985). I used an adaptation of Moustakas’ method, elaborated below, to analyze the data. The heuristic method encourages the researcher to delve deeply into analysis of the transcripts with the intent of noting significant meaning and themes. An individual summary depiction is formed from analysis of each transcript. Review of the individual summary depiction by each

participant served to 1) substantiate and or correct the researchers' analysis and representation of each person's lived experience of the phenomenon, and 2) lend credibility to the eventual composite depiction drawn from these individual summary depictions.

In addition, I was inspired by the descriptive phenomenological method developed by A. P. Giorgi (1975, 1985, and 1997) and I adapted certain aspects of his methodology through out the process of the analysis. These aspects of the Giorgi method are incorporated in the following description of the process of analysis.

After all of the interviews were taped, I listened to them intently several times before transcribing them. I wanted to glean the nuances of meaning from their inflections. Each transcribed interview was examined one after another rather than simultaneously until the final cross-analysis. After transcribing each participant's interview, I analyzed all data using the following methods: First, I read each transcript to experience the whole of the narrative (Giorgi calls this phase of analysis "familiarity" (Giorgi, as cited in De Carlos, 2003). I then read and reread each transcript highlighting main ideas and noted their thematic meaning in the margins. Then I wrote the noted meanings down for each participant on a separate sheet of paper. These highlighted areas naturally formed what Giorgi (1989, 2008) called "meaning units." They are naturally occurring divisions or shifts in context and meaning.

When I felt saturated by reflecting and analyzing, I withdrew from the analysis for as little as a day or two to several months and then returned to the analysis. Often, new ways of understanding the material and surprising new insights occurred to me after a refreshing break. New paths of inquiry arose as I entered into intimate contact with the participants' words and stories. Then I included a new question in the next interview or a follow-up interview. In this way, the discovery had a life of its own.

With an aim to make overt the implicit meaning and essential qualities of the phenomenon, prevailing themes were noted within and then, in time, among the transcribed interviews. I read and reread the meaning units I had noted with the aim to be faithful to the participants' meanings and to attend to the significance of both the parts and the whole of their narratives. I struggled to successfully follow the aspect of Giorgi's method which "transforms" the "meaning units" into concise and accurate representations from a psychological perspective. (Giorgi, as cited by Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 54, De Carlos, 2003). I held in mind that it is important to stay true to the participants' psychological meaning and experience as I changed the participants' words to my own. And therein was the struggle: in several instances, after rereading my notes, to be both more faithful and clear, I experienced a deepening of understanding and refined what I had written previously. For example, I reread the notes I'd written of Jennifer's experience in the nursing home where she had worked in her youth. I realized this seminal experience was significant to her for several reasons: not only because she witnessed and abhorred the devaluation of elders, but also because of her strong value of community and relationship. I returned to the original transcript and observed that both her mention of the value of community in the lives of children in the native community and relationship with "Mother Earth" reinforced the importance of the nursing home story, as both represented "relationship" in her value system and worldview. After this phase of analysis, I drew from Moustakas (1990) for the remainder of the analytic process.

A core component of heuristic methodology is the summary depiction of each participant's experience, which aims to epitomize their lived experience. Consistent with heuristic methodology, once I was satisfied that I had authentically brought forward the

essentials of the phenomenon for each participant, I wrote individual summary depictions of each participant's experience of the phenomenon. I then relayed these depictions to each participant by mail or in person, inviting their clarification and correction. I then revised these summaries in accordance with their feedback. I found the revisions to be important in several instances. For example, Charlie wanted me to add to her summary depiction mention of the joy and gratitude she felt for her animistic worldview despite the challenges of social stigma she had experienced. She felt this important aspect of her experience of walking in two worlds had not been clearly expressed.

In the next step of the analysis, I turned my attention to a *cross analysis* of all of the material. Cross analysis entails comparing and then synthesizing the pertinent data from each source. I first attempted to discern idiosyncratic content from general content in the quest of contextual commonalities, differences and themes. The individual summary depictions and the ground of my own experience were integrated in light of the topic as a whole. I sought to uncover the essential general structure of the phenomenon. Finally, I produced a composite summary depiction to disclose and illuminate the general structure. This composite summary depiction follows the section on the discoveries.

I intently worked to set aside my own personal experience at the time of the analysis. Yet, once the themes had been articulated, I readily identified with them. The analysis of the material was more time consuming and complex than I had initially anticipated for several reasons, especially because, as noted above, I felt the responsibility of being careful and true to the meaning and experience of the participants. My own passion and curiosity for the subject drew me into further introspection and research. The materials -- powerfully and

personally meaningful and evocative -- lead me into extended periods where I withdrew into contemplation and quiet in a kind of gestation period before I returned to active analysis.

I struggled with how and how much to include my own experiences of the process and autobiographical material in a balanced fashion along with the data derived from the participants. My own experience was the touchstone for a larger comprehension and presentation of the phenomena. During the final stages of writing the discoveries, after going over my copious journal entries, I chose a select representation of process reflections, significant experiences and insights that I had recorded throughout the marvelous journey of this research. This material is presented in the section on the heuristic process after the discoveries.

A description of core themes and the structure of the animistic experience are presented in the discoveries section. Exact quotes are an extensive and significant part of the evidence supporting the discoveries. They are the heart of the study as they give voice to the participants' meaningful, lived experience of the phenomenon. In following sections, this study unfolds starting with participant portraits, through the individual summary depictions, the discoveries, the heuristic process, the composite summary depiction, and the creative synthesis.

IV. Participant Portraits

*“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly,
what is essential is invisible to the eye.”*

- Antoine de Saint- Exupéry

Brief portraits of each study participant afford the reader a sense of each participant’s Life-World. To protect their anonymity, each participant chose his or her own pseudonym.

Bianca

Bianca is a woman in her early 50s. One of three children, she is originally from New Zealand, and grew up in a working class family with no organized religious affiliation. Her family’s apartment was one block from the beach. She spent most of her childhood days on the beach and swimming in the ocean.

Bianca left New Zealand after college. She traveled and eventually moved to a rural area in the State of Washington, where she met her husband. For over twenty-five years Bianca has lived in the Northwest corner of the United States. Her family lives on over thirty acres of woodland that have been in her husbands’ family for many years. Bianca and her husband have one child of Indigenous descent whom they adopted when she was an infant. Bianca has a large flower and vegetable garden. Nearly every day, she walks the land and down to the shore on Puget Sound. In the summer she swims daily.

For Bianca her sense of walking in two worlds emerged from both her childhood experience of living close to the elements and nature and her experience as an immigrant. She has deep ties to the land and to friends and family in New Zealand and here in the United States.

Bianca has a degree in physical therapy; however, because she achieved her degree in New Zealand she has been unable to practice in the United States. Currently, she works part time. She is involved in numerous social groups and causes pertinent to her community.

Tsinuk

Tsinuk (the name of his ancestral tribe) is a divorced man in his mid-60s. He was raised in eastern Washington State and currently lives near Seattle, Washington. His mother was a Native American woman and his father was of Scandinavian descent. He can trace his indigenous family back many generations. His family elders taught him the first people's ways. He has no children.

Tsinuk is a Vietnam veteran and has a doctorate in education. For several years he taught in tribal schools. In several communications Tsinuk referred to himself as "we" in the traditional communal manner of humbly identifying oneself as a part of a greater community. He has studied the native culture and practiced native Northwest spirituality for many years with the guidance of his cousin, a local native medicine person. He is involved with social activism and service in the Native American community. Now retired, he continues to add to his impressive collection of Northwest artifacts which he has "rescued" over many years. He mentioned finding many Coast Salish baskets at the Goodwill and other thrift stores years ago.

Malissa

Malissa is a sixty-year-old woman. She was born and raised in Southern California and has lived in the Pacific Northwest for over twenty-five years. Malissa was raised Catholic, attended Catholic schools as a child, and is from an Irish Catholic heritage. She is divorced and has one grown, married daughter. Malissa has a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology,

and is also ordained as an ecumenical minister. She is a college professor in Washington State. Of great importance to her is her involvement with a national spiritual community she has been a part of for over thirty years. Malissa is also a spiritual advisor. Several times a year she attends ongoing training retreats in Celtic shamanism. In her youth, Malissa stated, she was a spiritual seeker who realized the discord between her sense of life as innately spiritual and the “secular” culture. At one period she lived in an Ashram commune. She described her beliefs as most akin to Shamanism and mysticism.

Charlie

Charlie is a yoga teacher and counselor in her mid-forties. She leads workshops for women combining shamanism and movement therapy. Her yoga classes are open to both genders. She has taught women’s studies and yoga principles at several universities. In her late 20s, she traveled to India to deepen her study of yoga and ancient Hinduism.

At present, Charlie is single. She lived with a partner for seventeen years until recently. Charlie is, in her own words, “queer.” She co-parents a young daughter with several other people in the queer community.

Charlie grew up on the Oregon coast in a middle-class family. She described her childhood as unsettled and difficult. Her parents were not religious or spiritual. For over ten years she lived alone in the woods in central Oregon in a yurt before moving with her ex-partner to a large city in California where she currently resides.

Charlie reflected that it was her years of living in nature that honed her spiritual sensibilities. Although she continued to explore other religious and spiritual heritages, she is at home with shamanism and the spiritual principles of yoga. She frequently replenishes herself by camping in the woods.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a single woman in her late 40's. Jennifer grew up in the Midwest. She remembered her father introducing her to several indigenous elder relatives when she was a child but she was not involved in their lives. Of mixed Caucasian and Native blood, her Native heritage is of the Upper Great Lakes region. Jennifer described her sorrow that her family allowed her only minimal contact with her Native relatives. She left home in her late teens. She has lived in the Pacific Northwest for nearly 30 years.

A college graduate, Jennifer has furthered her education with a Native American medicine teacher and numerous Native American women elders in the Northwest for over 25 years. She lived in the woods on a local reservation for several years and in several other secluded areas. She has a wealth of knowledge of “the grandmother teachings.”

For several years Jennifer was a full-time guardian to her Native adopted brother's granddaughters. She also helps her adopted brother in his work on the behalf of a local tribe. She is particularly active in children's and Native rights and related political concerns.

Daniel

Daniel is an artist in his late 30s. He grew up in Oklahoma and, after several years in the New York, he and his long-term partner moved to the Northwest. Daniel's father died when he was a young, and he grew up as an only child with his mother. Daniel graduated from college with a Masters in Fine Arts degree. He is gay and lives at present near the Cascade foothills. His partner is a musician and successful music teacher. As a child, Daniel reported that he felt close to the rolling pastoral land where he was raised and some of the Native people he knew. However, he was often lonely as a gay male in the conservative rural Oklahoma environment.

Daniel described himself as a seeker who has experimented with drugs and numerous spiritual and religious belief systems over the years. In college he was heavily involved in Wicca. He stated he misused some of the practices, became disenchanted with Wicca, and then gave up drug use as a gateway to spiritual evolution. He has practiced meditation for a long time and has been studying shamanism for the past 10 years. He also professes an affiliation with mysticism. His art is notably spiritual in character.

V. Individual Summary Depictions

The forthcoming summaries were derived from an analysis of the interviews of each research participant. The depictions reflect the lived experience of each participant in his/her unique voice.

Bianca – Walking in two worlds is like being of two countries. It can be rich and full or lonely and alienating. Sometimes one feels like there is no place to belong. Yet, at the core of one's being is a connection with a greater self, a oneness with the natural world. It is a sacred way of being, experienced through the body and senses. It is sacred and powerful, and, therefore, not shared with others who wouldn't understand. It is shared only with a few intimate people and privately with a god/goddess who lives in all of nature. This spiritual way of being enlarges one's connections and concerns with the world.

Tisnuk – There is a sense of danger to live in two worlds. The Native American animistic cultural worldview and dominant culture worldview clash. One has deep ties to nature and the human community who hold the same worldview. With these ties come shared obligation and shared suffering. Although the deep power and beauty of community (including also the community of spirits) is wonderful, it is also stressful to suffer from discrimination and misunderstanding concerning what is most important to a person.

Walking in two worlds is difficult, even traumatic. There is intergenerational grief and trauma but also wisdom and beauty. Still to be a part of the spiritual world and a community is the heart of a meaningful life in service to god.

Malissa – A private sacred world is the core of one's life. The sacred world is composed of an imminent wise relational world of nature as well as a transcendent, nameless kind of divinity. One learns when one is young to cover over one's beliefs and experiences because of fear of discrimination. One is always aware of the gulf between working in a secular world while feeling deeply connected to the sacred. Shamanism provides community to nonhuman spiritual realms and enlarges a sense of responsibility to the living world. It also deepens one's connections to the deepest self. It is a challenging and painful path; yet despite the suffering, one has great joy. This spiritual path which values service helps one confront one's issues and initiates personal development.

Charlie – Walking in two worlds is living aware of an unfolding non-ordinary reality, where everything is imbued with aliveness and everything is relational. This reality exists alongside a more ordinary, socially-sanctioned existence. It is like the experience of being queer -- to be outside the mainstream. There are constant decisions to be made about with whom to share this worldview. It is a gift one wants to share and also it can become a brand, a negative label. Walking in two worlds is an embodied holistic experience. Nature is our secret self. Still to live this way, there is a sense of danger, of caution in order to protect oneself. Nevertheless, it is precious – the greatest gift of one's life.

Jennifer – Walking in two worlds is very difficult but we have to learn to adapt. One is distressed by many of the differences in values between people who live close to the Earth and the Great Mystery and those of the dominant culture. One can become discouraged and

weary by having to deal with the clash of cultures. One feels in relation to nature and thus upset that the ways of the Earth are not more respected. There is greater comfort in being with people who share the same beliefs and way of being in the world. One can feel angry and grief stricken at the discrimination towards people of this Earth-based belief system. There is no choice but to try to navigate in both worlds out of necessity. One tries to live in keeping with the values of the Earth: the values of love and interconnection.

Daniel – The heart of spirituality and faith is the aliveness of all life. Spirituality has many forms and many ways to communicate. As a gay man as well as a person who practices shamanism, one has to learn to help oneself through a process of self-liberation. One keeps private these beliefs with most people in most walks of life, not only out of fear of reprisal, but also to protect people who might not understand and therefore feel threatened. Living a shamanic life path makes one more kind, more connected, and also more aware of how disconnected much of mainstream culture is. One keeps one's deepest spiritual identity hidden in public and only shares with people who would understand.

VI. The Discoveries

*“It is the marriage of the soul with Nature that makes the intellect fruitful,
and gives birth to imagination.”*

- Henry David Thoreau

Overview

After careful and comprehensive analysis of the data through the previously noted methodological process, three themes emerged:

1. The experience of being the recipient of prejudice and discrimination;
2. A sense of an intimate, relational and inspired life-world; and
3. A transcendent and expanded identity.

After completion of the analysis, I returned to a literature search on the subjects of identity and transcendence as well as discrimination, social stigma and prejudice. The results of this search were added to the Literature Review. While these topics were powerfully present when I began researching the cultural and historical background for my study, I had personally suffered from discrimination due to my animistic worldview. So, I had purposefully suspended my own anticipation of the discoveries, as much as I was able to, once I delved into the research process. Therefore, I had not pursued the topic of discrimination and prejudice until it was clearly of significance to the participants.

I found my own experience consistent with the three themes, but, out of regard to the participants, I did not include my heuristic account with the analysis and presentation of the discoveries. The discoveries chapter discloses the findings derived from the participant interviews. The heuristic aspect of this dissertation, which includes my own animistic worldview and experiences, is woven into the text in several ways: in the composite

summary depiction of the phenomenon, in a separate chapter on my heuristic journey, and in the creative synthesis.

The discoveries are presented by revealing the structure of the phenomenon, followed by a discussion of the three emergent themes. These themes are then illustrated by the participants' voices which describe the essential structure of the participants' experience of "walking in two worlds." The meaningful structure of the experience is a poignant dynamic of profound relationality and profound separateness. The rhythm of relationality and separateness is a human existential experience. However, for the people in this study, this dynamic seemed intensified due to their deep and multifaceted relationality -- a relationality which included numinous realms, such as dreams as well as the human and animal world. For them the natural world was communicative and in-spirited, both in visible and invisible ways. Furthermore, their deviation in worldview from dominant culture norms emphasized and deepened their feelings of separateness both in society at large and in certain contexts within their everyday lives. Simultaneously, they lived within a complex web of belonging but also felt a sharp sense of not belonging, of being "other." Those who ascribe to Earth-based spirituality, indigenous people, women and children, along with relationality in general, all seem to have been marginalized under a patriarchal social system (Highwater, 1981).

As the participants described it, their connection to the natural inspired world seemed to encompass not only the elements (air, earth, fire, and water) and flora and fauna but also states of consciousness such as dreams and trance states. Among Native cultures and mystical traditions throughout the world trance states, dreams and other states of consciousness are understood as and often sought after as means to connect and

communicate with ancestors, spirits and other life forms. Globally, people interact with the natural world in ways which defy western concepts of reality (Wilbur, 1996, Prertchtel, 1999, Somé, 1994, Highwater, 1981). Sheldrake (2003) draws on extensive research in biology to substantiate his theory of “morphic fields” and extended mind (p. 284) in which he concludes that, as humans, we are biologically linked to, receptive to, and responsive to our natural environment -- which includes unseen forces.

The participants were aligned with these beliefs and described their sense of being split from certain fundamental understandings and conceptualizations held within the dominant culture. Many such understandings and conceptualizations are derived from the common belief that animism is an erroneous, or at the least primitive, perspective. Piaget, in his influential studies of childhood, considered animism a stage that children outgrow as their cognitive abilities develop (as cited in Sheldrake, 2003). In the language of one study by Rosengren & Hickling (1994), all such *magical beliefs* are clearly referred to as immature and unrealistic. They posited that peers and schools assist children with maturation as they discredit the myths of childhood, including animistic understandings. Children are taught to conform to understandings of what is abnormal as well as to comprehension of the “real.”

All of the participants, to a greater or lesser extent, described investigating various religious, philosophical and spiritual practices and belief systems as young adults. All reported embracing an animistic spirituality as adults and several reported feeling an affinity with an animistic way of experiencing life from the time they were children. Furthermore, as a relational, dynamic spirituality, animistic spirituality seemed to allow them to incorporate fresh experiences and evolving understandings.

All of the participants knew their worldview was subject to the effects of social stigma. Their awareness of the schism between their way of being in the world and the dominant cultural norms, in addition to prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory actions towards their spirituality, was more distressing for some than others. For example, Daniel eventually reconciled his existential crisis of alienation through grappling with his identity as a gay person while growing up in an intolerant atmosphere. His and Charlie's struggles with the risks of "coming out" had to some extent inoculated them against the sting of prejudice and discrimination towards their spiritual worldview.

For Tisnuk and Jennifer, who were a part of the Native American community, their sense of ideological and cultural separateness was an ongoing source of suffering in their lives -- suffering which moved from foreground to background depending on the social context. In their daily lives, they were in close contact with both cultures while preferring to have persistent contact with the Native American community where they generally felt more at ease.

The participants described their spirituality as a way of living which was precious and intimate; for each of them their spirituality was personal, sacred in and of itself. In certain circumstances, their spirituality was also privately held out of self protection and/or to avoid subjecting themselves and what they held sacred to judgment and misunderstanding.

The heart of the participants' spirituality was animism and, as such, their experience of community and relationality was deep and multi-layered. All of the participants expressed a strong sense of interdependence and expanded personal identity: an identity which incorporated a multifaceted experience of community and "we-ness." This more collective identity contrasts with the pervasive individualism of the dominant culture (Cajete, 2000).

They described their spirituality as engendering a sense of a transcendent, expanded self which continues to evolve and to be reinforced through significant experiences.

Participants' sense of enlarged identity founded in their spirituality also had a shadow side. Their spirituality did not protect them from suffering. Most of them had suffered from discrimination. Moreover, suffering seemed to accompany the depth of their connections – their identification as “we.” Four of the people mentioned the pain of seeing the degradation of nature as well as the increase in a sense of obligation and duty to help the natural world and/or other people. Three of them mentioned the pain of their awareness of the Native American holocaust while two of them (non-Natives) noted their unsettling awareness of and sensitivity to the issue of cultural acquisition of indigenous people's spiritual practices.

In the final stages of analysis I recognized the importance of the experience of transcendence within the life world of animistic spirituality – a precious world of identity as “presence” in participants' seminal experiences. I embraced Halling's (2006) view of transcendence, described as a breaking through of wonder, and as a natural everyday experience. He gives as example the love between two people when it breaks through in everyday interactions. Transcendence, as it is alluded to by the participants in the study, may also be a momentous experience full of wonder which transports an individual into unknown spiritual realms far from everyday understandings. Yet transcendence is rarely spoken of or recognized in the mainstream culture, including mainstream psychology (Halling, 2006). Likewise, the social stigma which accompanies animistic spirituality in our cultural and in mainstream psychology also remains unspoken for the most part.

Being the Recipient of Prejudice and Discrimination

Only one participant did not express feelings of distress concerning the prejudice and discrimination encountered as a result of adhering to an Earth-based spirituality. Still, she was aware of the prejudice towards people with her worldview. Other participants reported they had suffered due to the social stigma attached to their beliefs. In terms of suffering, Bianca, as mentioned above, was the exception. She described an intentional silence on the subject of her animistic worldview in the presence of most people, including the majority of her good friends. When asked in the interview whether she had experienced difficulties around her spirituality, she stated, “No, no, because I've always thought I was smarter than most people, or not smarter, not necessarily smarter, but others' -- people's beliefs -- that never intimidated me.” She elaborated by saying she limited who she shared this sacred and personal topic with. “I really won't argue. It is not an arguing point. It is really only shared with people that want to throw it back and forth, one which would be my husband, my mother in some ways.”

Like Bianca, Malissa did not share her spirituality with many people yet Malissa suffered with her self-adhered-to silence:

I don't like to talk to very many people about my spirituality, I work at a community college and the college setting is very secular . . . probably more than the general public. So, religion is a kind of an anomaly amongst college people, at least where I work it is. I'm either with my colleagues or with my close friends. Those are the people I would have the most opportunity to talk about my spirituality with. I do not talk to people very much about it . . . I feel like the shamanism is considered weird and ooey-gooney and hokey, and kooky . . . my sense is that it makes people feel uncomfortable.

Malissa described a scene she remembered in her childhood which she believed was connected to her sense of shame as an adult concerning her practice of shamanism:

When I was in elementary school, I was the leader of a small group of girls in a Catholic girls' school. I would lead them over the school fence and to a field adjacent to the school. There I'd pretend to be the lead stallion of a pack of horses. I'd make the sounds of a horse, paw the ground, snort and run about the field, the other girls following me. I was joyful, free, and wild and close to the earth. One day when we are out playing horses, then the nuns discovered us and scolded us. They told us it was not ladylike.

Malissa recalled she was deeply ashamed at the time. As she described the distress she felt in navigating spiritual and secular realms of her life, she appeared distressed: her checks flushed and her voice rose in pitch. She said:

I hate it. I hate it. It's becoming increasingly difficult for me to do that. I get really tired of feeling like I can't talk about what it is that is most important to me. I find it utterly draining. I was reading something last night about Teresa of Avila, who was talking to her nuns in one of her books that she wrote, and she said, you need to know how to talk the language of God and if the people can't talk the language you should not be talking to them.

Like most of the other participants Malissa was deeply troubled by a situation she found to be an untenable conundrum: she could suppress her worldview (and therefore an essential part of her identity) and be safe or expose her beliefs and risk her credibility. The schism between these worlds can lead to feelings of alienation from others as well as to suppression of important aspects of the self. Those who perceive of themselves as outside of the norm may experience oppression as not belonging (Hays, Chang, & Dean, 2004, pp. 248-249). Malissa said:

You can't talk both languages, one will replace the other.... but I think that the deeper point Theresa of Avila was recognizing is that it's a painful thing to have to deny the deeper levels of one's truth and to have to walk in a world where you are denied that. It's difficult for me. I find it very difficult and increasingly difficult as time goes on, and I don't know what I'm going to do about it.

Historically there were variations in how the early colonizers of the United States viewed the indigenous peoples whose cultures embraced animistic spirituality. For the most part, they were either considered "ignorant heathens" or a "demonic race" (Takaki, 1993,

p.44). Despite widespread current cultural disavowal of such characterizations, oppression of the beliefs of those who ascribe to animistic spirituality continues. Jennifer seemed to describe internalized oppression:

The children are in the public school system here in Seattle and the parents get together to meet on how we can support our children. In the outside culture and the public school system . . . I heard other parents, Native American parents, through the sharing, talk about their own children as if they were stupid. It wasn't mean-spirited, but it was kind of the basis of their belief system. They truly were concerned about how they could smarten their kids up kind of thing. I felt so sad. It's not so much what our children need to conform to the public school system, but what the public school system can do for our Native children and to acknowledge that the children are different in the way they think, because it's the culture, because of who they are, because one of the cultural differences is the way we think. Most indigenous people will think differently than the Western culture. I was kept away from my Native American roots, until I found the Circle.

Jennifer noted the potency of the long-term systemic prejudice against Native peoples has led to prejudice towards non-Natives and non-reservation Natives by many Native peoples themselves. Prejudice, it would seem, gives rise to more prejudice. She described the prejudices within local tribes. She stated:

I think that's one of the prejudices you find even among the Native people. They realize they are thought of as less than and not accepted. So they don't want any non-Native people around them. And now, a lot of people feel that if you're not raised on the reservation you're not really an Indian. I would certainly not speak that way because that's also not fair. It is prejudice too.

Those who practice animistic spirituality may not be easy to identify as minorities.

Like being gay or having diabetes, it is often hidden or private information. One's visibility can affect the way oppression and privilege is experienced (Hays, Chang, & Dean, 2004).

Both of the participants who had mixed Native and Caucasian heritage were light-haired and not easily recognized as of Native heritage.

Two of the gay participants had experienced prejudice and discrimination due to their sexual preference. They were both openly gay at this time in their lives but noted that the

process of coming out had been both a liberating and frightening experience due to social stigma. They had struggled with oppression and feeling ostracized in years past. By choice, in their present circumstances, both of them lived and worked in communities where they felt accepted and even embraced. Each person spontaneously mentioned that being gay in a primarily heterosexually oriented society had prepared them to cope with prejudice against their unusual spirituality. They each felt they knew where to find support and where and with whom to protect themselves. Still, each navigated this path in their own way, with some commonalities between them. They each described their process of grappling with and adjusting to being a minority.

Daniel said:

I'm beyond the judgment part, I think the gay thing in there has really helped with judgments . . . one way is that I'm a gay male and I grew up in the Bible belt. You are told there that you can't be spiritual or you can't be Christian or you can't be this or that and be gay. To me, there is no way that you can't be gay and not be spiritual. . . . How could a creator create something that was distasteful or bad? Of, course, I think everyone's open and can partake of spirituality. So that's been a struggle for me as a gay male, to find my place around spirituality, but it's strengthened my spirit so much to know that I'm worthy and that myself is worthy of recognition of that part of my life. That I can't have a spiritual side is silly to me now. (Laughs.) So that's been challenging, it's also just working in a secular world.

Charlie connected her experience as a lesbian to the dynamics in her spiritual life.

Illuminating how being “queer” is similar to practicing animistic spirituality she explained:

. . . it's similar to being queer. It's another form of queerness to be living in a Shamanic way. Not a choice to be that way, but definitely a choice of how deeply I will embrace and celebrate it and what will I offer to you or withhold from the 'mainstream.' But I know it would be beneficial to be generous with my queer gift. Still, will I be safe or will I be small? Will, I hide? What is necessary to retain and protect what is sacred?

To avoid the effects of prejudice Charlie is cautious, often secretive, and sometimes reframes her beliefs to be more acceptable or understandable to others. In the follow-up

interview, when I asked her if she was referring to witch persecutions when she mentioned “common people” who were persecuted, she confirmed she was referring to the witch hunts here and in Europe. She continued:

I tell almost no one, socially and at parties and such. I've told maybe one or two people. I usually tell my clients because I find it unfolds that that's why they're there. Sometimes, by word-of-mouth people find out I'm doing Shamanic work. I don't promote it at least not for a long time. I rarely talk about it with many of the people in my life that I'm close to. Most people don't even know that I do this. . . . I qualify a lot at times. I frame my perspective psychologically a lot of times. Or I'll bury my true perspective and this is definitely for the reason of safety. I feel very careful about people thinking that I'm psychotic, far out, just, you know, mentally ill, or in some kind of a way where someone is not to be taken seriously.

After a pause, and with a disturbed expression, she continued:

There might be an element where I'm actually afraid. Safety and the sense that it's not that long ago when the common people were killed for these beliefs. And I'm definitely aware of that. I'm definitely aware of the chasm between myself and the mainstream. And what people and the mainstream think of this. I don't really interact with anyone from the mainstream very often. So you see, I'm even talking about people who are relatively open-minded here. I have a very small handful of close friends, who I either practice with or who know exactly what I do. And that's it.

Tisnuk described the internal and outward strain of moving between the two worlds.

Like Jennifer, as a person with Native heritage, his knowledge of and pain from prejudice and discrimination were profound. The “communalism” and a “collective identity” of the Native peoples have been at odds with individualism from early on in American history (Takaki, 2008, pp. 88-101). As noted above, Tisnuk often speaks of himself as “we” in deference to the collective loyalty and identity of Native Northwest peoples. Tisnuk described:

When we were doing our graduate work at the University of Washington . . . it was cross-culturally stressful, because on the weekends we were traveling and participating in various (Indian) Shaker Gatherings all during the weekend, throughout the Northwest, where few of the people were familiar with the world of academia, in the western sense of education, and on Monday, one was expected to compete in a classroom at a very high level about the various applications of Analysis

of Variance, or Co-variance in Statistical Analyses. We are no longer traveling from (Indian) Shaker Church to Shaker Church as we did in the past, based on intuitive urging. We didn't really know whether we were coming or going sometimes. The whole assumption in intellectual scientific investigation and inquiry is, until it can be shown to be empirically verifiable, it is not valid, nor does it exist. From this limited explanation one can get a feeling for why we have difficulty living in two worlds, especially because we are aware of what happened to our homeland, and how our First People students have been dumped down, the resources allocated to them through the treaties siphoned off, or redirected away from their highest good and best use, and their valuable culture and values stripped from them in many cases, except for the superficial that does not deal with sensitive issues :such as, generational grief and dispossession without compensation, that the dominant society would rather not deal with.

As noted above, an ideological schism between worldviews is at the root of misunderstanding and or prejudice towards an animistic paradigm of life. Jennifer described the fundamental difference in worldview between the animistic spirituality of indigenous peoples and the dominant culture:

. . . most indigenous people will think differently than the Western culture. How it's been explained to me by elders is that we indigenous people think in a circular way. We think in a whole-picture way. We think ahead as to how our actions are affecting the seven generations ahead of us. Everything we do has an impact on what's ahead of us. It's ingrained in us . . . it's who we are. When Western thinking it is very linear and thinks, straight forward, more about me myself and I right now. It's not wrong it's just a different way of thinking. They're just different.

For all of the participants an awareness of the effects of prejudice was ever-present in their lives. Tisnuk experienced prejudice in several realms of his life: as an academic, as a person with a Native/animistic worldview in a Eurocentric society, and from some Native peoples because of his non-Native appearance and doctoral degree at a mainstream university. As a Native American man, he expressed the difficulties of being in a scientific Western Ph.D. program as well as the challenge of dealing with prejudice among Native Americans towards the Western worldviews as well as the other way around. After he received his doctorate, he worked as a teacher on a local reservation. He believed he was

thought of as an outsider because of his position of privilege as an educator. He also felt there were more barriers to his pursuit of a doctorate because of his affiliation with the reservation. During the telling, he began to weep. He told me he was weeping not only for himself but also for the other “aboriginal peoples:”

When we sought admittance into three departments of the Graduate School of Education: Higher Education, Administration, and Curriculum and Instruction, we were denied in each case. At that point our Speese entered the picture (our Tsinuk intuitive spiritual guidance) and gave us a dream that a giant supernatural bear came to us, and we fired three rifle shells into it, and it did not fall, so that was our answer to what to do. We would go back one more time, and when we returned we spoke to the Dean of Instruction, and told him in no uncertain terms, that if we were not accepted into the U. W. Graduate School of Education, we would initiate actions to place clouds on each Federal Grant they received for Indian Education, which involved considerable amounts of funding. After a tumultuous six years we finished and defended our dissertation successfully.

Precious Relational Life-World

All of the participants described a precious, relational core to their spiritual lived world which was present in both tangible and sensate ways as well as more numinous, transcendent ways. With reverence and sometimes awe, the participants described this private world and how it affected them. It is important to note that there were details which varied among the descriptions of the participants’ spiritual life-world, but the common threads which signify animism (in-spiritedness, relationality) were present in all descriptions.

Although Bianca was discerning with whom she shared her spiritual world, she conveyed that her privacy around the subject was also due to the deeply personal sacredness of her spiritual world. Significantly, her spiritual life world held the qualities of immediacy and presence. She pointed to the Earth as she said: “My sense is definitely right here because I remember that it was what my mom gave me when I graduated from high school and I

thought, of course, she gets me, because she helped me get there. It said ‘Heaven is under our feet as well over our heads.’ Maybe it was Wordsworth, I don’t know.”

Bianca described her spirituality as inexplicably entwined in the accessible and the everyday:

Ah, and there is another sense . . . I was just remembering back to being a teenager, talking to a boyfriend about these ideas, and I remember what I said to him is that what I really want is to be ordinary. I don’t want to be out there. I want to be ordinary. Ordinary is sacred too and so it doesn’t mean a removal from this world, or removal from the society or removal from other people. So that was an aim from when I was fairly young.

Tisnuk merged the natural world and his human community. He suffered their suffering, and also shared their joy. His relational world was anchored in his Native community and ancestry. Among most, but not all, Native people he did not feel the need to be private about his spiritual world as it is most often a shared world. Yet in his professional life, in the “dominant culture” he hid this world. His precious world has a personal and community history. However, Tisnuk did mention that he had encountered Native people on the reservation who did not believe in the ancient animistic ways. His personal spiritual existence was private but also shared among and firmly rooted in a community of Native peoples. The non-Native peoples interviewed did not express such a strong and ever-present sense of spirituality shared in community. The Native participants treasured this community but also described their community as affected by intergenerational trauma, loss and oppression.

In a summary of our first interview, I included the statement that community was inextricably linked with Tisnuk’s spirituality. Tisnuk agreed and added that “service, which entails courage and obligation, is a part of a living spirituality as well.” He described the context of his community and what it meant to him:

In 1952 we lived for a year on the Quinault Indian Reservation on the Olympic Peninsula where we attended school in a two-room school house where we were most certainly in the minority, and got in many fights, because we were in the minority, and looked so white, and probably acted white to them. However, when we returned to public school we felt we had been given a wonderful opportunity to establish who we were and felt a part of, and included, being able to live on an actual Indian reservation, being able to play, and celebrate traditional cultural feasts, dances and songs, being able to interact with so many First People of all ages in Indian Country, being able to observe their fishing and canoeing up and down the Quinault River, and being able to drive out to the ocean beach with our father to buy clams by lamplight, and to buy fish from their canoes on the river.

After we returned to Ilwaco, Washington, they unearthed one of our burial grounds in Oysterville, WA. And like the S'Klallam First Nation People who put up a fight to get their over 350 sacred desecrated grave remains returned from Tse Whitzen, and . . . we also put up a fight and were successful on a smaller scale, of having the desecrated remains of our ancestors returned.

Charlie described her relational spiritual world as distinctly animistic in nature. She also suggested a corresponding constant thread which ran through the descriptions of the participants' worldviews: obligation and reasonability are key elements of/with relationship.

Charlie explained:

Everything is alive, even things we consider to be inanimate in our culture. [everything] . . . has a purpose that has something to offer, and an order to knowledge and the presence with the spirits here in the trees, the sky, in the birds, in the pavement, even being able to witness and acknowledge and interact with the spirits keeps them alive, enlivens the world. . . . Those of us who believe that everything is alive have a responsibility to interact with the world in that way, to hold that space. There is help available from the spirit world from anywhere, from individual to unity, the divine unity-creation, whatever that means, the Great Spirit, God, and Goddess, whatever that might be.

I think that the practice I'm involved in feels eternal, and it feels noncommercial. In that way it feels not like New Age, no one can come sell this to me. There is no product to buy. My most sacred rattle that I use for the large majority of my Shamanic work I purchased for fewer than five dollars. It's plastic, and it comes from China, and I've used it for about 10 years. There's nothing to advertise, nothing to get people on board with. There's nothing except the earth, the spirits and our connection to that world. Very simple.

During a follow-up interview with Charlie, I provided her with a summary depiction of her first interview to review. Her feedback was mainly confirming but she wanted me to revise one of the statements I had made in that first summary. I had written “Charlie seems to have suffered a great deal because of her experience of walking in two worlds.” Charlie declared it was important not to over emphasize the suffering in her experience. Although Charlie confirmed her feelings of stress and suffering as an outcome of walking in two worlds, she said that it was the “most precious and treasured aspect” of her life on a daily basis:

It is difficult, but it's the biggest gift in my life. I'm not a part of mainstream culture to a very large extent, and I'm glad I feel a longing to live in a community of people who will hold the collective experience of the spirit world. I find camaraderie and support in my work and the experience of the spiritual in ordinary reality. I often feel against the tide in the sense that my practice is often solitary and I must generate all of the will to make it happen. It is similar to being queer.

In a similar way Malissa emphasized relationality and inspiredness. She described her spiritual world with the preface that her thoughts about her spirituality had emerged from her existential experiences:

I think of myself as a Pan & Theist. Not a Pan-theist, but a Pan & Theist. The word Pan & Theism means, the theology behind it, is that divinity is in creation so divinity is in nature, but divinity is also beyond nature, it's also transcendent. I would say that I believe in both the imminence and transcendence of divinity. So, that nature being creation is divine, but I don't see that as the limit of divinity. I think that for me, one of the things I do is I'll sit on my porch and just talk to the trees, or try to tame the crow or working with animal spirits, and it comes out of the belief that really nature is holy, probably holier than we are. I remember reading something by a Christian theologian that said that nature is not fallen, like humanity, and although I don't believe the whole “fall” kind of thing, I kind of got what he was saying the idea that there is purity in nature that humans don't often times have.

During the interview, as she continued to describe her worldview, she seemed to be talking to herself as well as to me when she relayed:

There is a term in theology called heirophany. The word heirophany means the appearance of the divine, and anything can be a heirophany, a tree can be a heirophany, or a waterfall can be a heirophany. The thing about nature is that nature doesn't try to be a different heirophany than it is. The tree doesn't try to be the waterfall and the crow doesn't try to be the tree . . . they just are what they are, and they are also not trying to outdo each other, the tree is not interested in being more, 'I'm a better tree than you are' kind of thing. They are also not interested in denying their own divinity.

In describing what it is like to "walk in two worlds," and how they came to this way of being, each of the participants described seminal experiences, including encounters, dreams, crisis events, and internal awareness which shaped and substantiated their worldview. Such experiences were accompanied by a wide range of emotions, from joyful and peaceful to fearful and sorrowful. Some of the experiences were sought after and others were unexpected. These experiences reinforced the meaningfulness of their spirituality.

For Malissa one such experience was from the presence of a religious figure in her childhood:

Mary was helpful in the sense that I grew up worshipping Mary in the Catholic Church, and even though I was supposed to be worshipping Jesus, I didn't, I worshipped Mary. That helped me connect to the goddess spirituality which felt more akin to Shamanism and also helped me to kind of feel comfortable identifying a god with no name and my other spiritual life with the feminine aspect of the divine; because I do feel like at the deepest level or the deepest level that I have been able to go to, that there is a very feminine quality to divinity. That very intimate, loving, merciful, kind, mothering, embracing connectedness, the intimacy that we associate with the feminine, that those are the qualities that I find the most drawing to me in terms of my spiritual life. Mary was, for a long time, the thing that sort of allowed me to go from point A to point B. Point A being Catholicism, point B being goddess religion, point C Shamanism, the nameless spiritual path of all of those things.

Like Malissa, Bianca recalled ongoing and powerful everyday influences in her childhood. Her encounter was directly with the presence and sensations of nature. She described profound embodied well-being:

I grew up in an apartment and we were never in that apartment we were outdoors every day. That was in New Zealand, . . . I was taken to the beach every day of my

life until I was 5, summer and winter. So physically, I was just talking to a friend about this last week, that meant that, physically, barefoot. I was physically in touch with the earth every single day, for a good portion of the day without clothes, without shoes between sand and water and dust. So, I have continued to really trust in that, in nature being a part of things. As a kid that um, getting that sensation that “Oh this is a perfect day” and that this is a perfect day where I could appreciate where I was physically. That was outdoors: The sun; the sky, usually the beach. And so that sense of “it’s a perfect day” was tied in with all is right with the world -- which is the basis of my spirituality.

Both Daniel and Jennifer also referred to their experiences with nature as seminal experiences. Some encounters were sought after. Bianca recalled a time in her life when she was feeling discouraged and she felt her request for guidance to a higher power was answered:

I can recall one day down at the beach, the pebble beach, and I was lying on the beach and I had the (pause), and I was actively seeking, during that period, communion with a higher power of some kind and as I was lying on the beach I had a sensation, a knowing. I got to see for a couple of minutes that it was all one. So, I could see that the waves coming in were eroding those pebbles that were making the sand that the tree was being fed by it. And I could just be a part of it all: being one.

Not all experiences were numinous. Certain painful experiences also served to assist participants with honing their values and worldview. Jennifer stated:

The teachings that stand behind separating people are not of our Earth. They are cruel and heartless...I worked at a home for the elderly. I saw a lot of abuses that were horrible. It was considered one of the better homes, but I just thought how they can do this to our elders. The thing that made me leave the place was that one of the elderly patients, a woman, and her food kept coming back so I went to talk to her. I was a cook and I did my best to make everybody happy. I think they looked forward to their meal. I put up the effort to make it really beautiful for them and I got a lot of compliments. I went to talk to the one woman who wasn't eating, in her room and she was passing away. She had no family. She kept saying, “I want to go home, I'm going home,” so I held her hand and she passed away. I was young, and I wondered how can that happen? My eyes were opened at an early age. After that I got the job in the home for the children and the teachings I received stayed with me my whole life. It taught me that it was the wrong approach to life and it would never be okay in my heart. I would not enforce that in any way or treat our children or our elders like that.

For Daniel, a serious car accident was the catalyst for his life's spiritual and creative awakening:

When I was 13 years old I was in a really severe car accident that nearly took my life. Up to that point I don't think I was really that grounded and really cared to be a part of this world, so going through that experience and realizing that I really didn't have a choice in the matter as to whether I was going to stay or have to stay here, I realized I had to stay here on Earth. And that I had a purpose. And in realizing that I think it was the first time that I really considered spirituality, 'cause I knew that there was something larger than myself out there, kind of as a conductor orchestrating what would be my life. I found art through that experience. To this day art and spirituality, nature and dreams are so heavily linked, and it's really, really hard for me to distinguish because I feel that my spirit comes through my art so much whenever I'm painting.

For Charlie a series of seminal spiritual experiences unfolded in her youth. She felt she was "called" by the land in the wilderness of Oregon where she lived for many years:

I think I was about twenty, and I was living with my girlfriend in the city, and I had gone out to visit these friends, and this land, and I was completely, inexplicably drawn to this land and to the idea that there were all these women, living out on the land together, living there for what seemed like undefined spiritual reasons

Charlie and her girlfriend purchased land next to this property but after less than a year she and her girlfriend broke up. Charlie remained on the land living in a yurt with her two dogs. Living in nature was the means to an intense spiritual journey rife with presence and mystery as well as hard physical work:

I spent some years building there on the land and doing a lot of work making a home in a Yurt. . . . When I finally moved on to the land it was from age 20 to 30. I stayed there constantly. My relationship with the animals and the earth really developed. I lived there all alone most the time. . . . Then I was by myself. The coyotes would come around and howl and it seemed like probably it was 100 feet or less when they'd come. They would surround my yurt. And other animals would come: owls and little lizards. There were just so many relationships with animals. Then the very intense dream life began to develop. There was this recognition of something that was there—a feeling. My flashlight would never work on the land. Nobody's flashlight would ever work. You could buy new bulbs and flashlight batteries whenever and the flashlight will last for about one or two trips back. Because we didn't drive to our land we always had to walk in the dark, and I took it as a really strong metaphor for the need to walk in the dark and to feel sure about the land and to

learn to stay on my own path. There is a very strong relationship with the moon cycles because of the light.

Charlie's experiences of living in the woods were often challenging and sometimes frightening. She considered her encounter with a daunting forest creature a kind of initiation:

So, one day I was coming home, this was very early on, and the dogs ran ahead barking wildly and chasing something away. I went into my yurt, and there was a big hole in the side of the yurt and my cast-iron stove was maybe 10 or 15 yards out side in the woods. And I wondered, how could this have happened, how could such a heavy thing be outside in the woods? I couldn't figure it out so I called the neighbors and he came over and said "oh, a bear has been inside your house." And then I realized that's exactly right.

There were hallmarks of the bear everywhere, so the bear would not go away. It would come inside when I was gone, and it would circle my house at night, and it was scary, really scary. And finally, finally, I figured out that the only thing that anyone would help me to deal with this would be either trap and kill the bear or to shoot it. I wasn't willing to do that. And so I began to speak to the bear and as soon as I explained the situation to her and just made offerings and respect and all that I never did see her again. She didn't come, and that was when I first learned that I could really communicate with animals. So I began to communicate more with the animals, and I always found tremendous cooperation, and there were a lot of cougars, bear in the area. I always was aware that nothing bad ever happened to anyone living there. (There were thousands of acres of wilderness around us and behind us) that we were always safe, and felt as if we lived in a kind of harmony.

Charlie believed her years in the woods taught her intuitive healing modalities. "It was years before I received any training from human beings involved with Shamanic work. I developed work with nature and the Spirits in my private practice as a body worker on my own. I would remove invisible things from the bodies of my clients that I saw affecting their well-being."

Another participant, Tisnuk, while he was serving in the military in Vietnam, underwent a harrowing and life-altering experience. This incident was not only life-altering but also life-saving and included not only in his waking life, but also a frightening prophetic dream. In traditional indigenous cultures, dreams and other "non-ordinary" states of

consciousness are ordinary. Highwater (1981) explained that “Primal consciousness is larger than the psychological geography by which the West knows it. It overflows linearity in dreams, imaginings, visions, intuitions” (p 96).

Tisnuk told me the story of his experience:

I had a dream I was going to be in a bunker, with pierced steel planks. That's what they use to land aircraft on in the swamps; it can withstand the heat and wouldn't bog down. I had a dream I was going to be in this special bunker. Just before that mortar attack, I was knocked to the ground and an angel said, “You are going to die tonight.” I wrote my mother and my father a letter and thanked them for everything they had done for me and I told them that I was going to die tonight. I'm sure it was quite a shock to get that letter. The next mortar attack, it didn't happen that night. The next morning we were called by the military officer, the person who assigns the people to where they live. We were reassigned to a different part of the base. The officer said there is a Colonel and a Major coming in, you are of a lower rank because you are a Lieutenant, and so you have to move. We moved to this other hooch, hooch is a living area like an apartment. We moved into this new place, and I walked into the back room and there is this pierced plank steel bunker that I didn't know was there. The next week, all of a sudden I hear this slam, and a slam means that somebody is running to the bunker because they don't have time to close the door. The first shell that hit blew up the hooch where I used to live, so that was completely wiped out. Meanwhile, I was in this pierced steel plank bunker, where things were much safer.

This occurrence so powerfully affected Tisnuk that he altered his life to focus on a spiritual path when he returned from Vietnam:

I committed myself to God. I said I'm going to use my life in a good way. Whatever you (God) want I to do that am what I'm going to do. When I came back to the States, I found out they [US Government] were doing a lot of things to the Indian country that wasn't right. I started traveling with elders; I applied for different teaching jobs on reservations. I started teaching over at the Yakima reservation. I would travel with an elder, he died at 111. I went to the Mud Bay Shaker Church with him. The Shaker Church was a sanctuary where the traditional medicine people who were under persecution, could blend in, to disguise themselves, to secretly practice their old shamanic songs and ways, unbeknownst to the U.S. Gov. and others. Many of the activities that take place in the Shaker Church are reminiscent of activities spiritual, physical, mental and material that took place in pre-contact times.

He experienced a presence of spirit when he attended the Indian Shaker church:

There is a lady there, her name was N. It's like a big empty floor and they put chairs up, they light you up with candles, they ring bells around you, and more or less create

a spiritual space for you. I was sitting there watching all of this, and this Mrs. N, she starts spinning, and she starts spinning all around the room. It's a basically wooden floor and they've benches on either side, the altar up front or the exit at the back.

Every time she passed me, all of a sudden my whole body was just like Jell-O. I thought, this is really unusual. I went up, I basically made a stand and said I believe that God is speaking to me, . . . Wherever I felt I was supposed to be, I'd jump in the car and I'd go . . . to help.

Malissa recounted the context and process of her spiritual life:

I was raised Catholic for one thing, and I was raised in a very Catholic home with two sisters and my parents and we were very traditional. There were statues of Mary around and pictures of Jesus and we would go to church every Sunday. I went to Catholic school for 12 years. By the time I was in my junior year of high school I was starting to rebel against my parents and rebel against the Catholic Church, and I was rebelling basically because I became part of the hippy movement, and that was bad. My boyfriend was a hippy and that was really bad. By the time I was 18 and when I graduated from high school I moved out. Then stopped going to church like almost immediately, because I was sleeping with my boyfriend and I figured, well I'm going to hell anyway, so you can only go to hell so many times, so may as well just go to hell once and enjoy yourself in the meantime.

Malissa continued on to explain how her spiritual path diverged from her childhood religious affiliation.

That wasn't really very satisfying to me. I wasn't really interested in being a Catholic either. After I'd been out of school for a year and a half and felt very much at loose ends. The parents of one of my friends in this hippy group that I was in started teaching us meditation. It was actually the friend of a parent, and he had done this because this boy's mother was very concerned that we were all at loose ends and thought that we would really benefit from learning meditation and I think she thought that our drug use was really a way to try to find some more deeper meaning in our life.

As she spoke Malissa seemed to be reflecting upon this journey to substantiate the significance in her life of these experiences in her spiritual development:

What's interesting about this is that out of all of the people in that meditation group, as near as I can tell, I'm the only one, except for my ex boyfriend, who kept up with some kind of a spiritual life, and everybody else, as near as I can tell did not, which I think it's interesting and I'm not sure exactly what that means. I just realized that this second.

After a period of time in an ashram and then in a New York studying with a woman who teaches a kind of interfaith mysticism, Malissa said “. . .then in 1998 I started practicing shamanism . . . joined a drumming circle and now I’m in a drumming circle and have been very involved in doing Celtic Shamanism.”

Transcendent and Expanded Identity

The relational heart of the participants’ animistic spirituality affected the participants’ sense of identity. As bonds deepen, so does the center (the self): all are interwoven and inter-reliant. All of them mentioned the topic of identity during the interviews. Their sense of self was both expanded and evolving. An animistic worldview celebrates openness and mystery. Sense of self remains tied to interconnectedness. Sense of self is continually affected by relationship as well as by transcendent experiences and the presence of the transcendent. All of the participants described “spiritual experiences that facilitated healing as causes for ongoing development of true identity” (Tisdell, 2002, p. 134).

Like indigenous peoples and mystics around the world, the participants held a different sense of identity from the common version of the term in the dominant culture. “Primal cultures tend to be tribal rather than idiosyncratic in their psychology. For instance, most North American tribes possess what must be called a ‘communal soul’ in comparison with the western precept of the soul as personal property that ensures, under certain moral regulations, the eternal perpetuation of the private ego” (Highwater, 1981, p. 169).

Similarly, mystical traditions seem to portray a self which is both the heart of one’s identity and yet beyond one’s personal ego: transpersonal. Transpersonal psychology embraces this premise as well (Frager, 1989). “Cameroonian Nso African Indigenous culture includes developmental stages of ancestral identity, social selfhood, and spiritual identity.

Spiritual identity integrates ancestral spiritual relations with personal development and completes with a naming ceremony (Keller and Werchan, 2006, p. 417). “Similarly, the Navajo meld identity and community within arenas of learning. One learns through out a life time. One develops a trade or career in keeping with ones talents and the needs of the community. One may also chose to become a spiritual leader or medicine person but this chose requires the greatest demands and commitment (Joe, 1994, as cited by Hoare, 2006, p. 414).

Charlie described an embodied quality to her fundamental identity, herself “as nature.” Bianca described her sense of identity as coming into contact with “oneness” -- “I got to see for a couple of minutes that it was all one. . . . And I could just be a part of it all: being one.”

Although she made it known that it was not always an easy process of self discovery and self evolution, Malissa described how her spiritual journey has honed her self awareness, self acceptance and creative self. Malissa said:

I was realizing this morning when I was meditating that that was sort of one of my mental constructs that I needed to change and so now I’ll get to work on that and start changing that. It’s that kind of thing that my self identity has become continually improved, and become kinder and gentler and more loving towards myself dramatically. I would say yeah, the shamanic stuff has really opened up my creativity a lot. One of the things in the Celtic Shamanism is traditionally very much about poetry and the bard, bardic tradition and all of that, so he (the teacher) had us reading poetry and writing poetry. I started writing poetry, and it was really because of that that I started writing poetry, and I’ve gotten pretty good. I would say that that has come largely from doing the shamanic stuff. I would say that has really changed my sense of who I am too, from being a less creative person to truly seeing myself as really a creative person. So we have to think about what the outcome can be in linear thinking, if we don't come back to the heart and live from the heart. We can get so far away that we are living in a place instead of being grounded to the earth.

Daniel described a similar path of self acceptance when he recounted the overlap between his spiritual identify and identity as a gay man.

Like Malissa and Charlie, Bianca's usually private sense of self and her animistic worldview brought her joy as well as a sense of the unusualness of her experiences and beliefs. Bianca stated:

I have got quite a few friends who are atheists or agnostic. Sometimes when they say things I realize how shocking it is to me. I don't try to challenge them on it at all. But for me it is a certain base of who I am. It is the base of who I am. Oh, that is an interesting thing that happened one time. I was in one of the darker phases and periods of my life and in a meditation with a psychotherapist and I got this image of bubbles of joy running up and down my spine and knowing that is who I am. And that image has stayed. Just that, at base, that is who I am, and then the personality takes on other things but then that is what I come back to.

In a similar way Charlie referenced sensation when she described her identity:

. . . nature reflects my nature beautifully. Nature remembers my whole life, myself. Nature brings me joy and ministry and opened the door to a deeper reality. My moving body is nature exactly the same as all things of the Earth-body are. The beauty of spirit is infused and never distorted in nature. My body reminds me of this, through dance, drama, food, swimming, climbing the tree, feet in the mud and breathing and tasting mist.

People who subscribe to an animistic spirituality anchored their sense of self in relationship. Jennifer talked about the priority of relationship and family in her community. She also gave an example of the confrontations which can occur between a collective versus an individual emphasis in interactions. As she spoke a sad expression settled on her face:

Also in the Western culture is a lot of separation of families. It's not just a breakup of families -- that happens at a very early age as the child goes off to school, the elder goes over here, and they go over here. There's all the separation for various reasons. In our culture, that is rather new. It happens, some even on the reservation, but on the reservation they try to have these institutions right there on the reservations. The separation creates things like ageism and other isms of all kinds, so people are separated by power or economics and all kinds of things like that.

She elaborated:

Still, the people who were raised in traditional ways we don't adopt that. We need to survive in two worlds, so we may have to do that, but we tried to pass on to our children to take care of one another. You don't separate because of your age or your this 'n your that. We do what we can to keep the families integrated. I know that on

the reservation there are schools but often the children don't attend the schools that often, because there are rituals going on, ceremonies that are important for the family and the community and for the children to attend. There are not the same rules about attending school and all that. The kids are more free to spend time with family and community. There is an encouragement of education but the balance is really hard to keep for the children.

Tsinuk's sense of self also was in the context of his people. Tsinuk found it important to describe to me the history of his tribal people, as an important, perhaps essential, aspect of himself:

The ancestral, aboriginal name of my Indian culture side of my Indian ancestry is the Tsinuk Indian people, who are conventionally known as Chinook Indians. They were comprised of a number of tribes and bands and, as a whole, were the Tsinuk Indian Nation. The ancestral Indian country which was their ancestral aboriginal homeland was the Tsinuk Indian Nation ancestral Indian country homeland. In August 1851, two Federal Agents for Oregon Territory, on the part of the executive department of the United States government, signed the un-ratified treaty with one group of said Tsinuks at Tansy Point on the Oregon side of the Columbia River. This treaty was never ratified by the United States government ... By not extinguishing the ancestral sovereignty and the ancestral, national, aboriginal homeland, the ancestral Tsinuk Indians are in the same condition that they were in before the coming of the Whiteman.

As another very important part of his identity Tsinuk also told me his native name. A native elder bestowed this honorable name upon him many years ago. Out of respect for his privacy, I will not repeat the name or the meaning of the name. Accompanying relationship are social supports, reciprocity and obligation:

This is one of the things you get when you are doing things that benefit tribal people. You get all these little perks, and one of the biggest perks is a name. It's an honor, but yet an elderly lady might be coming up to you with a shawl saying "Now you remember me because at some point in time I am going to ask you some favors."

My Native medicine man friend (personal communication July 10th 2010) once joked that his grandparents, who had raised him, said they were glad they were the vanishing people because then they wouldn't have so many long rituals to attend or so many relatives to pray for.

The participants also defined themselves by defining and discerning who they were not. All but one declared he or she was not with the New Age movement: Malissa said:

The new age movement seems kind of like prosperity Christianity, where it's pretty self serving and the idea is that it's kind of feel good religion. I think it's very American and I think it's very middle class and upper middle class, it's there for people to kind of be comfortable with their spiritual life and not have to be challenged by it. I would say that that's the opposite of my spiritual life, my spiritual life is very much about being challenged. I feel like it's a constant challenge to me in many ways, and I would say that those challenges are to be faithful is probably the main challenge, to be faithful and to be persistent and to be willing too.

One of the things that I think is different about my own spiritual life and the new age movement is that I feel like my spiritual life is constantly throwing me into a place that says "I have to look at my stuff." I think the new age movement is very much about being able to be happy: all of this stuff that you never ever have to really look at your stuff. I feel like there is this constant challenge of having to look at my stuff and be willing to really deal with that whatever that happens to be. That there's a constant kind of digging down and trying to deconstruct the self that allows me to practice both sides of my spiritual life with a deeper kind of truth. I don't see any of that in new age-y kinds of stuff.

I've stayed away from Indian, American Indian stuff because I don't want to be a white girl wanna-be taking from the Indians. I think if you are going to be working in an Indian tradition, it's really important, first of all, I think if you are going to be doing Indian Shamanism you should be working with an Indian teacher, or somebody who's authentically been trained by an Indian teacher who has the permission to pass on the traditions of the Indians.

Malissa elaborated on her recognition of the hubris often found in the popular world of spirituality. She pointed out the issue of credibility for people who are not of indigenous decent but ascribe to animistic spirituality:

At one point my sister; back in the day before the internet; when you put your name on a phone thing, ... and people could call up and listen to your message and then you could call up and try to hook up with this person; my sister was listening to all these messages trying to get me to hook up with these people; and she goes "Oh, I found just the person for you!" So I call up this guy and he goes; my name is; it was basically "Big Dick the Kahuna" or whatever, it wasn't exactly that but in essence that's what it was and he goes "I'm an Hawaiian shaman" and I was like gag me please! I think there is just so much of that, of white people who read a few books about Indian spirituality that are new age books a lot of times and then they run around practicing Indian, saying I've been initiated by so and so, or whatever. I do

think it's possible to be legitimate, I think it's hard. I think it is possible for people to study shamanic traditions without doing cultural acquisition, one of the reasons why I've done the Celtic Shamanism is because I've tried to be as faithful to my own ethnic roots as possible just because I was very concerned about straying into anything that to me seemed like it could be cultural acquisition.

I was gratified, and a little surprised, when several participants, Charlie, Malissa, Daniel and Jennifer conveyed to me their appreciation for the opportunity to be heard.

VII. The Heuristic Journey

Overview

'You have to believe in gods to see them.'

- *Hopi Indian Proverb*

As I write this I am in my fifth decade of life. This dissertation is a culmination of a lifelong, tenderly intimate, personal journey. Given the power of prevailing cultural attitudes towards animism, disclosing my own animistic spirituality has felt extremely risky. Over the years I have shied away from yet another encounter with judgment, misunderstanding, and dismissal. But I know I am not alone. It is intriguing to me, but not surprising, that over the years, along with family, friends and Indigenous acquaintances, I have come to know numerous professionals (doctors, lawyers, psychologists, professors), people who have reached some pinnacle of success in western terms, who hide similar worldviews and spiritual practices.

As I have written this dissertation I have imagined the potential responses of skeptical readers: might I be delusional, at worst, or, at best, imaginative and dreamy. Might I be experiencing a reaction formation or wishful and magical thinking in response to my family of origin dynamics? These are only some of the possible psychological explanations for my animistic understandings. And I have explored these and other possibilities with abundant

soul searching and years of therapy with a well-respected and fairly mainstream psychologist. Nearing the end of my therapy with him, after I had recorded and shared with him a series of dreams at the time they occurred, and then later recorded and shared with him the instances when significant specific images in those same dreams took place in the waking world, he, as my witness, confirmed the reality of these confounding prophetic dreams although he confessed he was perplexed. He told me he thought I was a true mystic. In my estimate, mysticism and animism are close relatives if not aspects of one another.

In this study, and through the meaningful narratives of the participants, I have attempted to earnestly examine both my own non-conformist worldview as well as the cultural/historical context I live in. I have returned to the quintessential heart of phenomenology: to be true to what simply is, as it is. With an attitude of wonder for my own often mysterious and complex life-world as well as that of others, this inquiry has been compelling. Beyond ideology or abstractions, I know, in a knowing of the body -- of sensory perception -- that the natural world is the touchstone of our lives. The natural world, of which we humans in the Western world sometimes forget we are a part, communicates the wisdom of cycles and the rhythms of change as well as mysteries difficult to express in word.

To provide a context for understanding the inspiration for this study, I will briefly describe my history as it pertains to this writing. I grew up as an only child to physician parents in the Pacific Northwest. My ethnic heritage is mainly Scandinavian. As a child I spent as much time as I was able to outside. My family spent vacations at the ocean. I relished my own backyard as well as exploring the vacant fields around my home. I often played in solitude outdoors but did not feel alone. The natural world communicated to me. I saved baby birds that fell out of the nest and garter snakes that other neighborhood children

tormented. Time and again I enjoyed transcendent relational experiences through nature, dreams, art, and music and with a few people as well. Periodically, I became aware some of my most sacred, often ecstatic, experiences were considered odd or dismissed, and then I was overcome by confusion, sadness, self doubt, and even shame. For as long as I can remember I walked in two disparate and often seemingly incompatible worlds. I learned to keep quiet with all but one or two friends, about hearing the wind speak to me or feeling the fish my uncle caught struggle for breath and other such experiences.

Beginning in adolescence, driven by my “spiritual” experiences, I plunged into a search for insight into my unconventional way of being in the world. I studied many religious traditions. I was consistently and primarily drawn to the beliefs and cultures of Indigenous peoples. One of the facets of the way I perceive the world is synesthesia (the melding of usually distinct senses) which, for me, is simultaneously sensory-perceptual and spiritual-relational. I believe my synesthesia has contributed to the rich relationality and beauty I have felt in the natural world most especially, but I am aware there are many nature lovers who do not share my animistic or sensory perceptual experiences.

As a young adult, my first husband and I lived with our two children in an off-the-grid, remote cabin, which we built ourselves, in the San Juan Islands of Washington State. My husband died suddenly when I was thirty-one. My two daughters and I relocated back to Seattle where I gradually completed my education. Those years of living in the woods closer to the rhythms of night and day and the seasons profoundly transformed my worldview. Those years living in the woods anchored my spiritual worldview in a depth of real world everyday experience. My core perception of an alive, communicative world, an animistic way of being in the world, has stayed with me, sometimes sharply present and other times in

the background. Over the years, with the time when my primary focus was parenting having passed, an animistic way of perceiving has become ever more in the foreground of my life.

During the past twenty years I have studied intensely with several Native American elders. These studies included initiatory trials and ceremonies. I am currently involved in a local Native American spiritual community. The initial reason I was accepted into this community was because I lived for many years in nature; thus, I shared with them a grounding of beliefs in intimacy with the earth. With my family, or alone, I return to the cabin and wilder lands whenever we, or I, are able to. Now my grandchildren know the land as well.

Doubts in my own perceptions, and a remote, intermittent fear of being delusional, no longer shadow me as they did in my teens and twenties. Countless numinous encounters have validated my worldview. These reinforcing animistic occurrences have multiplied as I have become more accepting and open while less absorbed by the intra-psychic and intra-familiar angst of my younger days. I am at home in my own skin.

There are people I know of who have had anomalous experiences and do not consider those experiences spiritual and I have met people whom I thought were either not grounded in their spiritual pursuits or were delusional . Among the schizophrenics I have treated as a therapist, religious delusions are common. Moreover, we are a consumer culture. It seems many people shop for spiritual experiences or beliefs like they do for groceries. Ironically, my own observations suggest our technological and materially-oriented culture has lead to a prevalent spiritual hunger difficult to satisfy with instant “hot spiritual cure of the day.” My litmus test for the credibility of people’s beliefs and knowing is directly connected to their

holistic functioning on a daily basis, and more than functioning, their flourishing as humans who are able to love: to love in action in the here and now rather than merely abstractly.

Interestingly, most of my transformative spiritual encounters occurred not when I was in an altered state or pursuing an experience, but unexpectedly, even when I was not in a good mood. They emerged seamlessly from the everyday world. Like the other participants in this study, these seminal sacred encounters have radically affected me. The majority of them have been astonishing and unexpected. These experiences broke through my everyday, often culturally-guided, comprehension of what designates the real and subjected me to wonder and mystery. Most of these experiences have been uplifting and wondrous but several have been frightening and baffling. In the following dated journal entries, recorded over the course of this study, I will describe a handful of my significant sacred encounters and my reflections throughout the research period. To assist the reader, I distinguish between the two types of journal entries by designating them either *Personal Experience* or *Research Reflection*.

Journal Entries

5/23/07 -- *Personal Experience*. After attending an art college for less than a year, when I was 19, I used the bulk of my college money to purchase land in the woods on our Island. From the time I was a small child I'd wanted to live in the woods and talk to the animals. The wild and undeveloped land that I purchased had no water on it. I learned through a local friend of the family that there was an older man on the island who was a water witch (dowser). My husband and I hired him to find water on the land. We came together on the undeveloped property. My mother joined us. His small delicate wife accompanied him in silence. He was tall, boisterous, and impressive: a hardy islander, in his seventies.

The tool of a dowser is a “Y” shaped stick of about 18 inches in length. As we traversed the rough and wild land, he put his big elephant skin hands on top of mine and held the thin willow stick with the tail of the “Y” pointing skyward with me. With force, the slim, Y-shaped wand turned. It turned forcefully enough that I felt the heat of friction in my palms. The wand turned exuberantly, pulled by the water under the moss. Soon, he graduated me from this momentary apprenticeship, he released his hands and I was on my own as he walked along side of me. The wand continued to determinedly point down. As I walked the abrasion of my palms was a sweet pain. I felt light and effervescent- full of the alchemy of water and wood. My heavy body was air and I was euphoric. The wand did not turn for my husband or for my mother who was visiting us that day.

Mr. Linney (not his true name) had dowsed the island wells for all of his adult life. The two local well drilling companies worked with him. As he had requested, we gave him a bottle of bourbon for his work. Once the well was drilled, his predictions, his wands predictions of where to drill our well, how deep the underground veins of water ran and how many gallons a minute we would get, were all true. Thirty years later the well is healthy and active for us.

I was about eighteen when I witched for water. For several days after initial dowsing, I walked around the land gleefully feeling the wands pull down to water, but then I felt that I was taking the gift too lightly and I never did it again. The incident was an epiphany for me.

About eight years later we, my two young daughters and my husband, lived on the land in a cabin we had built near the well witched by Mr. Linney. One cool night in the fall our neighbor drove up our driveway in his van. When he emerged from the vehicle we saw he carried something wrapped in a towel in his arms. It was an adult great horned owl. He

had hit the owl with his van and the owl had a broken wing. At that time on the island, there were no wildlife clinics. Indeed, at that time, we had no telephone at our cabin in the woods. Our neighbor knew of my love of animals and hoped that I would care for the owl. So we took the owl in. We were afraid of her. She was nearly two feet tall and hissed with menace.

The next day, from my mother's house, I called a biologist I knew and asked his advice in caring for the owl. I also referred to my wildlife emergency care book. My husband and I set the owl's wing with tape and Popsicle sticks and sprinkled a sulfa drug in the wound to prevent infection. The owl cried in pain. Despite the heavy gloves and towels we used to protect ourselves from claw and beak, we received some painful wounds ourselves. We built a cage out of chicken wire in the corner of our cabin and fed the owl dead mice caught by friends or pieces of liver covered in egg and egg shell.

Over time, the owl learned to use her beak like a wire cutter and escape from her cage. Many times we came home from town to find the owl perched on the back of the largest chair, the highest vantage point in the cabin. She could fly a very short few feet but no further. Sometimes at night, I would hear her calling to the other owls outside where they perched at the top of the great fir trees surrounding the cabin. My heart would hurt for her, her longing. Over time, I lost my fear of her and it seems she lost her fear of me as well. We became friends. Moving slowly, my hand open and my arm outstretched, so she could easily see my approach, I would come up to her and stroke the soft feathers on the top of her head and in the front of her chest. She would close her eyes like a happy cat. In the early spring we moved her cage outside, within view, beneath the tall firs. One night I dreamt of a white owl flying west towards the sea. When I awoke and went to see her in her enclosure, I found she had died. She is buried on the land under the most beautiful and tall noble fir tree.

Living with a great horned owl was one of the most rare and powerful experiences of my life. She was one of my greatest teachers. Many years later, I was talking with a friend who was a scientist (he'd received his doctorate at Harvard) as well as a falconer. He had raised and trained several falcons and hawks. I told him about our life with the owl. I confessed I had felt guilty, that I may not have taken care of her well enough or fed her properly as she died after living with us for only about 9 months. He listened intently. He told me a colleague of his was an ornithologist. From his colleague he'd learned the "common wisdom" was that a great horned owl would die within two weeks in captivity, and, when born wild, they were never friendly with human beings.

7/10/07 – *Research Reflection*. Bianca was describing the roots of her spirituality. She emphasized the word "physically" several times as she described going to the beach as a child in New Zealand . . . her bare feet feeling the ground, her naked child body in the sun and waters of the ocean, her sense that "this is a perfect day." As she spoke my own internal dialogue was suspended. I was captivated. I felt I was back with her feeling the heat of the sun, the ground under foot. This was a moment of awe. I was awed by the power and significance of her embodied experience. I felt I had gone through a secret doorway into her spiritual world, and her spiritual world was profoundly grounded in everyday experiences within nature. She spoke of her body with such honor as an aspect of nature. (Charlie mentioned a similar embodied spiritual sense too.) As I listened to her, my own emotions stirred. A twinge of sorrow, regret and envy unexpectedly rose up like ghosts, roused from my own childhood. I recognized them and then refocused on Bianca to deal with them later.

8/22/07 – *Research Reflection*. Discrimination—an ethical and theoretical conundrum or delicate balancing act for the field of psychology. I was looking over the APA

multicultural guidelines concerning respect and inclusiveness. How are the beliefs of Indigenous peoples, immigrants etc., which distinctly do not fall within Western sciences paradigm, taken seriously? I know of two immigrants in this doctoral program who keep their animistic spirituality to themselves.

What I have seen, even among most psychologists, many of whom I like and respect, is an immediate dismissal of such beliefs/experiences even as they espouse the commitment to upholding people's rights to have those beliefs and see them close-up. But if the beliefs (I would rather say "way of being in the world" is more accurate) are not truly heard and considered, then these other voices which emerge from non-dominant culture paradigms do not become a real part of the conversation. They are allowed, even supported, but still remain on the margin.

2/12/07 – *Personal Experience*. My familiarity with an animistic world began in early childhood. As I suppose it does for many children, according to early childhood development specialists. Every morning on the way to school I walked up a steep hill, with steps and metal guard rails, just below the campus of the school. One stormy morning with my hair scratching as it was blown across my face, the swishing noise of the trees in the background, I heard the wind speaking to me and felt its unseen presence. It spoke, not in the words of the English language, yet with a clear message. I knew that it was calling to me, beckoning me, and it had a message for me about my future. For many years, I told no one in this experience, to this day I have told only a few people. An Elder medicine man, a traditional Native shaman, told me I was wise not to tell many people. Still, when I have told him of my unusual experiences connected with nature, they are familiar for him, natural.

12/27/07 -- *Personal Experience*. Two weeks ago I went to the R. Circle. I wanted to go to this Native American run circle for some time. I was urged on to attend due to a dream I had over a month ago of being in the circle. I also dreamt that I wore an ancestral mask at that meeting. It was of a being with its mouth wide open in the shape of an "O." At the actual circle, I felt a little self-conscious, my natural introversion at play, but also aware of my ethnicity, my whiteness and privilege. The circle is open to all but lead by local, Native people. Still I felt a warm serenity within the group. I enjoyed the drumming and the Salish songs. The medicine person arrived late. He is called the memory keeper. An unusual androgynous person, also an artist, he dispersed his drawings of memories and legends around the central altar. Between drumming and singing there was also a potluck. We ate informally in our seats. Then the medicine person told stories first in the Native's language and then in English. He talked a good deal about the ancestors. He told of how the ancestors always are invited to the potluck to share the pleasure of food and the meal for the living. And as he spoke I remembered vividly the dream I'd had a few days before the circle when I was in California visiting my friend. I'd had a dream of going to someone's home to visit, and there was laid out a large table with a white tablecloth full of platters of food, where people were sitting, eating and milling around the table. Most of them were elders all dressed up in their finest clothes to celebrate the feast and being together. They exuded a sense of joy and calm equilibrium. They welcomed me graciously. At the end of the evening a small group of them gathered around me to show their affection and give me a message. In essence, what they said was something like "don't worry about the difficulties in your life, don't pay attention to your fears, everything will be all right in the long run."

6/22/08 – *Research Reflection*. She talked about embodiment and I was startled, even a little envious. For her, Bianca, there has been an at-homeness, a self acceptance I have not felt myself, not seen in the other people I have interviewed. This spirituality seems to feel less abstract but consciously I hadn't anchored it so soundly in the body. I will ask about embodiment in the follow up interviews with the others.

7/31/09 – *Personal Experience*. Several weeks ago I read an e-mail from the woman who sends out announcements to the Native American circle. She was announcing a formal sit-down dinner up at the old medicine house on the reservation. Once again my dream of several years ago came flooding back to me and I knew that the upcoming sit-down dinner was connected to my dream of the dinner with the elders, which I'd written down after the first circle I've attended. Saturday in the early evening over thirty-five of us gathered around the white tablecloth and finely laid out tabletops for dinner. The dream was coming into being. I saw the scene of my dream of over a year and a half ago.

11/10/09 – *Personal Experience*. It is strange how this journey has taken me in my private life as well as in the research for my dissertation. Unaccountably, organically, I have entered more deeply into one of the worlds I was seeking to understand more fully. I am reminded of the phenomenon called “going Native.” I have heard of ethnographers, anthropologists and psychologists sometimes “going Native.” I think I have become one of them, to some extent, although I was always inclined in that direction.

A couple of years ago, soon after I had started formulating my dissertation project, I was invited to the circle by a friend who had seen a poster announcing a talk by the medicine person. And when I saw the medicine person speak I was taken with not only the stories, but with his sweetness and brilliance. Now he calls me his sister and I see him for a short time

after the circle when I give him a ride home. Then, we have a chance to talk, to laugh, to reconnect.

It is a confusing experience sometimes for there is a good deal of obligation and responsibility required to be this deeply connected with not only the Native people but with nature as well. In keeping with this responsibility, several years ago I spent a significant number of hours over several years volunteering for a group whose aim it was to save wild lands in a local park. Sometimes, now, I am overwhelmed and unsure how to proceed. I wonder how to balance the everyday requirements of my life and work with this powerful relational spirituality, which now includes the Native community. My connection to this community has also led to sharing a measure of their suffering.

1/2010 – *Personal Experience*. Last night I attended my first Samish language lesson. The medicine man/ teacher told his three eager students that the soft “sh” sounds had been eliminated in the language many years ago, because the English people and missionaries thought it sounded like the devil's language. The original Samish language, Samisheelah, was a language full of soft whispering sounds. For many years I lived on San Juan Island and I recently learned that San Juan Island is the heart of this ancient culture. The teacher says he believes the culture is at least 50,000 years old. This ancient way of being in the world is transmitted through the language. Just a little bit of the language is deeply moving to me. I was told that the language originated in the sounds and experiences of the earth; the water emerging from the blow hole of a whale, the wind, the trees rustling in the wind. Since the inception of this dissertation project I have unexpectedly followed a remarkable turn. Unexpectedly, my passionate interest in animistic spirituality led me to a deep connection with the Native peoples of this natural place, this Northwest coast

ecosystem. For me, this has been the synthesis and epiphany of many often somewhat mysterious life experiences.

Research Reflection. At the end of our interview, Jennifer told me there was a prophecy of the native peoples that we all have to learn to walk in two worlds. I had no prior knowledge of this prophecy but I was not surprised by her words.

VIII. Descriptive Summary of the Phenomenon of Walking in Two Worlds

*“To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily.
To not dare is to lose oneself.”*

- Soren Kierkegaard

The experience of “walking in two worlds” is fundamentally challenging. One is aware of a deep schism between the norms of the majority culture and one’s core way of being in and experiencing the world. Yet, the rich web of relationships and wondrous experiences which emerge from such relationships is a source of comfort and even bliss. There is interconnectivity between eminence and transcendence. Paradoxically, for those who “walk in two worlds,” what is material in the natural world, including all manner of beings, maintains and yet transcends materiality. The phenomenological world beneath ideas and interpretations is communicative, inspired.

One is cautious to guard this in-spirited life-world from those who would not understand and perhaps would negatively judge it. One participates in and in some aspects is comfortable in the everyday, taken-for-granted world of the Western, culturally agreed-upon reality and functions in the dominant society; yet privately, one experiences a parallel world shared with other humans with like perspectives. An animistic worldview is both reinforced and honed by significant experiences that break through beyond cultural and social

influences: in a prophetic dream, in communication with an animal, the elements or uncanny intuition. This spiritual way of being in the world is dynamic and evolving. One's sense of self is enlarged through encounters with mystery, wonder and the profound sense of being a part of a transcendent whole -- a transpersonal unifying force which encompasses the world of nature -- of which we are a part.

Still, in the context of the dominant society, "walking in two worlds" may be a lonely, or private, at the least, socially separating experience. Conversely, connected to nature, dreams, and visions, the solitary aspect of the experience may be richly relational, transcendent and joyful. "Walking in the two worlds" has been described as similar to being "in the closet." Three of the six people who were interviewed commented spontaneously that walking in two worlds was analogous to being gay in our society. One may be "in the closet" in certain settings and with certain people, and "out" in others. There is a kind of subculture of like outsiders who share a way of being in the world not of the mainstream. It is more challenging for some than for others. "Living behind the veil" is another analogy mentioned by one of the participants. For those with an animistic worldview, the true self remains partially concealed, hidden from mainstream society.

IX. Limitations of this Study

*"See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grows in silence;
see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence...
we need silence to be able to touch souls."*

- *Mother Teresa*

In this study, sample size was small and variables such as sexual orientation, gender, or disability were not considered for recruitment of participants. Nevertheless, given the comprehensive and deep exploration of the participants' lived-world, the underlying structure

of the experience was successfully revealed. As stated in the methods section of this study, phenomenological methods draw credibility from an exhaustive discovery of the lived experiences of the participants and the sound representation of the essence of the experience presented in the findings (Polkinghorne,1989). It is possible, however, that the research participants were atypical. All of the research participants were referred through participants or colleagues and friends of participants. As such, there may be commonalities among them that distinguish them from other potential contributors. Furthermore, all of the people recruited for this study self-reported that they were without concerning mental health issues and history. There is a possibility that this information was not true although, as an experienced diagnostician with over twenty-five years experience as a therapist, I did not observe any evidence of alarming mental health concerns. However, some would consider those whose life-world has animism as its core exhibit evidence of mental health issues simply by virtue of their worldview.

Also, all of the individuals currently lived on the West Coast of the United States of America. Still, five of them were not originally from the West Coast of the United States. One of the participants was originally from another country (New Zealand). This spiritual worldview, as I have demonstrated in the Background and Literature Review, is global and is not unique to living in the Western United States. In addition, it may be that other questions or another methodology could have generated alternative or more meaningful understandings. Although I believe I am adept at connecting, another interviewer might have elicited more full disclosure from some or all of the participants. Furthermore, the interaction between interviewer and interviewee will always include relational dynamics unique to those involved which may or may not be of benefit to the research. I began this project with the

“walking in two worlds” metaphor. All of the participants resonated with this metaphor. Still, other titles: such as, “Hidden Animism” or a “Secret Life World” would have been true to the topic and findings. In the phenomenological and heuristic method, faithfulness to the phenomenon is essential and to that end, as researcher, I employed the phenomenological reduction in a disciplined attempt to push prior knowledge and assumptions aside to make way for the phenomenon to shine. Still, it may be that my own presumptions and biases affected the outcome of the study.

X. Discussion

*“Believe, when you are most unhappy, that there is something for you to do in the world.
So long as you can sweeten another's pain, life is not in vain.”*

- Helen Keller

Overview

In essence this study contributed to the body of qualitative work which 1) explores and champions multiculturalism, 2) challenges established knowledge systems and modernistic assumptions, and 3) unfolds a meaningful lived experience.

The ramifications of this research and the discoveries are relevant for clinical psychologists. This study expands perspective and thus enhances how clinicians assess and understand their clients; that is, it brings in a wider socio-cultural-historical context. Cultural influences, it seems, are all-too-often absent from diagnostic and treatment modalities. Clinicians are usually taught to focus on intra-psychic and interfamilial rather than socio-historical contexts when assessing and treating clients. The content and results of this study attest to the need to train therapists to understand not only the significance of cultural influences on their clients but also their own cultural historical background to gain insight

into the therapist's part in the inter-subjective realm between therapist and client. Greater perspective on one's life context can open up unrecognized prejudice and assumptions.

The discoveries from this study contribute to the body of knowledge into the lives of marginalized peoples in the socio-cultural context of their lives. This study has furthered investigation into the overlap between epistemology and culture. Knowledge systems are entwined with cultural worldview (these connections were extensively explored in the introduction and background section). Culture, knowledge systems, historical context, worldview, and personal psychology are tied together in complex ways.

At the risk of too lofty an aspiration, I propose that this dissertation may contribute to reawakening an embodied and re-souled existential understanding of being in the world. Barrett (1986) and Eisler (1988) recount the dispiriting of the Western world and its ripple effects through numerous cultural attitudes, institutions and behaviors. The natural world, women (as allied with nature in patriarchal philosophy and theology), and indigenous cultures in particular, have all suffered from the formidable shift from a relational social power structure (in ancient times and among many native cultures to this day) to a social power structure centered on objects, objectification and advancement. Barrett, a current philosopher, concluded that no matter how far as a culture we think we have progressed in a post modern era and in a capitalistic technocratic society, “. . . we are back with the disembodied consciousness of Descartes” (1986, p. 160).

Many individuals in our society walk in some form of two or more worlds, within multiple social and private roles. There are times and circumstances when the consensus-reality of the dominant culture, or certain aspects of that paradigm, are discordant to some people. The intensity of this sense of dissonance varies among individuals. This research

offers insights into people in such circumstances, for example, the experience of immigrants; gay, bisexual, trans-gendered individuals; bi-racial, multi-racial, multi -lingual individuals; individuals with unseen illnesses or disabilities, and other people whose way of being in the world, in some significant manner, falls outside of the norms or understanding of the dominant culture. Moreover, there is more to learn about how the context of various peoples' lives influences and enhances or suppresses their spontaneous experiences. Therefore, this research may be germane for those in other fields who study these influences, such as philosophy, sociology, transpersonal psychology, feminist studies, ethnography, and anthropology.

People tend to have preconceived notions of certain populations of people and their beliefs. People may over generalize when encountering people and worldviews dissimilar from their own. In addition to disclosing a lived human experience, the aim of the study was to challenge taken-for-granted Euro-American dominant culture assumptions of animistic worldviews and modernist knowledge systems. Hopefully, by facilitating deepened understanding, prejudice and discriminatory actions towards the marginalized people in this study may be decreased. For clinical psychologists, both clinically and ethically, it is imperative to assist marginalized individuals and groups to have a voice in counseling sessions, in family systems, and especially in the cultural discourse.

The cultural discourse affects all arenas of a person's life. Psychologists in their numerous roles, for example, as advocates, clinicians, educators, consultants and academics, have within the power of their profession and knowledge the ability to reduce prejudice and discrimination. Through giving voice in this research endeavor to those who are often silenced by oppression, my goal was to go beyond cross-cultural approaches to diversity

toward embracing multiple ways of knowing, perceiving and being -- to answer the call put forth by Duran (2006) for a decolonized epistemological hybridism.

Returning to the Literature

Of particular interest was the discovery that none of the individuals recruited for this study identified with the New Age movement. Topics such as shamanism and Wicca are common on the shelves of New Age book stores. The New Age movement has been described in derogatory terms as irrational and consumer-driven, spiritual materialism (Tisdell, 2006) and more positively as “. . . contemporary religiosities that emphasize personal transformation and healing” (Welch, 2002, p. 21).

New Age workshops and practices have all too often borrowed, without permission, from the sacred traditions of Indigenous cultures. All of the participants in this study discussed the intimate relational quality of their spiritual worldview. The continuity and depth of the subjects' worldview and their relationships seemed to them to set them apart from the New Age movement. This rich and nurtured relationality may be the missing element for those other seekers who continue to be unsatisfied and shop around for a transformative spiritual practice. Spirituality, at least animistic spirituality, is grounded in interaction rather than abstraction, in community rather than a purely individualistic venture. Clinicians assisting their clients with a search for meaning and/or a spiritual/religious search would be advised to encourage their clients to build a solid foundation of connection on which to build a meaningful spiritual practice.

In addition, although four of the participants described a period of several years in their young adulthood when they investigated other forms of spirituality, worldview and religion, all of the participants were approaching midlife or older and were, at this time in

their lives, committed to animistic spirituality. An understanding of the New Age movement may vary from the perspective of whether one is looking from the outside in or the inside out: those of us who adhere to an Earth-based spiritual worldview may look like New Agers to others but not identify with the New Age movement ourselves.

Several of the participants mentioned a fear that others might label them as crazy if they knew of their worldview but none of them felt they were in danger of “going crazy” nor had they ever had a psychotic break. In contrast to the participants, in my experience as a diagnostician, psychotic individuals are unable to discern everyday consensus reality from their delusions and hallucinations, and, even more significantly, they are unable to contain and manage their symptoms in order to interact with others in healthy relationships and daily activities. In other words, rather than being enriched by their unusual experiences and perceptions their lives are diminished by them.

One of the participants had a mild seizure disorder which she felt helped her to be attuned to spiritual realms. Neuroscience has attributed religious and or experiences among individuals with seizure disorders to brain function.” Individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) often experience extreme religiosity, suggesting that stimulation of the amygdale can infuse everyday experience with a sense of deep significance. In other words, its ability to inform the rest of the brain that we are experiencing something highly significant can be applied in an inappropriate manner leading to odd and delusional thinking” (Cozolino, 2010, p. 83).

Cultural acquisition was a crucial matter mentioned spontaneously and separately by two of the non-Native individuals. They felt it was important that their spiritual worldview and practices came from the ground of their own encounters rather than being borrowed from

other peoples' traditions. They each (Malissa and Charlie) felt this was an ethical concern. As Takaki (2008) noted, we have been acculturated to behave and believe that socially structured and sanctioned "whiteness" is not only the norm of experience but also is sanctioned as appropriate and subsumes the majority of paradigm beliefs and practices of other *lower* status cultures and subcultures. We, as a society, intentionally or not, "whitewash" alternative beliefs and practices. We, as clinicians, can both strengthen respect for such marginalized worldviews and practices and contribute to the dismantling of hierarchy when we encourage our clients and colleagues to pursue spiritual or other meaningful practices generated by their own actual experiences.

Reflections

As this study has come to completion, further questions and considerations have occurred to me. Further investigation into the individual background of people who ascribe to an animistic worldview might yield insights into other commonalities or differences they share. For example, the one participant who was the least perturbed by prejudice against Animism lived in a rural environment and reportedly had strong encouragement from her mother for her childhood connections with nature. Were these factors which facilitated resilience? The dominant culture could learn from the participants in this study, as well as others who successfully walk in two worlds, the difficult to overestimate the value of relationality. My medicine man friend and teacher once told a small gathering that in the ancient times grief was not uncommon but depression was unknown because people were always together -- bonded by love and cultural norms of reciprocity (personal communications, December 18, 2010).

In addition, I have wondered how sensory perceptual abilities and/or creativity might contribute to a person's affinity towards animism. Several of the participants were artists, one was a painter, two wrote poetry, and one was a dancer. As I mentioned previously, I have synesthesia. Synesthesia is the melding of two or more senses. Citing Arguelles (1975), Slattery (2005) stated that synesthesia "presupposes" a body and soul unity shared by consciousness which is drastically different from the conceived of understanding of consciousness of current society and most like ancient "so-called primitive societies" (p. 125). Furthermore, Abram (1997) (as cited by Slattery) proposes our innate "pre-conceptual experience is synesthetic" but we have become alienated from our own primary sensory perceptual experience "because scientific knowledge shifts the center of gravity of experience" (p. 126). Whitefield (2005) linked aesthetics to synesthesia and pre-linguistic knowledge. In other words, our sense of beauty originates from a co-constituted body-self - world interaction -- a pre- verbal dialogue with the world founds our primordial sense of aesthetics.

My medicine man friend and teacher told me the ancient Native people in this area also had this sensory -- perceptual -- capability. They implemented this ability, often considered an anomaly in Western culture, as a way to communicate in nature, utilizing it for such skills as navigation and hunting. One feature of my own synesthesia is a melding of sound, sight and motion. Sometimes, when I am most serene, I "hear" (with internal hearing) melody when I observe flowing water, waves or leaves falling. Often, when I watch a bird in flight, I feel the motion in my body as if I were flying -- merged with the bird yet still myself -- while simultaneously I "hear" a melody in sync with the movement of the bird's flight. As I mentioned in the heuristic account, the medicine man also told me the Native songs and

language originated in the natural environment. The Hindu people speak of the third eye whereas the Native people of this area spoke of the ear in the heart (personal communication, April 22, 2009).

"Noetic" is a rarely used word that comes from the Greek *nous*, meaning intellect or understanding. It gives us our word "knowledge," and means knowledge that is experienced directly, an illumination that is accompanied by a feeling of certitude. Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time (Cytowic, 1995, p. 4).

Cytowic has undertaken extensive research on synesthesia. He believes synesthesia is a way of knowing. The subjects Cytowic (1995) interviewed described the experience of synesthesia as real, reassuring and even blissful occurrences. He has studied many people with various cross-sensory kinds of synesthesia. He found that synesthesia is relatively rare in Western cultures; it is more common among women than men, and among left-handed individuals. He also found that synesthesia-like experiences often occur with epileptic seizures and from hallucinogens. In a recent issue of *Scientific American Mind*, research into sensations and body movements and how they affect the way we feel and think are upsetting old notions of cognitive functions. For example, researchers have found that people feel more warmly towards others while holding a warm cup of coffee or tea rather than a cold drink. Also people conceptualize time spatially, with the past seeming to be on the left and the future on the right. Even more interesting is the finding that people seem to have more

ethical concerns when they are aware of being in a physically clean environment (Carpenter, 2011, p. 30-45).

Margulies (1989) proposes that synesthesia is innate in all of us. Perhaps all children experienced synesthesia in the time of their lives before the acculturation that shapes how we perceive as well as informing us how we are “supposed to perceive....Synesthesias might well belong to a preverbal world,” he concludes (p. 29). It would seem that, in our culture, prelinguistic ways of experience and knowing are often considered underdeveloped even primitive; yet perhaps sensory perceptual, undifferentiated ways of knowing are the source of often overlooked mysterious and wondrous ways of experiencing the world .

Some of us as individuals and some cultures (perhaps more Earth-centered cultures) maintain this way of experiencing and knowing the world throughout a lifetime. As for myself, my synesthesia experiences are intensifying, evolving, and more frequent (or perhaps more conscious) than they used to be. I believe one factor which has affected the evolving nature of this phenomenon has been my increasing willingness to let it occur and even to relish it.

Like me, the participants in the study talked about their profound love of and relationship with the natural world. They seemed to carry a strong ethic of reciprocity and care for the environment. Such relationality and reciprocity inherent to this ancient yet enduring spiritual worldview are time proven prescriptions for healing the current environmental crisis. For centuries Indigenous peoples have lived in good relations with the natural world.

Most people raised in a Euro-centric society are heavily influenced by organized education which affects social, ideological and even neurological shaping. Animism,

imagination, and creativity are not usually celebrated in mainstream education. The question of how education may encourage or dissuade factors which might be associated with animism (creativity, synesthesia, hemisphere dominance) dovetails with questions of neurobiology. As noted above, it is of interest that most people with synesthesia are left handed (associated with right hemisphere dominance), the neglected hemisphere according to neuroscientist Taylor (2006). From my observation and initial investigation in this research, it seems that mainstream education tends to focus on predominantly left hemispheric functions and development. If this is so, what are the implications socially and ideologically? From these ponderings I formed the following questions for further research:

- How might one's family and social background affect how one responds to prejudice?
- Is there a connection between synesthesia and or creativity and an animistic worldview?
- How might one's childhood exposure to the natural environment affect openness to animistic beliefs and encounters?
- How might language and education attune or dissuade people from animistic understandings?
- How do specific learning modalities affect animistic experiences and perceptions?
- How might scientific endeavors, such as quantum physics and neurobiology, challenge and confound established paradigms? For example, what are the implications of Sheldrake's concept of *morphic fields* (2003) which suggests there is something like an invisible energy field connecting all living beings?

This is an epistemologically complex, and given the cultural-historical context, easily misunderstood topic. Animistic worldviews, discrimination, marginalization, and spirituality

are all sensitive topics. The existential experiences and worldview in this study are outside the socio-cultural and scientific norm. Given the serious potential for misunderstanding and prejudice attached to the subject of this study, I have found it challenging, risky, demanding, and, ultimately, deeply fulfilling to bring forward this subject and the life-world of those who walk in two worlds. I have sought to bring this phenomenon to the fore in an open and articulate manner with the hope of unlocking minds and hearts. I am grateful to have undertaken this worthy challenge.

XI. Creative Synthesis

“Humanity is placed within this complex network of space, sensibility, color and wisdom.”

-- Highwater

As an important and culminating part of my heuristic journey in this research, I share two poems and a collage which represent the Creative Synthesis of this exploration. The first, *Earth Songs*, was written mid-course -- soon after I had written a journal entry about the time my family and I lived in woods with the great horned owl. The second poem, *Destiny*, I wrote near the very end of writing this dissertation at the home of my friend and editor helper, Shelley Stump. I painted a picture of Shelley and her husbands' horse in trade for her assistance. On the last day of my visit, with the intent to complete this document, we had worked long hours on the fine points of language clarification and checking citations when I took a break to walk down to the beach (Shelley lives on the Oregon coast). With the forceful song of the Pacific Ocean surrounding me, I walked the shore and looked for rocks and shells. The stone I found, the first stone which stood out in my path, or rather the stone

that seemed to find me, was a rare, heavy, fist-sized rock -- an epiphany which birthed the *Destiny* poem.

Earth Songs

Do not succumb to the belief the Earth is less sacred than Madonna blue skies

*Do not be swayed by the tenacious whispers of righteous grey ghosts who came to this land
haunted by their own ancestral pall*

As if true, their decrees of the real silenced the emerald wisdom of the wild

*Do not let arrogance or apprehensions go untested ---
They may distract us from the astonishment of what is before us --- The giving of the world*

Be De-possessed from them ---

Then ---

*Walking at dusk, the night birds' wingtip brushes your cheek --- you hear the reverberation
of air and feather --- a unity in motion*

*Waters take in all of your mermaid-body and hold you. Dancing sparkling light on lake,
river, sea --surprises you with the unabashed revelation of its song*

*Dance and melody tingles into your sweet skin --- You are an instrument played by sentient
elements*

*Silence awakens you from a forest sleep . . . surrounding presence makes you hold your
breath and pay attention --- now your waking life and your nocturnal dreams unfurl twin
stories*

Mystery is salutation --- you've come to ways of knowing you'd been taught to avoid

*When songs of the Earth overcome ghost rumors --- Your heart is readied to welcome in the
great horned owl's spirit --- her lingering call will sooth your way through the darkest dark*

*Long ago she came to you for sanctuary --- with a broken wing --- lived with you and your
children --- She let you befriend her, stroke her breast and the soft place between her cat-like
ears*

She became your master teacher --- your sanctuary

Destiny

More slowly than a sea star

the stone walked down the sands

towards the surf

to be in line with the trajectory of my footsteps

She held the oldest wisdom to impart ----

ancient medicine to share

In the dull new moon black of her form

I thought I saw an instant of brightness

I picked her up --- held her palm size dense body close

I am your destiny ... She said

Then, yes, I saw the luminous shapes and veins of whiteness

formed around her rough rock darkness

Crystalline agate --- palest mellow golden

frost white and, finally

sheer silver-blue starlight

Swirling in soft mountain ranges, a broad deep river

She was transmuting from rock to light --- from coarse to smooth

A transfiguration over eons

But destiny is patient . . .

I wondered was the light fashioned on the outside, a cloaking?

Then, no, I held her up to the sky and it was plain to see her clear crystal heart

The light all the way through

Salutation



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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

The following open--ended questions will be discussed with the participants of the study during individual interviews:

1. Tell me the story of your spirituality?
2. How does your spirituality show up in your life?
3. What is most essential about your spirituality?
4. Has your spirituality ever posed challenges or difficulties for you?
5. How is your spirituality different than the more common religions; such as, Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism, etc.
6. How has it been having a different kind of spirituality?
7. Are there people in your life you share this with and in what contexts?
8. Are there people or places in your life where you don't share this---why?
9. What is it like to live your life in two worlds?
10. Is your spirituality related to the New Age Movement?

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form for Individual Interview

Antioch University Seattle Informed Consent Form

The Doctor of Psychology Program supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research and related activities. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, and that if you do withdraw from the study, you will not be subjected to reprimand or any other form of reproach.

Procedures to be followed in the study, identification of any procedures that are experimental, and approximate time it will take to participate:

I am being invited to participate in a study exploring the experience of being a person who practices a kind of Earth-based spirituality within the western United States. I hereby authorize Joanne Dorpat Halverson, a doctoral student at Antioch University, Seattle, to interview me about my thoughts and concerns with regard to my spirituality. I will participate in one audio-taped interview that will be approximately 60--120 minutes in length. I understand that I may complete a questionnaire at the beginning of the interview to provide demographic information such as race/ethnicity, age, marital status, religion. I understand that I will be asked questions regarding my own spirituality and social and cultural contexts that have impacted my experiences. I understand that the researcher, Joanne Dorpat Halverson, will give me the opportunity to review my answers and to confirm the accuracy of recorded data. I understand that the recording of the interview will be transcribed by the researcher and will be confidential. I understand that after the interview I will have an informal "debriefing" by phone or over free lunch (if I choose) with the researcher where I can ask any questions with regard to the study and process my thoughts and feelings about the interview. I understand that the researcher, Joanne Dorpat Halverson, may want to contact to me for clarification during the 3-6 months following the interview. I understand that the information in the dissertation text will be reported as patterns and themes and no identifying information will be published.

Description of any attendant discomforts or other forms of risk involved for subjects taking part in the study:

I understand that there is no physical risk but there is a risk of psychological stress. I understand that the nature of questions concerning and spiritual practices and spirituality may be emotionally trying. I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions and may terminate my participation in this study any time, without penalty. I understand that if I experience stress during or after participation in this study, I will be provided with a referral to a licensed mental health professional for one free psychological consultation to discuss my feelings about my participation in this research. I understand that I will receive a list of

names and phone numbers of mental health professionals working with people who practice Earth-based spirituality should I choose to seek treatment.

Description of benefits to be expected from the study or research:

It is expected that this study will contribute to a better understanding of Earth-based spirituality in Northwest North America and the findings will be used to advocate for accepting their beliefs and practices more sensitively.

Appropriate alternative procedures that would be advantageous for the subject:

Since this is an exploratory study and does not involve mental health treatment, there are no other alternative treatments. My participation in this study is on a voluntary basis; if I decide not to participate, or decline to continue at any time, I will still be able to receive mental health referrals if I so wish.

I have read the above statement and have been fully advised of the procedures to be used in this project. I have been given sufficient opportunity to ask any questions, I had concerning the procedures and possible risks involved. I understand the potential risks involved and I assume them voluntarily. I likewise understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without being subjected to reproach. I may also ask for a summary of the results of this study.

Signature _____
Subject and/or Authorized Representative

Date _____

Signature _____
Subject and/or Authorized Representative

Date _____

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Age

Ethnicity

Place of birth

Religious/spiritual choice

Years of residency on US west coast