

**TRANSFORMING THE DEEP PAST: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
HERMENEUTIC INVESTIGATION OF THE JOURNEY THROUGH HEALING  
TRAUMA AND THE QUEST FOR WHOLENESS**

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## **Dedication**

This research is dedicated to all persons who have endured and persevered through fears of judgment and ridicule from others and yet, still sought out therapists who embraced their deep desire to heal through the expression of past-life work and the non-dual path. Most importantly, to all the research participants in this study; thank you for sharing your beautiful journeys of healing and through your own truths and experiences, making a difference.

## **Abstract**

A phenomenological–hermeneutic method of research was employed to determine the nature of the lived experiences of adults as they transformed past-life trauma into wholeness in this life and the associated meanings attached to these experiences. Upon completion of the analysis, five distinct parts and 16 themes emerged. The themes illuminate the significance of childhood developmental trauma on the developing ego; the resulting splits of self; and the impact and manifestations of rejection, neglect, isolation, and abandonment within all life stages. Also illustrated is the journey through the healing of past-life and current-life trauma and the embracement of the non-dual path. The findings of this study appear to indicate that past-life regression and the non-dual perspective are beneficial healing paradigms for individuals who have experienced physical, sexual, and emotional trauma during childhood development.

*Keywords:* healing, past-life, past life, regression, non-duality, nonduality

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Gnotis te auton (Know thyself)*  
—Socrates

As a master's student of counselling psychology, there appears to be two, deeply imbedded yet seemingly conflicting aspects of human nature used to assess the world: scientific observation and humanistic and spiritual knowledge. One aspect is characterized by its rational logic and measurability of space, time, and objects; the other is marked by its mysteriousness and immeasurability. In order to become fully aware of the complexities of our human condition—the mind, body, soul, and spirit—one should not limit accessing solely the scientific approach or gaining knowledge from the isolated perspective of humanistic intuitive understanding. While communities that focus on understanding the supernatural and other aspects of the human experience on earth exist, the cultural preference appears to be for scientifically observable aspects. Academics, for example, do not often share their findings on the mystical and intuitive aspects of the human condition for fear of being associated with the occult (Rush, 2009).

An example of this is found in a book written by Brian Weiss (1988), *Many Lives, Many Masters*. This book is a recollection of a psychiatrist's experiences as he encounters a client that challenged his entire medical philosophy. Without any past-life therapeutic intention or intervention, during several therapeutic sessions, a client of Weiss experienced past-life recollections. However, Weiss was trained “to distrust anything that could not be proved by traditional scientific methods” (p. 10). Therefore, it took Weiss several years to begin to write about his therapeutic experiences and exploration of past-life work with his client. According to Weiss, “It took me four years

to write about what happened, four years to garner the courage to take the professional risk of revealing this unorthodox information” (p. 12). While his work is discussed in more detail in the second chapter, it is important to note that Weiss is an example of one academic professional who took a risk and wrote about his experiences. His objective was to make a small contribution of knowledge to a branch of psychology, which is beyond the current reach of science, known as parapsychology.

Transpersonal psychology is another branch of psychology similarly scorned by mainstream psychologists (Grof, 1998). Leading innovative transpersonal psychologists and thinkers such as Weiss, Grof, Wilber, Almaas, and Woolger, publish mostly books rather than peer-reviewed articles in professional and academic journals, which generally shy away from publishing alternative ways of healing that “have access to subtle forces that influence the material world in ways that leave the familiar laws of cause and effect far behind” (Nelson, 1994, p. xviii).

How do we make sense of these “subtle forces” and their healing powers, and what are the experiences connected with these unseen and unscientifically proven sources? How do we translate these unknowns into something comprehensible and tangible? According to Grof and Grof (1989), individuals who experience the vastness of the universe unfolding before them, with an intuitive understanding that they are one with the universe, and experience incredible visions of light, demons and gods, and sparkling currents of energy, “would instantly be labeled psychotic by most modern Westerners” (p. 2).

Deeply imbedded in mainstream psychiatry and psychology, as well as the Western scientific worldview is the notion that such experiences are not only

pathological, but also reflective of people who are superstitious, uneducated, irrational, and emotionally unsophisticated (Grof & Grof, 1989). Through the study of human consciousness, ancient traditions and spiritual literature confirm the healing powers of such extraordinary experiences, yet the Western worldview resists and dismisses these experiences (Grof & Grof, 1989). According to the authors, “mainstream psychiatry and psychology in general make no distinction between mysticism and mental illness” (p. 2). According to Grof and Grof, many individuals are healed by non-tangible unseen forces and experience the long-term benefits of mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

My worldview changed over a year ago. My supervisor asked me, “What is the difference between someone who is medically labeled psychotic and someone who is able to harness visions and assist in forensic work with the authorities?”

The answer appears to be based on cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Our culture values individuals who use their psychic capacities in a manner that is considered appropriate by cultural norms. That is, their psychic abilities demonstrate a capacity to gather information that is considered valuable and includes not only the past and present, which are the basic assumptions of science, but also aspects of the future, or to solve issues from the past or present that elude traditional scientific method. This extrasensory perception when used to help in forensic science seems to morph what would be called psychotic into “forensic psychic,” and thus the label of mentally ill is no longer attached.

This fascinated me, and after reading, *Healing the split: Integrating Spirit into Our Understanding of the Mentally Ill* (Nelson, 1994) and *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis* (Grof & Grof, 1989), I became further intrigued. This proposal is my endeavour to understand the theoretical aspects of

spirituality and the subtle intangible intuitive forces that impact daily life. I also seek to understand how we, as therapists, can assist our clients in healing through the use of methods that reflect the theoretical underpinnings of ancient traditions and beliefs.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of adults who have transformed trauma into wellness while simultaneously embracing a non-dualistic journey into wholeness. Through this exploration, particular themes will emerge and illuminate the meanings of the lived experiences of adults who have unlocked past-life trauma. Using a theoretical perspective of phenomenology-hermeneutics, this study proposes to understand the phenomena of past-life trauma and the lived experiences of adults who have transformed past-life trauma into wholeness, relieved of pain and suffering in their current life.

## **Research Questions**

Two research questions direct this study: 1) what is the nature of the lived experiences of adults as they transformed past-life trauma into wholeness? 2) What are the meanings attached to these experiences? These foundational and open-ended questions provide the initial roadmap. In this context, experiences and the meanings attached to those experiences are explored as emotions and feelings, thoughts, behaviours, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and any other psychological information relevant to the experience.

## Significance and Overview

This thesis seeks to explore and develop an understanding of the transformative aspects of past-life regression and the experience of the non-dual path as channels into healing, growth, change, and wholeness. According to Hunt (2004):

In the past 30 years a small body of literature has been published documenting the therapeutic uses of perceived previous-life memories and images. However, perhaps because of cultural prejudice, the perceptions and insights relevant to the topic are seldom discussed in psychological literature. The literature even more rarely addresses the philosophical, psychological, and professional effects and consequences experienced by the individual psychotherapists who have explored this therapeutic modality. It is important that their lived experiences and insight, and those of other experts in the subject of reincarnation, be more fully researched and made available to academic and psychological communities as well as the culture at large. (p. 24)

Depth psychology teaches and respects the soundness of the psyche and the nature of knowledge available from psychic experience through the “various developments of psychoanalysis: ego psychology, object relations theory, and self-psychology” (Almaas, 2004, p. 35). As a future therapist dedicated to understanding depth psychology, my goal is to help clients to heal. I consider client visions, images and psychic experiences real for the client. I seek to understand the impact of the client’s personal journey during the therapeutic process, while acknowledging that my personal beliefs are inconsequential and potentially harmful to the client’s own process (Woolger, 1988). Should I engage with a client in the therapeutic process and encounter past-life stories, regardless of memory, fantasy, or imagination, I intend not to let my own ignorance restrict or blind me. I must be open to the vast possibilities of my clients’ experiences and let these experiences teach me their truths.

Van Manen (1984) stated, “to borrow other people’s experiences and their reflections in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole human experience” (p. 16). Therefore, I expect to add to my own knowledge and perhaps, further engage academic and psychological communities in understanding the lived experiences and meanings attached to those experiences of adults who have transformed past-life trauma into current-life wellness through a non-dualistic transpersonal journey.

### **The Implicated Researcher**

The degree that I am implicated corresponds to the degree to which I believe I have experienced past-life recall. Although I have not explicitly associated my fantasies, daydreaming, desires, imaginary situations, feelings of *déjà vu*, or nocturnal dreams to past-life recall, I do not discount these mental images and imaginative powers as representations of actual experiences from another time (Fiore, 2005). I cannot consciously recall past-life experiences or the unlocking and transformation of past-life wounds and trauma in this current life, yet I remain open to all possibilities. As I seek the journey of the non-dual path in this life, I wonder if my interest in the possibilities of past lives is indicative of perhaps my own unknown past lives and trauma. Whatever meaning is associated with my journey and this work, I cannot deny that my personal experiences of psychological pain and suffering in this life are not partly or wholly embedded in my soul from past-life experiences. Therefore, while I am not aware if I have transformed my personal agony and suffering into wholeness, I am indeed implicated in this study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This section presents a review of the literature as related to the main concepts of this thesis and is divided into three sections: 1) a description of the quest for wholeness under the rubric of transpersonal psychology; 2) a description of trauma and abuse, effects and healing; and 3) a description of the contexts of past life from the perspective of depth psychology, past-life-regression therapy, and within its spiritual, religious, and philosophical contexts.

### **Transpersonal Psychology**

**Defining transpersonal psychology.** To understand the constructs of past-life recall, regressive/regression therapy, and hypnosis, it is important to recognize the umbrella, or the arm of psychology under which these constructs exist: transpersonal psychology.

Transpersonal refers to the psychological categories that transcend, or go beyond the normal limits and beliefs of scientific inquiry (O'Reilly, 2006). Stages of psychological growth, such as intuition and spirituality, which are not included in mainstream psychology and move beyond the reasonable and into the mystical, are important features of transpersonal psychology. Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) looked at the changes in the definition of transpersonal psychology over a course of 23 years. They found five major themes constant over these years: states of consciousness, higher or ultimate potential, beyond ego, transcendence, and spirituality (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992). A more recent study conducted by Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007) found over the course of 35 years, one hundred and sixty different definitions of transpersonal

psychology. Table 1, which incorporates the results of Lajoie and Shapiro, and Hartelius et al., presents three major themes.

**Table 1**

*Three major themes of transpersonal psychology*

THEME I	THEME II	THEME III
Transpersonal as Content of a beyond-ego psychology	Transpersonal as Context for integrative psychology of the whole person	Transpersonal as Catalyst for human transformation
beyond ego trans=beyond	pervading personhood trans=pervading	changing humanity trans=change

These emergent themes are a compilation of the analysis of published definitions of the meaning of transpersonal psychology, yet they may appear vague. Further clarity is provided by Hartelius et al.:

*[Transpersonal] as content* deals not only with states that are in some measure beyond ego, but also stages of post-conventional development, traits such as compassion and altruism, aspirations for beyond-ego development, and paths such as meditation and mysticism that are designed to cultivate this unfolding. Similarly, *transpersonal as context* covers more than the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions (and, we would add, the somatic presence) of the therapist in relationship to a client. It refers also to the recognition that ego is not separate from its many contexts, that it must be seen within the larger fabric of the embodied mind, the community, the social history, the environment, and the transpersonal ultimate. In addition, Western psychology lives and breathes within a global net of culture-specific psychologies, some of which take forms unfamiliar

to this society, but all of which inform an inclusive human psychology. Finally, *transpersonal as catalyst*, acknowledges not only personal transformation, but also social transformation. (p. 144)

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of transpersonal psychology can be boiled down into one sentence: “Transpersonal psychology studies human transcendence, wholeness and transformation” (Hartelius et al., 2007, p. 145).

**Historical roots of transpersonal psychology.** In the 1960s, Abraham Maslow, a well-known psychologist and then-president of the American Psychological Association, advocated for a third force of psychology after behaviourism and Freudian psychoanalysis: humanistic psychology (Grof, 2008). Maslow criticized the behaviouristic and psychoanalytic focus on elements of behaviour that had nothing to do with the higher order qualities of humans such as “love, self-consciousness, self-determination, personal freedom, morality, art, philosophy, religion, and science” (Grof, 2008, p. 47). For Maslow, the behaviourist’s focus on behaviour excluded consciousness and introspection, while the psychoanalysts reduced psychological processes and pathologies into simply the results of basic instincts (Grof, 2008).

Equally important during this time were the social and political revolutions occurring in the United States. Americans were protesting against war, conservatism, and the oppression of minorities (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). Rapid growth in the American economy and the advancement in communication technology produced a new culture of individuals searching for personal and collective understanding, fulfillment, and growth (Taylor, 1999). During this time Maslow teamed up with Anthony Sutich. Alongside Maslow, Sutich co-founded humanistic psychology (Ruzek, 2007). This new third wave of psychology created excitement among mental health professionals. Its

paradigm was multidimensional; it created a realm of possibilities encompassing emotional, psychosomatic, interpersonal, and psychosocial issues of the whole person (Grof, 2008). As American culture began to explore Eastern spiritual practices, mystic thought, meditation, and ancient and aboriginal wisdom, in combination with the popular use of psychedelic drugs, it became evident to Maslow and Sutich that an important aspect of the human psyche had been ignored: the spiritual dimension (Grof, 2008).

This renaissance and interest in Eastern philosophy made it clear to Sutich and Maslow that the humanistic psychology model was not inclusive of the spiritual elements that the American youth culture was demanding (Granger, 1976). In recognition of the missing pieces in the humanistic framework, in 1967 Maslow, Sutich, Grof, Fadiman, Vich, and Margulies met with the intention to create a fourth wave of psychology: humanistic/transpersonal psychology (Grof. 2008). Their intent was to create a therapeutic framework and approach that would fill the existing void by considering the entire human experience, which meant including non-ordinary states of consciousness through the integration of Eastern and Western philosophies (Grof, 2008).

In reviewing the historical beginnings of transpersonal psychology it is important to note that the actual term “transpersonal” is found in the literature as early as 1905. Credit must also be given to the following influences: the Jungian notion of analytical psychology, specifically archetypes and synchronicity; William James, who described the flow of thoughts in the conscious mind as “stream of consciousness,” an idea also found in Buddhist teachings; James Hillman, who furthered Jung’s theories on archetypes and is considered one of the founders of archetypal psychology; the spiritual psychology of Robert Sardello; psychosynthesis, founded by Roberto Assagioli; logotherapy, made

popular by Victor Frankl; and the theories of Timothy Leary, Michael Washburn, Charles Tart, and Ken Wilber—all of which have contributed to transpersonal theory as it is understood today (Granger, 1976; O'Reilly, 2006).

**The two giants: Wilber and Almaas.** To appreciate the importance of transpersonal psychology, the journey of non-dualism, and the transformation of self through the healing of past-life trauma, the contributions of Wilber and Almaas are examined. Through their theoretical frameworks, an ancient Eastern perspective is modernized, presented in language that assists Western understanding of what constitutes human nature.

To further understand the depth of transpersonal psychology, a description of the meaning of “non-dual” is required. This term means exactly what it sounds like; it is the opposite of “dual” or “twice” (Wilber, 2000). According to Wilber, the real world in the non-dual or “one” state is:

[Given] to you once, immediately—it is one feeling, it has one taste, it is utterly full in that one taste, it is not severed into seer and seen, subject and object, fragment and fragment. It is a singular, of which the plural is unknown. (p. 207)

Another definition offered by Fire (2010) provides further clarity:

Nondual consciousness specifically refers to that experience in which one's sense of internal self (“I”) is no longer experienced as separate from external phenomena (world). (p. 4)

**Ken Wilber.** Transpersonal theorist and philosopher Ken Wilber (2000) conceptualizes human nature to include the development not only of the mind and the body, but also the spirit and the soul. He formulated an integral theoretical approach to understanding the human development that combines Eastern and Western philosophy,

spirituality, and psychology. Wilber's Spectrum of Development is a detailed 10-level map divided into three separate phases of development that systematically describes and outlines both the processes of normal maturity and of the resulting pathology when individuals fail to integrate and transcend the previous levels.

The first two phases, which include six of the 10 levels of development, are associated with the mind and body and incorporate Western theories of human development. The third phase, which includes the final four levels of human development, incorporates those aspects of self as they relate to Eastern notions of soul and spirit. Wilber (2000) stated that these 10 levels or three phases of development represent the body, mind, soul, and spirit. Yet they are not like rungs on a ladder that must be climbed; rather, they resemble interwoven concentric circles where the developmental levels progress at times independently, interdependently, or at other times simultaneously. Wilber (1996) described each level as containing a three-step process that must conclude before the level can be transcended and the individual moves on to the next developmental level. The self must first identify and become infused (step one). It then must differentiate from or transcend (step two); and finally, before moving to the next level, the self must integrate and include the previous level (step three) (Wilber, 1996).

It is important to understand that trauma at any of the levels that interferes with this three-step process can create a fixation or pathology, leaving the self stuck at the fusion, differentiation, or integration stages (Wilber, 1996). If the self does not progress through each of the stages in order, it will not transcend but rather disassociate, repress, and regress (Wilber, 1996). According to Nelson (1994), spiritual growth hastened at the

expense of the ego may often trigger an occurrence of *altered states of consciousness* (ASC), which can create great harm if the ego is not fully integrated and developmentally ready to be transcended. When transcendence occurs during an ASC, the transcendence itself may be premature, and the person may regress to a lower developmental level than the level that had been reached before the actual ASC experience (Wilber, 1996).

The following outlines the three phases of Wilber's Spectrum of Development, followed by further explanation of these developmental levels (Wilber, 1996).

Phase 1 is the pre-ego structures of consciousness and includes the three levels: 1) sensorimotor, 2) impulse emotional, and 3) representative mind. Phase 2 is the development of the ego structure of consciousness and consists of the next three levels: 4) rules and roles, 5) identity, and 6) logic and vision. Phase 3 is the transcendence of ego and includes the final four levels: 7) psychic, 8) subtle, 9) causal, and 10) non-dual (Wilber, 1996).

*Phase 1. Level 1: Sensorimotor (birth of the physical self).* This level is where the self must differentiate itself from the primary matrix (mother). If the infant fails to transcend this level, severe affective disorders can result, such as psychosis and schizophrenia (Wilber, 2000). In level one, infants are not grounded and cannot tell where their physical self begins and ends (Nelson, 1994).

*Level 2: Impulse emotional (birth of the emotional self).* At this stage the individual (ages 15–24 months) can differentiate itself from the physical world, but cannot differentiate from the emotional self and boundaries; or normal narcissism (Wilber, 1996). If the self gets stuck in fusion, this is often where narcissistic personality disorder originates, and if the self gets stuck in differentiation or starts the process but

does not integrate, then the self dissociates and issues such as borderline personality disorders surface (Wilber, 1996, 2000).

*Level 3: Representative mind (id, ego, super-ego).* At this stage, if all has gone well in the first two levels, the self (ages 2–7 years) is not only physical sensations with impulses and emotions; the self can now utilize concepts and symbols that are a part of consciousness and awareness (Wilber, 1996). Since the self can think of the future, things can creep into the mind that are not present before it. Consequently, problems may evolve between psychic aspects and splits can occur creating issues such as anxiety, neurosis, and depression (Wilber, 1996, 2000).

*Phase 2. Level 4: Rules/roles.* This is an important stage as the self (ages 6–14 years) learns to take rules and roles from the “other” and begins to see that the worldview may not be the same as the view of self (Wilber, 1996). The self is no longer relying on the body, emotions, and immediate impulses. When the self has had interruptions in any of the three-step processes and does not integrate, problems arise around script pathology, or following the rules and roles of social norms.

*Level 5: Identity.* According to Wilber (2000), this is an important stage because the self (ages 11–15 years) can now think about thoughts, which means the self can begin to question and judge the rules and roles from the previous levels. Problems that can manifest during this age include identity neurosis, which is like mid-life crisis, reliance on a false self, and undifferentiated narcissism (Wilber, 1996).

*Level 6: Vision-logic (existential).* This is the last stage of development that Western researchers recognize in human development (Wilber, 1996). Vision-logic is an awareness that synthesizes and integrates self. The self is aware of the experiences of

mind and body, resulting in an assimilation of responsibility, freedom, and choice. The self is able to confront the realities of existence: death, freedom, authenticity, aloneness, relationship, and the meaning of life (Yalom, 1980). Problems during this stage are commonly called existential crises. According to Corey (2009), existential crises occur when the self sees itself as a victim without any choices. This creates issues of anxiety, fear of aloneness and isolation, lack of identity and freedom, and a life with questionable meaning.

*Phase 3.* Issues with process of integration within the third developmental phase can show up as peak experiences or psychotic breaks that Wilber (1996) calls Kosmic Terror, Kosmic evil, and Kosmic horror. It is not within the scope of this paper to investigate these psychotic breaks, however, it is important to understand that if the self has not successfully integrated all of the previous levels, or perhaps has only integrated portions thereof, such experiences can be devastating, leaving the self unsure, unstable, and vulnerable to psychic disorders (Wilber, 2000).

*Level 7: The Psychic.* In this level, the self transcends its mind-body identity into an existence outside of itself. The central identity of self becomes all living things, human and non-human, no longer any separation between subject and object (Wilber, 1996).

*Level 8: Subtle.* At this level, the self can experience a type of mysticism called deity mysticism, which involves the self's own archetypes and a union with one's "god" (as defined by the self) (Wilber, 1996). For example, a Christian may see an angel or a saint; a Buddhist may see the blissful body of the Buddha. In either example, it is a

subtle interior illumination of intensity (Wilber, 1996). This level does not exist in the psyche but is rather available through transcendental insight (Wilber, 2000).

*Level 9: The Causal.* This level is referred to the level of the “sage.” The self witnesses the world as well as its own observing self. It sees the ego, the body, and the natural world (Wilber, 1996). The self is no longer the body, mind, or ego. Pure consciousness and awareness is everywhere in all things; the witness or the observing self is pure emptiness (Wilber, 1996).

*Level 10: The non-dual.* This level is referred to as the absolute end point of development or enlightenment. The individual has transcended all previous levels and the entire spectrum of consciousness, becoming a witness to all things. Wilber (1996) described this level as a state of being where:

[You] simply rest in pure observing awareness—you are not any object [that can be seen]—not nature, not body, not thoughts—just rest in that pure witnessing awareness. And you can get a certain—sensation of freedom, of release of great expanse. (p. 206)

As stated earlier, the first two phases appear to parallel aspects of the developmental stages of the human psyche that are commonly accepted in mainstream Western psychological thought; it is the last phase, however, which follows Eastern thought and incorporates the concepts of soul and spirit. According to Wilber (1999), the soul has two distinct characteristics: it is the keeper of virtues of Karma, both good and bad, and wisdom. This notion lends itself to the doctrine of reincarnation, which appears in Eastern and mystic traditions. Wilber (1999) suggested it is not the mind or the reincarnate that travels through many lives but the soul.

In further discussions of past-life memory, Wilber (1999) suggested that these memories are an aspect of the soul. The soul is timeless and when it thoroughly discovers the entirety of spirit, there is no longer a sense of separation between the individual, the soul or the mind. Therefore, the individual, soul and mind become fully transcended as they discover spirit and dissolve into the wholeness of spirit. It is this transcended all-encompassing entity of spirit that transmigrates through many lives, bringing with it expressions of previous experiences with all its virtues and wisdom (Wilber, 1999).

**A. H. Almaas.** The work of Almaas (2004) does not embrace any one mystical or religious expression. Rather it is a combination of several traditions, including the foundational building blocks of psychology and science, and focuses on understanding the nature, functioning, and development of the soul with reference to lived experiences. According to Almaas (2004), Western mainstream psychology and modern science have no consideration for the soul.

Almaas has written volumes of work that have contributed to the field of transpersonal psychology; in keeping with the intent of this thesis, however, the following discussion is limited to the exploration of what is “soul,” how the soul functions, and how the ego prevents the non-dual path by placing barriers around the functions of the soul. In this thesis, I use the term “soul” to refer to the “whole self, including all its elements and dimensions” (Almaas, 2004, p. 16).

What is soul? Soul is something we cannot study; it is not physical, electromagnetic, or gravitational. It cannot be seen; rather it is considered an evolving system of pure awareness and consciousness (Almaas, 2004). Awareness and

consciousness includes our experiences, perceptions, changing capacities, faculties, and potential (Almaas, 2004). As the soul has no form, it is holographic in the sense that it may identify with the entire shape of the body, or contract and expand, all the while maintaining its pervasive properties and capacities (Almaas, 2004). This leads to the notion of oneness with the universe, a sense of existing and being with the world and not separate from the world (Wilbur, 1999). According to Almaas (2004), "When we begin to experience consciousness directly, a whole new world opens up. Rather than the normal sense that we are seeing the world as an external object, we begin to perceive the universe from within" (p. 31).

The soul is considered an open and living dynamic system of consciousness capable of self-organizing potentials (Almaas, 2004). According to Almaas (2004), the soul functions through a concept known as *autopoiesis*:

Autopoiesis is the mechanism that makes living beings into autonomous systems; it is the function of continuous self renewal through the exchange with the environment and the regulation of this process in such a way that integrity of structure is maintained. (p. 556)

Understanding soul from this perspective paves the way to understand further that the soul lives within the living organism's environmental context of space and time with characteristics of "emotional, mental, spiritual, social, aesthetic, political and cultural dimensions" (Almaas, 2004, p. 557).

The malleability and flexibility of the soul required for self-renewal and autopoiesis in order to mature into the non-dual path of wholeness are met with challenges presented by the rigid and fixated structures of the ego (Almaas, 2004). In order for the soul to transcend, its previous structures cannot be preserved; the ego,

however, often becomes attached to these formative structures that resist growth and maturity (Almaas, 2004). Almaas observed that it was “through this attachment to established structures the soul tries to remain in static equilibrium, antithetical to her nature of open non-equilibrium” (p. 558). The result is a lifeless, mechanical, static soul that is unable to self-organize, transcend, and mature. Unable to engage in autopoiesis, the soul subsequently moves more towards entropy and collapse—but not destruction (Almaas, 2004). The ego has suffocated the soul, thus preventing the soul from transcending and freeing the ego. As Almaas (2004) noted, “[This] accounts for the continual suffering of ego life, and its hopeless and incessant attempts at balancing itself. Egoic life is bound to lead toward disorganization and breakdown, not renewal and evolution (p. 559).

According to Almaas (2004), it is the result of deep spiritual work and inner transformation that frees the soul from the rigid static structures of ego. This then liberates the soul, allowing it to transform earlier immature structures into mature ones. Almaas (2004) eloquently described the ego’s release of the soul as the realization of wholeness or the non-dual nature of oneness:

[Our] soul is then not constrained to form herself only into what we think of as a person with arms and legs. Our inner experience can be released from this body image, and we become free to experience ourselves as a flowing river of luminous consciousness, a bright star of presence, a rich planet of life, a rose of love, a lava flow of energy, a night sky of depth, a blue sky of inner rest, and so on. Our feelings are no longer constrained to the ordinary emotions of fear, greed, aggression, sadness, depression, and so on. We can now experience our inner feelings as bright and happy sun of joy, a solid and stable silver moon of will, a warm honey of fullness, a fresh pool of innocence, and so on. Our mind will be freed from obsessive thoughts and limiting self-images, to manifest diamonds of

clarity, jewels of lucidity, gems of insight, scintillating brilliance of knowledge, and so on. (pp. 89–90)

Understanding the structures of the soul and the roles of spirit and ego leads to further inquiry into those elements that impede the healthy, progressive journey of the soul.

### **Trauma and Abuse**

According to Levine (1998), trauma is generally defined to include some element of violence, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; witnessing war and other atrocities; and natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, and floods. Levine (1998) stated that trauma is not defined by its specific characteristics; rather, it is about the experiential sense of how the trauma “feels.” Instead of using common descriptors and events to define trauma, Levine (1998) stated that different people react to different events in different ways. Levine identified several protective or risk factors that determine the individual’s internal response when experiencing a potentially traumatic event:

- 1) The event itself, 2) the context of the person’s life at the time of the traumatizing event, 3) the physical characteristics of the individual, 4) the persons learned capabilities, 5) the individuals experienced sense of his or her capacity to meet danger, and 6) history of success or failure. (pp. 49–52)

Determining what causes trauma is difficult. Levine (1998) suggested that awareness of the traditional understandings of trauma is important. The therapist must consider the above factors as well as the individual when contemplating the cause of traumatic symptoms. Levine stated that the resulting pathology of trauma or the *felt sense* becomes locked within functions that are regulated by the brain, such as eating,

sleeping, sexual function, and general activity. Trauma impacts brain functions and becomes frozen or stored in the brain. To survive, maladaptive thoughts and feelings burrow into the mind. In an effort to contain the uncharged frozen energy, behaviours labeled as pathological may occur, such as anxiety and eating disorders, alcohol and/or drug abuse, hyperactivity, promiscuity, and other mental health issues.

Levine (1997) explains why exposure to trauma manifests as mental health concerns. He noted that it is important to understand how memory works in order to understand how trauma affects us. There are two types of memory—explicit (conscious) and implicit (unconscious). The relationship between these two types is important to understand when trying to resolve or comprehend the mechanisms of our mind/body connection and trauma (Levine, 1998). As Levine says, it is the implicit memory that guides most physical activities and links them into meaningful acts. For example, the actions required to learn how to ride a bicycle are difficult to label or recall how they may have been learned. But several smaller unconscious physical actions were put together to create a larger action and are implicitly recalled each time one rides a bicycle (Levine, 1998). Considering that these procedures are not conscious, attempts at conscious learning are counterproductive. Levine further stated: “[Trauma] is about procedures the organism executes when exposed to overwhelming stress, threat and injury. The failure to neutralize these implicit procedures and restore homeostasis is at the basis for the maladapted and debilitating symptoms of trauma.” (p. 116).

According to Levine (1998), the body responds to a “library” of reactions when threatened or injured in order to protect and defend itself. These reactions are visceral, autonomic nervous system responses. Levine (1998) stated that:

[In] response to threat and injury we orient, doge, duck, stiffen, brace, retract, fight, flee, freeze, collapse, etc. All of these coordinated responses are somatically based-they are things that the body does to protect and defend itself. It is when these orienting and defending responses are overwhelmed that we see trauma (p. 116).

According to Levine (1998) “trauma is fundamentally a highly activated incomplete biological response to threat, frozen in time” (p. 116). Essentially, what happens is that the body cannot access or utilize the required pathways of energy release via fight or flight. As Levine (1998) states, the energy then becomes trapped in: “[Specific] patterns of neuromuscular readiness and the afferent feedback to the brain stem generated from these incomplete neuromuscular/autonomic responses maintains a state of acute and then chronic arousal and dysfunction in the central nervous system” (p. 116).

If the body is unable to release energy, the nervous system, in a constant state of self-perpetuating arousal, becomes overloaded. If energy cannot be released, mental health issues such as dissociation and other pathologies compensate in the effort to regain some form of equilibrium. These are then recognized as symptoms of trauma (Levine, 1998). This splitting of consciousness or dissociation related to the exclusion of unpleasant memories is a concept from our forbearers of psychodynamics, beginning with Janet and Freud (Meyerson & Konichezy, 2009). Over one-hundred years of studies have focused on the psychopathological aspects of trauma, creating a solid body of documentation indicating that “dissociation relates to threatening and overwhelming

events interfering with integrative mental capacities" (Meyerson & Konichezy, 2009, p. 135). According to Ogden, Minton, and Pain (2006):

[The] debilitating, repetitive cycle of interaction between mind and body keeps past trauma "alive," disrupting the sense of self and maintaining trauma-related disorders. Many people are left with a fragmented memory of their traumatic experiences, a host of easily reactivated neurobiological responses, and baffling, intense, nonverbal memories-sensorimotor reactions and symptoms that "tell the story" without words, as though the body knows what they do not know cognitively. (p. 3)

It is through the reoccurring reactions that the individual either plays out the trauma as the victim or as the victimizer (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Oddly enough, the behaviours are often paradoxical in nature and fall into three categories: 1) self-destructiveness, 2) harm to others, and 3) victimization (van der Kolk et al., 1996). According to the authors, uncoupling the fear and anxiety associated with traumatic memories from the dissociations may be a way to prevent individuals from re-terrorizing themselves and others.

Levine (1998) sees hope within the experience of trauma, "because every injury exists within life and life is continually renewing itself, within every injury is the seed of healing and renewal (p. 123). He endorses shamanic culture when referring to healing. Although the shamanic understanding of soul and trauma will be covered in more detail later in this chapter, it is worth mentioning here that Levine explores the commonality between contemporary views of his clients' experiences and the ritual practices of shamanism. Many of Levine's clients repeatedly state that their "soul has been taken, raped, strayed or is lost, or they are in spiritual limbo and missing important parts" as a result of traumatic experiences. Levine believes that Western society has much to learn

from shamanic healing; what is most paramount, however, is that practitioners restore wholeness to their clients. Levine respects and accepts shamanic healing rituals, even if such rituals are framed as uniting wandering lost souls with the physical body.

Almaas (2004) views the experiences of trauma and abuse on the soul slightly differently yet resulting in outcomes similar to those of Levine. These outcomes show up as disassociations from essential presence or ability of the soul to expand, contract, transcend, and mature.

According to Almaas (2004), “[T]rauma is any experience that the soul is not able to tolerate with the resources available to her at the time of the event” (p. 171).

Traumatic events are different in emotional make up and material than abuse. Trauma may be physical, emotional as in related to a physical trauma, witnessing abuse or emotional trauma to others; being subjected to others’ unkindness and mistreatment; or as related to loss and bereavement (Almaas). Upon experiencing trauma, the soul goes into survival or emergency mode. Part of it freezes up emotionally and energetically, and splits off or dissociates from consciousness. Having rejected part of itself, consciousness thus reacts in ways that may not be initially noticeable to the individual and show up later as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Almaas, 2004).

Almaas (2004) explains that trauma is a result of resilient and repeated messages that become fixated in the soul and part of the entire ego structure. Abuse of this nature occurs early in life and may include such experiences as “abandonment and loss, hatred, judgment, severe intrusions and lack of empathy” (p. 170). The soul survives, but is imprinted with the memories, thoughts, and feelings related to the abuse. The imprinting of the soul changes its structure, leaving its malleability now restricted, and prohibiting

the soul from transcendence and maturity (Almaas). The split-off or dissociated frozen soul becomes part of the ego's identity or the individual's persona. According to Almaas, in order for the individual to be free, "one has to work on the structures that have developed through this abusive history and learn to disidentify from them" (p. 181).

### **Contexts of Past Life**

**Depth psychology.** The defining characteristic of depth psychology, developed in the early 20th century, is its exploration of the unconscious mind as a means toward understanding human nature. After a brief explanation of depth psychology, this section probes further into the residency of soul within the realms of depth psychology and past-life-regression therapy.

Freud often considered the father of depth psychology. Freud is often credited with the discovery of the unconscious mind, after which human behaviour could no longer be viewed as an assumption of flawless rationality (Gelb, 1974). While Freud saw the unconscious mind as a place holding repressed memories, Jung, a disciple of Freud, saw the unconscious mind as the true basis of the human psyche, a place where consciousness arises. Jung believed the unconscious exists underneath the conscious mind—a translucent field representative of repressed or painful memories that are forced into the unconscious because of early painful experiences (Gelb, 1974). These painful memories show up "as dreams, slips of the tongue, memory lapses and neurotic symptoms" (Gelb, 1974, p. 288).

Jung identified two separate domains of unconsciousness: the collective unconscious and the personal unconscious. According to Gelb (1974), Jung differentiates the unconscious as follows:

[The] unconscious contains...two layers, the personal and the collective. The personal layer ends at the earliest memories of infancy, but the collective layer comprises the pre-infantile period, that is, the residues of ancestral life. Whereas the memory-images of the personal unconscious are, as it were, filled out, because they are images personally experienced by the individual, the archetypes of the collective unconscious are not filled out because they are not forms personally experienced. On the other hand, when psychic energy regresses, going beyond the period of early infancy, and breaks into the legacy of ancestral life, then mythological images are awakened: these are the archetypes. (p. 289)

While Jungian theory is not the focus of this thesis, further understanding of Jung's depth psychology is nonetheless merited, as it reveals how the soul functions through archetypes. Archetypes reach beyond the individual psyche and are important pieces of the collective unconscious (Hopcke, 1999). They are universally recognized images or patterns of thinking, often viewed as conduits where energy from the collective unconscious flows and is projected onto consciousness and thereby is translated into action affecting human behaviour (Rush, 2009). The archetypes have incredible power to sway conscious behaviour; often the ego becomes overwhelmed and overpowered by the archetypal image, which can manifest in something as banal as ego inflation to far more serious conditions such as psychosis (Rush, 2009).

According to Woolger (2001), a Jungian psychologist, the experiences of psyche and archetypes are often dismissed by Jungian psychologists to simple mythology or some kind of hallucination or imaginary event. By contrast, Woolger believes these events are real experiences, memories contained within the psyche, thus necessitating a reworking of what is meant by imagination. Further discussion on Woolger's theories will be presented in the section on past-life-regression therapy.

In modern parlance, the words *psyche* [Greek] and *soul* [English] are synonymous (Underwood, 2002). It is Jung's notion of psyche that offers the idea of soul as a tool for healing when Jung and Jaffé (1989) defined the psyche as a process or as the inner and outer workings of all aspects of *self* that included spirit, soul, idea, consciousness, and unconsciousness. Hopcke (1999) suggested:

For Jung and Jungians, *soul* describes much more evocatively and correctly the vast range of human phenomena that one calls psychic, phenomena that Jung believed to be the true focus of psychology: the individual soul, with its conflicts, heights, depths, and uniqueness; the collective soul, the world soul, one's sense of humanness shared with others; and the transpersonal, supra-individual soul of the metaphysicians and theologians, soul in the spiritual and religious sense, as a manifestation of the mind of God, the objective psyche beyond human understanding. (p. 38)

Consideration of Jung's theories on the collective unconscious and the elements contained therein suggests the possibility for past-life-regression therapy to open the door on the soul's evolutionary developmental experiences. Is it the experience of the *felt sense* of soul in past-life-regressive therapies that promotes understanding of *self*? Does this experience manifest as healing of past-life trauma, thus propelling one forward into the blissful experience and transformation of self into wholeness? Are inflated egos, neurosis, psychosis, and other mental health issues, in part or whole, related to past-life trauma/experiences? Do past-life-regression-therapy techniques connect individuals with the archetypes of all humankind, paving the way to heal past traumas and the future of mankind?

In his earlier years, Jung was uncertain of prenatal or pre-uterine memories, but, as mentioned earlier, he was certain of inherited archetypes (Hunt, 2004). In later years, however, he speculated on rebirth:

I could well imagine that I might have lived in former centuries and there encountered questions I was not yet able to answer; that I had to be born again because I had not fulfilled the task that was given to me. (1961, p. 318)

**Grof's holotropic breathwork.** Another therapist grounded in psychoanalysis and depth psychology is Stanislav Grof. Through experiments with psychedelics, Grof experienced firsthand that consciousness was not a product of matter but rather something bigger. He speculated that consciousness could create matter and not the other way around, which in the 1970s was the popular opinion (Grof, Grob, Bravo, & Walsh, 2008). It was Grof's experience with Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) that compelled him to leave psychoanalysis behind. His psychedelic experiences were dynamic and profound. They revealed a personal and historical analysis of his life previously unknown to him. He experienced an out-of-body experience and the sense that he was "all there was" without boundaries or any other type of containment on Earth (Grof et al., 2008, p. 4). This propelled him into a lifelong study, spanning 50 years, of the states of consciousness. In an effort to duplicate the effects of psychedelics, Grof, along with his wife Christina, created *holotropic breathwork*. Holotropic is a composite of two Grecian words and literally means "oriented toward wholeness" (Grof, 1998, p. 5). Holotropic breathwork is a technique that embraces hyperventilation, evocative music, and bodywork that moves clients through extreme states of consciousness toward wholeness (Grof et al., 2008).

It was within this framework of holotropic states and experiential psychotherapy that Grof encountered past-life memory with his patients (Grof, 1998). He stated “past-life experiences can thus contribute significantly to the understandings of psychopathology and play an essential role in successful therapy” (p. 166).

**Plato revisited.** Looking further into the historical timeline of depth psychology, Greek philosopher Plato was already contemplating the rebirth of the soul (Moody, 1976). According to Rush (2009), Plato believed “[T]hat there existed a fixed number of souls, composed of a substance whose essential quality was life and belonged, in its perfection, to the realm of being, the transcendental world of ideas” (p. 41).

In the *Republic*, Plato tells the story of Er. Found here in this ancient literature is reference to the manner of the soul’s rebirth and movement from life to life (transmigration) (Hunt, 2004).

The story of Er refers to a Greek soldier who dies upon the battle field and as his soul leaves his body and joins all the other souls, they move through a peaceful and loving space or passageway to be met by the divine. Er is then sent back to the physical world to inform those remaining of this other world, the soul world (Moody, 1976).

Moody (1976) interpreted Plato’s story of Er as follows:

[The] soul comes into the physical body from a higher and more divine realm of being. For him (Plato) it is birth which is the sleeping and the forgetting, since the soul, in being born into the body, goes from a state of great awareness to a much less conscious one and in the meantime forgets the truths it knew while in its previous out-of body state. Death, by implication, is an awakening and remembering. Plato remarks that the soul that has been separated from the body upon death can think and reason even more clearly than before, and that it can recognize things in their true nature far more readily. Furthermore, soon after

death it faces judgement in which a divine being displays before the souls all the things—both good and bad—which it has done in its life and makes the soul face them. (p. 117–118)

James Hillman (as cited in Hunt, 2004) a well-known Jungian psychologist who directed the studies at the C. J. Jung institute in Zurich, interprets the story of Er through archetypal terms. He sees it as a mythical tale that not only refers to former lives and the pre-existence of the soul, but suggests that modern psychology is based on “something else,” a stronger force or “daimon” consisting of pre-selected images and patterns “that shape each human life” (Hunt, 2004, p. 54). According to Hunt (2004), “[However] framed, it seems the soul is imprinted with a particular archetype before its present birth, whether that imprint is called daimon, destiny, ancestor, samskara, Karma, or past-life complex” (p. 64).

This section has summarized some of the theoretical constructs of several well-known depth and transpersonal psychologists that speak to the beliefs, views, and possibilities of past lives. Considering Plato’s story of Er, I wonder if the origins of transpersonal/depth psychology were set in motion over two-thousand years ago. Could it be that as time has passed, countless souls have transmigrated the original teachings of Plato, and many others like him? Perhaps the world today has expanded this once secular philosophy from several individuals to millions of people.

### **Past-Life-Regression Therapy**

To further explore the contexts of past life, the following section examines the historical beginnings and theoretical considerations of past-life-regression therapy. First, however, a definition of past-life-regression therapy is supplied to provide the framework for the discussion.

According to Woolger (2002), past-life-regression therapy is a therapeutic technique that draws on methods used by hypnosis, Jung's active imagination, and psychodrama. Hypnosis had been traditionally used to discover aspects of clients' repressed childhood memories; active imagination or waking dreams had been used to bring unconscious memories to consciousness; and psychodrama had been used to encourage the client to act out conflicts. Past-life-regression therapy combines these three elements and thereby assists clients in the process of growth, healing, and change (Woolger, 1988).

In past-life-regression therapy, however, the client is regressed past the current time line "backwards to assume the soul's continuity with previous existences via what some have called the soul memory or *far memory*" (Woolger, 2002, p. 1). Past-life-regression therapy is therefore an intentional stimulation of past-life memories. It serves as a powerful tool for healing current pain and suffering by providing an environment for the unconscious to become conscious. It "is a trauma based therapy where we are looking for traumas in other lifetimes that may have caused psychic shutdown and hence complexes of one kind or another" (Woolger, 1988, p. 352). Hence, it differs from past-life recall or spontaneous past-life recall. Woolger (1988) defined past-life recall to mean "[The] ability to recall past lives either 1) spontaneously, 2) through hypnotic regression, or 3) through other forms of induction such as guided imagery or focusing on images, feelings, words, or sensations" (p. 353).

To contrast, past-life therapy is intended to help clients heal trauma, while past-life recall is based on recollections and may or may not have healing implications. Lucas (2007) offered this definition of past-life-regressive therapy:

Regression work differs from conventional therapies in that it is conducted in an altered state of consciousness—past-life memories cannot be retrieved in the beta state, though beta is necessary for their processing. In this altered state the patient retrieves the experience of another personality that is both himself and yet not himself. It is an autonomous personality that has its own history and tragedies and makes its own decisions. All the patient can do is watch this drama unfold—he cannot determine what the script will be. And yet, because this autonomous personality is also in some way himself, he is drawn into its strivings and sufferings. In this process the patient becomes aware that he is not to be identified totally with the personality of the other lifetime and probably he is not who he seems to be in this lifetime, either. (p. 35)

**Historical development of past-life therapy.** In the late 19th century, *reincarnation* was the term used to describe the event of past-lives recall. During this time a Parisian military colonel by the name of Albert de Rochas used hypnosis and regressed subjects to previous lives (Woolger, 1988; Lawton, 2011). According to Lawton (2011) however, Rochas's work and several of his compatriots that followed were apart from the theosophical circles, denounced, and loathed by the Western world. John Bjorkhem, a Swedish psychiatrist in the mid-20th century used hypnotic regression on patients, however his substantive work was largely unknown as it was not translated (Lawton, 2011). During this time other psychiatrists, such as Alexander Cannon began to find that patients who could not be cured by conventional methods, were responding to past-life-regression therapy with significant symptom reduction (Lawton, 2011).

However, contemporary publication of past-life-regression therapy made its first real launch into the public arena in 1967 when Denys Kelsey and Joan Grant wrote *Many Lifetimes* (as cited in, Hunt, 2004; Lawton, 2011; Woolger, 1988). Although initially met with skepticism, this book paved the way for further publications during the 1970s and

1980s (Woolger, 1988). Practicing therapists such as Netherton and Shiffren (1978), Wambach (1984), Fiore (1979), Moss and Keeton (1981), Weiss (1988) and Woolger (1988) began publishing their methods and findings communicating to the public their strong beliefs that past-life-regression therapy was the most effective and thorough therapy known to them (Hunt, 2004). The following is a brief look at these contributions.

**Morris Netherton.** Morris Netherton introduced in the 1970s a method of regression therapy that avoided hypnosis, suggestion, or belief in reincarnation. Instead, Netherton listened for symbolically specific recurring or out-of-place phrases. When patients repeatedly used certain statements, for example, "I am burning up" to describe anger (p. 24), he would have the client repeat the phrase until a mental picture appeared. This mental image would then awaken a memory to a past-life incident relating to the phrase. It was through this process that Netherton probed the unconscious mind and escorted his clients through past lives, using a variety of questions to assist his clients identify the past-life traumas or issues linked with their current-life problems. This mental image would then lead the client to a past-life incident with which the phrase was related. (Netherton & Shiffren, 1978; Hunt, 2004; Lawton, 2011). It is through this process that Netherton probes the unconscious mind and escorts his clients through past lives using various questions to assist and help his clients discover and identify the past-life traumas or issues that are linked with current-life problems (Netherton & Shiffren, 1978).

**Helen Wambach.** Helen Wambach's (1984) goal appears to be whether or not she is able to see if past-life recall can be substantiated through historical evidence and through consistencies within her own research. Wambach (1984) focused on developing

and refining the process and progress of her hypnotic technique, and while as a psychologist she did not focus on past-life regression as a therapeutic technique for symptom, issue reduction, or elimination, she focused on providing historical evidence of past lives through her research samples (Hunt, 2004). Wambach (1984) summarizes her research and findings based on evidence that ranges from substantial to suggestive and inconclusive and invites others to formulate their own opinions and conduct further research.

***Edith Fiore.*** *You have been here before* was written in 1978 and was one of the first books to suggest that past-life therapy is virtually identical to regressive hypnotic therapy. A doctor of psychology, Fiore's theoretical perspective is influenced by Freudian psychology. Fiore (1978) was brought up Protestant but later became agnostic. She was a practicing psychiatrist when she began using hypnotherapy in 1974. Two years later she stumbled upon past-life regression (Lawton, 2011). She began documenting her method of regressing patients into past lives with full descriptions of patients' reactions and subsequent healings of such issues such as anxiety's, insomnia, nightmares, depressions, body pain, and phobias (Fiore, 1978). Fiore reflects on many of the philosophical questions that are relevant to past-life experiences, such as "Who are we?" and "What is the purpose of living again and again?" However, Fiore's (1978) message was that it is the healing results that matter; whether the regression is a product of one's imagination or something else matters not.

***Moss and Keeton.*** Moss and Keeton's (1981) book, *Encounters with the Past*, was written in an effort to understand the theoretical and academic constructs and challenges of the phenomenon and experiences of regression from the perspective of

reincarnation, spiritualism, cosmic and universal memory, ancestral or genetic memory, telepathy, and the unconscious mind. The authors debate these constructs, phenomena, and experiences of regression, citing many of their 8000 case histories. While a full book review is not appropriate here, an example of the work put forth by Moss and Keeton gives insight to their analytical and open approach for understanding past-life regression. For example, in questioning the timeless concept of reincarnation, they support the notion that hypnosis provides a gateway and may assist in explaining the concept of reincarnation. Yet they also question this notion, alluding to sessions with clients where it is more normal than not to have trivial utterances that are incomprehensible (Moss & Keeton, 1981). The authors also compare spiritualism to reincarnation and suggest that reincarnation is within the body whereas spiritualism exists outside of the body. When comparing spiritualism to reincarnation, the authors' stated:

[S]piritualism as an answer to the problem of regression has something in common with reincarnation in that it depends on the continuing existence of some personal and conscious part of the human being. But whereas in reincarnation this element is believed to be incorporated in a living person and speaks through him, the spiritualist holds that it now exists in the disembodied world of the dead where it can be approached only through intermediaries, human and spirit. (p. 15)

**Brian Weiss.** Dr. Weiss was a traditional conservative psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Trained to practice as a scientist and physician with substantial credentials—graduating Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude from Columbia University and Yale Medical School—Weiss was knowledgeable, respected, and grounded in theoretical practice in psychotherapy. He recounts his experience with a young woman who came to therapy with issues of fear, anxiety, and insomnia. Therapy proved to be difficult because it was complicated by the client's poor recall of her earlier life. For 18

months Weiss treated his client with traditional talk therapy without any improvement, until he tried hypnosis. Providing a detailed account of how he hypnotized his client, searching for issues from her early life, Weiss describes his astonishment when in one session, his client began recalling past lives without any intention or suggestion from Weiss. Witnessing these sessions challenged Weiss's initial disbelief of reincarnation and past lives. As time progressed, his client began to experience a decrease in symptoms and subsequent healing. This further challenged Weiss's medical and academic understanding of the conduits for healing and growth, which ultimately catapulted him into a whole new realm. Weiss describes the successful termination of treatment and the effects of his experience on his own personal beliefs and professional philosophy and practice (Hunt, 2004).

**Roger Woolger.** In *Other Lives, Other Selves*, Roger Woolger (1988), a graduate of Oxford University and Carl Gustav Jung's school of depth psychology in Zurich, Switzerland, persuasively, rationally, and emotionally writes about the meaning of reincarnation and how it is part of our spiritual and personal evolution, how treatment works, and how clients recover after witnessing memories from their past lives. Woolger begins with an autobiography and then move into a discussion of reincarnation from the perspectives of Eastern and Western religions. He also incorporates the work of other well-known researchers in this field, such as Ian Stevenson, who documented several evidence-based studies on reincarnation. He provides ample evidence of the healing powers of past-life-regressive therapy through case studies that are thoroughly reviewed from the perspective of Jungian depth psychology. Woolger (1988) describes how people come into therapy with unsolvable issues, and during regression therapy, severely

disturbing traumas often surface. These accounts make it clear how immediate and direct an influence past lives have on our current lifetime. According to Woolger (1988) it is the current-life anxieties [which are not overblown fantasies] that are often fully justified and based on a very intense past-life trauma, the effect of which is still crippling the person today. Although Woolger is convinced of the healing powers of past-life-regressive therapy he clearly demonstrates his analytical capacity towards mainstream psychology. Woolger (1988) states “It doesn’t matter whether you believe in reincarnation or not, the unconscious will almost always produce a past-life story when invited in the right way” (p. 40). Hunt (2004) stated that Woolger skillfully separated “[The] ambiguities inherent in psychological interpretations of this material, eschewing both dogmatic scientific materialism and unsubstantiated metaphysical speculation” (p. 56).

Woolger does not use “hypnotic” trances. Rather, he encourages his clients to explore events in this life and past lives through a technique used by Jung called “active imagination,” a therapeutic modality considered revolutionary when first published by Jung (Hopcke, 1999).

The history and development of past-life-regression therapy spanning over a 30-year period is rich with diversity: from Wambach’s brilliant efforts to categorize and prove past-life recall from the historical perspective; to the direct and leading questions characteristic of Fiore; to the non-hypnotic approach of Netherton; to the intense theoretical analysis and application of Jungian theory in Woolger; to Moss and Keaton who look to explain reincarnation as the foundation of past-life-regression phenomena; and finally to Weiss’ spontaneous experience with the client who unexpectedly slipped

into past-life recall during a hypnotic session intended on retrieving memories from early childhood. A significant and salient theme is the consensus that hypnosis or inducing an altered state of consciousness as a modality for retrieving past-life memory generates client growth and healing. There is agreement among the authors that it is not necessarily about whether one believes in past lives; rather it is the healing and client change that occurs as a result of this modality of therapeutic intervention that is important.

**Theoretical considerations and controversies.** Considering the amount of information published in mainstream books and magazines by highly educated therapists, and the response of such information by the reading public, there seems to be little dialogue between mainstream depth psychology and past-life experiences and regression therapy. The idea that physical, mental and psychological illness may originate from past traumas and events in previous lives is not well accepted in Western culture. Rush (2009) stated:

There are very few resources that seem to connect the healing aspects of depth psychology with the techniques of regressive therapies. With little to no dialogue, past-life regression, life between life regression and future life progression are easily relegated to the realm of esotericism. Depth psychology has not yet taken up the cause of reintegrating mind and body with soul by utilizing regressive techniques. (p. 16)

Past-life-regression therapy, as mentioned earlier, is the deliberate stimulation of past-life memories for the intention of healing. This is a controversial subject, which not only creates tension and pressure between differing schools of psychology, but also within the community of therapists who regularly use this approach; there are fascinating, contentious and unanswered questions.

The following section looks at the theoretical considerations of past-life-regression therapy as put forth by Lucas (2007), Woolger (1988), and Grof (1998), all of whom have contributed significantly to the theoretical underpinnings of past-life-regression therapy. While the focus is on these three theorists; it is noted that other pioneers such as Wambach (1984), Fiore (2005), Moody (1976), Netherton and Shiffren (1978), and a host of others have contributed as well.

Many past-life-regression therapists have differing philosophical orientations and perspectives, methods of induction, information retrieval and methods in which material is processed and integrated (Lucas, 2007). Lucas (2007) compiled case materials from 12 well known regression therapists from the United States and Europe. Lucas (2007) summarized her findings:

Most of us suffer some ambivalence about past lives. The trained, scientific side of us is reluctant to endorse them as being real, while our intuitive right brain cannot imagine that they haven't taken place. The one thing on which we all agree is the efficacy of regression therapy, whether the material retrieved is true recall or a metaphor. (p. 558)

This quote sheds light on the unrequited struggles for clear and deep theoretical understanding and logic for what is known and that which is obvious but cannot fully be explained.

Looking for an explanatory hypothesis, Woolger (1988) stated that “past-life therapy does not necessarily subscribe to any religious, spiritualist, or metaphysical doctrine” (p. 311). Furthermore, Woolger (1988) suggests that “when it comes to metaphysics, one man’s cosmic revelation is another man’s gobbledegook” (p. 312). Lastly, Woolger (1988) commented:

[Any] concern with explanation must remain secondary to the immediate task of the therapist, which is to help his or her clients to obtain relief from and to understand troublesome symptoms and behavior patterns over which they have no control. (p. 312)

Still the impetus of our Western culture seeks for grounded theory and understanding, the missing piece that appears to keep the link between depth psychology and regressive therapy fragile.

With respect to past-life memories and the insurgent popularity of past-life-regression therapies since the 1960s, Hunt (2004) poses the question, “Why now?” Lucas (2007) also raises this question and observes that perhaps it is due to the combination of increased availability of powerful therapies and well-trained therapists; she also speculates that our planet may be in the midst of planetary paradigm shift. Lucas (2007) asked:

Could such memories have been recorded with more skillful techniques before the 60’s? Or does the fact that past-life memories are increasingly more available constitute evidence that the nature of consciousness is undergoing a shift? Rupert Sheldrake, author of *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation* (1983), proposed in his theory of morphic resonance that the growing number of people able to access such a level of consciousness increases the potential of everyone to do so (p. 7).

With such musings it becomes complicated in establishing solid theoretical evidence. Much remains vague, unclear, and confusing at this point in time in human awareness; this in itself creates speculation, which leads to the construction of incomplete theories that are, however, useful for building further research and clinical use (Hunt, 2004).

Woolger (1988) provides a framework consisting of three theoretical strands that help explain the phenomenon of past-life memory. The first strand is the “positivist or tabula rasa position” (p. 40). This position suggests that when we are born our mind is a blank slate, having only “one life or one identity, and that therefore all psychological disturbances must be the result of experiences in this, our only life” (p. 40). Positivists have strict standards about what is real, fantasy and imagination and explain past-life experiences as creating memories of supposed past events by the use of imagination, storytelling, family or other gossip overhead, misunderstood, misinterpreted, or read in childhood (Woolger, 1988).

The second strand is called the “Great Memory Position” (Woolger, 1988, p. 41). This position suggests that all mankind has the ability to excavate into the vast collective memory vault of all humankind (Woolger, 1988). Woolger (1988) asserts that this collective memory has been referred to as the *Akashic record*, the *collective unconscious*, or simply *Great Mind*. According to Woolger (1988), the psychic Joan Grant conceived the phrase of *far memory* as the ability to look back into past lives. “Parapsychologists cautiously term this ability “*retrocognition*” (Woolger, 1988, p. 41). This position does not require the perspective of reincarnation as it is seen as an avenue to access historical information. It does not explain, however, why some people repeatedly have memories that occur and others do not, nor does it explain why some memories have a mysteriously recognizable familiarity (Woolger, 1988). Woolger (1988) concluded this position by stating that:

[Past] life memories are by no means arbitrary or random; we cannot just access the cosmic computer at will and pull out any life we choose. Like it or not, certain of them really do seem to belong to us individually. (p. 42)

Unlike the second strand or position, the third position requires that one believe in reincarnation and is amply called the “reincarnationalist position” (Woolger, 1988, p. 42). Woolger (1988) explained that this third position sees the soul as introducing itself to the physical body at birth, bringing with it the karmic consequences of the many previous lives lived in other physical bodies. The perspective of Karma is substantial, which Woolger defined as:

Karma: (=deed, action, work) 1. The spiritual law of moral cause and effect by which good or evil acts or thoughts are eventually meted out to the originator in a later incarnation; 2. The actual psychic inheritance, good or bad, accruing from previous deed in this or another life; 3 destiny or fate. (p. 353)

Woolger (1988) writes that “testimony to this belief is to be found in nearly all religious traditions at one time or another and possibly it is as old as man” (pp. 42–43).

The concept of Karma leads to an ancient Eastern question, one thought to be asked by the Buddha himself, is whether Karma is personal or impersonal (Hunt, 2004). Jung and Jaffé (1989) thought:

The idea of rebirth is inseparable from that of karma. The crucial question is whether a man’s karma is personal or not. If it is, then the preordained destiny with which a man enters life represents an achievement of previous lives, and a personal continuity therefore exists. If, however, this is not so, and an impersonal karma is seized upon in the act of birth, then that karma is incarnated again without there being any personal continuity. (p. 317)

Lucas (2007) stated that the term karmic is consistently used and is a foundational component considered throughout the profession of past-life-regression therapists; it is the existence of karmic patterns that is the underlying theory of past-life-regression therapy. “Karmic describes the patterns that we establish in our drive toward wholeness

and that either hinder or facilitate our journey” (Lucas, 2007, p. 27). Karma may also be thought of as the fine yet definite nuance which include concepts of cause and effect and relationships, and through means that are indistinct or not completely understood, Karma is the guidebook for the soul as patterns from life to life are repeated, working through issues as the soul seeks to achieve wholeness (Lucas, 2007).

Woolger (1988) agreed and suggested that it is psychic residue or Karma that shows up as pieces from previous lifetimes (which the Hindu refer to as Samskaras) that are brought forward for resolution in the current life and often show up as pain and trauma. Further, new wounds that occur in the current lifetime create new Karma.

Woolger (1988) believed that past lives are coded within the etheric body (the blueprint of the physical body) as well as the emotional and the mental body. Past-life, physical trauma may be imprinted within the etheric body; past-life, emotional trauma may be imprinted within the emotional and physical body beliefs, and values; and personality may be imprinted on the mind. Woolger (1988) suggested that it is the etheric body and the association of the emotional body that creates the physical body inclusive of Karma. Lucas (2007) supported this theory referring to physics and psychobiology:

[Physics] postulates that energy fields, which include behavior patterns, cannot simple cease to be: they can only be transmuted. This suggests that energy fields generated in previous lifetimes are brought forward into the current one, perhaps in the form of sub-personalities (repeated vibrational patterns), and it is these patterns that must be transmuted. (p. 30–31)

According to Lucas (2007) psychotherapy and past-life-regression therapy is aimed at bringing the patient and their vibrational energy fields into a state of peace,

harmony, and balance. To do this, most past-life-regression therapists acknowledge the process of retrieval and processing of past-life memories is conducted using hypnosis to induce an ASC (Lucas, 2007).

When referring to past-life regression, Grof (1998) prefers to use the term holotropic rather than ASC, or *nonordinary states of consciousness*, suggesting that these terms are associated with psychiatry and pathology and are too general when referring to past-life-regression therapy. Grof (1998) defined holotropic as a state that is “[Characterized] by a specific transformation of consciousness associated with perceptual changes in all sensory areas, intense and often usual emotions, and profound alteration in the thought process” (p. 5).

Grof (1998) further suggested that in order to move beyond the Western materialistic scientific paradigm and comprehend the mechanism of past-life-regression therapy and the holotropic states, it is imperative to expand the concept of the human psyche into two domains: the perinatal and the transpersonal.

The perinatal is associated with the emotion, physical experience, and trauma of birth. Referring to the definition of transpersonal earlier in this thesis, Grof (1998) adds that the basic characteristic of transpersonal “is the experience of transcending the usual personal limitation of the body and the ego” (p. 15). He also gives considerable credit to the work of Jung, as well as the discovery of the collective unconscious and the archetypes that are contained within, as these theories provide a rich backdrop for infinite imagination of the psyche. It is the contents of the collective unconscious that are available during holotropic states where perinatal experiences and images of biological birth, memories of prenatal existence, death, sex, and violence are experienced (Grof,

1998). Transpersonal experiences may also occur within the holotropic states; illuminating episodes of previous lives and ancestors, as well as providing a deep understanding of the universe and the notion of wholeness or oneness with the cosmos (Grof, 1998). Woolger (1988) weaved depth and transpersonal psychology to further a theoretical foundation of past-life regression. Leaning on Jung's well-known complexes and dynamics of the psyche (the personal unconscious), and a structure coined by Grof called the "system of condensed experience" or COEX, Woolger (1988) integrated these two concepts and brought the aspects of past-life and perinatal life into a holographic model with six intersecting paths for therapeutic access. Woolger (1988) suggested that complexes and COEX refers to "[T]he same array of psychic experiences. COEX and complex could be used almost interchangeably, provided, as I propose, we expand the reference of the complex to include past-life and perinatal memories" (p. 121).

The six aspects of Woolger's holographic model are divided into two halves. The first half contains the elements of the personal unconscious and are the existential aspect (the current reality), biographical aspect (childhood and later memories), and somatic aspect (chronic body issues). The second half of the model contains the elements of the transpersonal unconscious and are the perinatal aspect (birth and birth trauma), the past-life aspect (pain and shame from previous life trauma), and the archetypal aspect (spiritual insight into karmic debt). In the center of this model is the *feeling core*. Woolger (1988) explains that the feeling core of the complex or COEX lies at the heart of the holograph intersecting with all six aspects; this allows therapeutic entry into any area of the model and supports work with any other aspect all with the possibility of transformation in any other.

**Religious, spiritual, and philosophical contexts.** The following offers a brief look at the traditions of Shamanism, Hinduism, and Tibetan Buddhism as they relate to the topic of this thesis; that is, it will provide further knowledge of the soul and its specific context for the passage of trauma to life and to the transformation into wholeness.

Ancient cultures did not view death as the end of existence, rather they celebrated death as the start of the eternal souls journey towards enlightenment (Rush, 2004). Contemporary Western research on non-ordinary states of consciousness and successful therapeutic treatment of clients through past-life-regression experiences as well the discussions surrounding spontaneous psychospiritual crises has enticed Western scholars to look carefully at some of the ancient texts that are dedicated to death, dying and rebirth. These texts are commonly known as *Books of the Dead* (Grof, 1994). Of these ancient texts the most well-known and preserved is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, also known as the *Bardo Thodol* (Rinpoche, 2002). According to Grof (1994):

The Bardo Thodol is a guide for the dying and the dead, a manual to help the departed to recognize, with the aid of a competent teacher, the various stages of the intermediate state between death and rebirth, and to attain liberation. (p. 12)

This view lends itself to the concept of reincarnation which is the ancient belief that is associated with Eastern spiritual traditions and thought, especially with Hinduism and Buddhism as it originated in India from the 8th to the 5th century B.C. (Hunt, 2004).

**Hindu philosophy.** Eastern philosophy is usually connected to sacred and holy writings that cannot be assigned to one great thinker or evolutionary mind (Rush, 2004). The Vedas are the oldest composition of religious texts and contain the Upanishads, which are Hindu sacred writings that teach about Samsara, Karma, Brahman, and Atman

(Robinson & Rodrigues, 2006). Reincarnation or repeated births in Hindu is called samsara, and is the belief that all living entities experience birth, death, and rebirth (Robinson & Rodrigues, 2006). Life is guided and evolves from making choices and experiencing the cost of those choices. All beings evolve through the samsaric path and endure the laws of Karma, which permeate all human acts, internal and external, with the definitive moral principle of cause and effect (Robinson & Rodrigues, 2006). The law of Karma requires human beings to reincarnate, to repeat the cycle of birth and death, and bring forward with them the situations of cause and effect or past-life Karma. According to Robinson and Rodrigues (2006) “[The] circumstances of a person’s life are the result of past Karma, and it is one’s actions in this life that will dictate the circumstances of one’s future, in this life and in lives to come” (p. 170).

Retribution through the karmic cycle of birth and death imprisons the soul in this repeated cycle of earthly embodiment. Through the practices of intense meditation and yoga which are aimed at challenging the egoic world of illusion, realization of the true Self (Atman) emerges. The nucleus of Hindu philosophy revolves around the release or liberation (moska) from the cycle of birth and death thus aligning the individual with their true Self. Once liberation is attained the individual atman merges in Brahma which is the ultimate divine existence. Robinson and Rodrigues (2006) stated, “Brahman’s characteristics are eternal existence (sat), absolute consciousness (chit), and unbounded bliss (ananda). Self-realization confers one with these immutable attributes” (p. 172).

**Buddhist philosophy.** It is believed that during the 6th century B.C. Buddhism arose from the wisdom of the Hindu philosophies and Upanishad tradition (Hunt, 2004). Buddhism accepts the same basic Hindu doctrines of samsara and Karma and the ultimate

purpose of escaping the cycle of death and rebirth (Woolger, 2001). However, Buddhism is distinguished from Hinduism in that Buddhists do not accept the understanding of an eternal soul that transmigrates through the cycle of death and rebirth (Robinson & Rodrigues, 2006).

However, according to Hunt (2004) “some scholars contend that two different doctrines were put forward by the Buddha” (p. 31). The exoteric traditions were maintained and are part of what is known as the Southern teachings of Theravada or Hinayana, found in Southeast Asia. In these traditions there is no transmigration of the soul, only psychic residues; the samskaras pass from life to life without any aspect of soul (Hunt, 2004). Theravadans use the term rebirth and believe that the ego or the false self incarnates because of its attachments and the delusion that there is a permanent eternal self. The Buddha is thought to believe that eliminating the attachments of ego or of desire, passion, craving, and wants would free the binds of the physical suffering of the earthly experience. In death, due to the freedom of desires, one would be liberated from the death-rebirth cycle and would achieve nirvana, the Buddhist equivalent to moksha, escaping samsara (Hunt, 2004). It is thought the exoteric teachings were taught to Buddha’s inner circle of colleagues, the Mahayana school of Buddhism, which still exists in Tibet, China, and Japan (the Northern teachings) (Hunt, 2004). The Mahayana Tibetan Buddhists believe that the spiritual body has the function of transmigrating from life to life with memories of past lives, but also the capacity to control rebirth (Rinpoche, 2002). This belief is evident in the immediate rebirth of the Dalai Lama. Although nirvana transcends death and rebirth, the Dalai Lama is considered an enlightened being that repeatedly is reborn to help eliminate the sufferings of others. As Hunt (2004) suggested,

“In Mahayana, the enlightened being, acting from boundless compassion, refuses to depart from the realms of birth until all sentient beings have attained also to enlightenment” (p. 31).

**Shamanism.** The views and beliefs associated with the term “shaman” are diverse. Shamanism is cross cultural and according to Winkelman (2010):

[Spans] centuries of time in such areas as art, dance, healing, hunting, music, politics, spiritual, and many other phenomena in the ancient and contemporary world. The term shaman has been applied to religious leaders, healers, mystics, prophets, political leaders, and performance artists. (p. 459)

This section seeks to understand the shaman’s role as a spiritual leader and healer through the experiences of the spirit world. According to Winkelman (2010), a commonality of all shamans is the ability to enter into an ASC in order to “diagnose disease, to heal, to locate friends, enemies, and animals, and to prophesize about events of importance to the group” (p. 460). Through hours of exhaustive use of drumming, chanting, singing, dancing, fasting, physical pain or exertion, dreams, medicinal preparations, and the use of psychoactive substances, ASC would be induced, providing the shaman with access to the spiritual world through what is commonly known as the “soul flight or magical flight” (p. 461). Once the shaman had access to the spirits he would be able to heal, assist souls as they transitioned from this life to the next, or help souls that were lost and appeared to be unable to move forward to the next life (Winkleman, 2010). Shamans conceptualize illness through the loss of some part of the soul which can occur from a multitude of situations including trauma, psychosis, physical illness, loss and grief or theft by another spirit or demon.

**The seven chakras.** To complete this section, the chakra system, or “invisible space surrounding, interpenetrating and connecting people...nature, the animal kingdoms and the divine” (Douglas, 2002, p. 6) will be explored with reference to trauma, healing, and the soul. Shamanism, Hinduism and Buddhism interpret the complicated schemas of the chakras in diversified ways. The following is an interpretation of the chakra system as expressed by transpersonal psychologists Douglas, Nelson, and Villoldo.

Three traditions—Shamanism, Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism—incorporate the energy of the chakras into their healing rituals and beliefs (Douglas, 2002; Nelson, 1994). The chakras are “swirling disks of energy” (Villoldo, 2000, p. 72) and mean “wheel” in Sanskrit (Douglas, 2002; Nelson, 1994; Villoldo, 2000). The chakras are the energy vortexes that connect the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of an individual to the nonmaterial subtle energy system that surrounds each person’s physical body (Douglas, 2002; Nemi, 2004). According to Douglas (2002):

The chakra system is perceived by psychics and clairvoyants as shifting clouds or rays of colour or definite lines and threads surrounding and sometimes connecting people [aura], according to the level of the system being observed. Each field and its chakra is seen as one main colour within the light spectrum, ranging through red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet and varying in shade or hue.  
(p. 94)

According to Nelson (1994) the chakras “[Map] the progress of personal consciousness from its first quickening within a living embryo to the highest stages of self-realization and ultimate reunion with the divine Source” (p. 161).

In the process of healing, the chakra system opens to receive and exchange information from the subtle energy fields that surround the body (Douglas, 2002). Nemi (2004) sums it up, “[Chakras] are the energy vortexes that give life to your energetic

body, which is another name for your spiritual body (soul) the part of you that has eternal life” (p. 37).

Chakras from the Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist traditions are insights passed down through the teachings of yoga (Nelson, 1994; Villoldo, 2000). Yoga is considered the path of virtue and purity required in order to transcend (Villoldo, 2000). In Sanskrit it means “to unite what has been separated” (Villoldo, 2000, p. 71). This is the non-dual moment, the reunification of the body and the soul. In contrast, the Shamans believe that there is no dissection between the body and the soul; there is no split between desire and enlightenment and unlike yoga traditions, you are your body (Villoldo, 2000). However, the Shamans have accepted the chakra system because they believe they have been cut off from nature; hence the mind/body split (Villoldo, 2000). Comment must also be made that some Hindu teachings do not recognize the mind/body split or the split from nature (Villoldo, 2000).

In an effort to understand how it is that trauma, through the luminous energy field, Spirit or soul, may be tapped and passed from life to life, we look at the degree that the chakras are restricted. Describing the mechanisms of the chakras and the healing process, Douglas (2002) stated:

Healing is understood to start at the subtle levels, outside the physical Body, and works through to the physical. Disease (trauma) begins at the causal level, the outermost energy field, and manifests eventually at the physical. It is remarkable in this system that much of the human psyche and our inner workings are located away from the physical body at its outer energy fields. Psychotherapy and group analysis, in their focus on the mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of patients, could be seen as operating within these outer fields of human aura with the potential to effect the aura at all levels, including the physical. (pp. 94–95)

According to Nemri (2004), healing occurs when we examine our values, beliefs, and memories with a desire to release patterns that are negative, which results in spiritual and emotional healing. The following is a brief description of the seven chakras, including their Sanskrit names (Nelson, 1994). According to Nemri (2004), two characteristics are important to note: 1) the first and seventh chakras are the only chakras that are active and open at birth, and 2) much like the ego defense mechanism of overcompensation, the least restricted chakras will overcompensate for those that are highly restricted.

Chakras one through four are energized primarily through the power of the Sun or the powers of the physical world and their development is emphasized by the sky-good religions of logic, reason, and technology (Villoldo, 2000, Nemri, 2004). Chakra five is the only chakra that integrates both the physical and Spiritual Realm, while chakras six and seven are associated purely within the Spiritual Realm and are emphasized by the Earth-goddess religions (Villoldo, 2000; Nemri, 2004).

*First chakra: Root (Muladhara).* The first chakra is located at the base of the spine; it carries with it life purpose and is associated with the colour red (Nelson, 1994; Nemri, 2004). Within this chakra are life's purpose and all the lessons for this lifetime as well as those lessons (Karma) from previous lifetimes (Nemri, 2004). According to Nelson (1994), the first chakra guides the development of the pre-ego and pre-mental fetus and is the primary means of survival, so it "prepares the amorphous being for personal individuation" (p. 163). Nemri (2004) indicated that the first chakra is "the basis of your belief system, your security, and your connection to others" (p. 38). A malfunctioning first chakra system is associated with fears of abandonment, death, and

loss of physical order or sudden change. For individuals who have suffered immense abuse there may be doubt about reality, which may be ungrounding, leading to episodes of psychotic disturbance or an ASC such as schizophrenia (Nelson, 1994, Prendergast, 2000).

*Second chakra: Typhonic (Svadhisthana).* The second chakra is located in the lower abdomen and is associated with the colour orange (Nelson, 1994; Nemri, 2004). Within this chakra are desires to form relationships, creativity, choices, and to have some control over the physical environment (Nemri, 2004). Control includes the use of money, other people, personal power, and authority (Nemri, 2004). A malfunctioning second chakra system is characterized by unbalanced relationships between self and other; “there are often feelings of body shame, disgust with sexuality, guilt, impotence and physical powerlessness” (Prendergast, 2000, p. 52). According to Prendergast (2000) and Nelson (1994), sexual abuse is the most common cause of constriction of the second chakra.

*Third chakra: Power (Manipura).* The third chakra is located over the solar plexus and is associated with the colour yellow (Nelson, 1994; Nemri, 2004). This chakra is the personal power chakra, whereas the first chakra relates to group power, the third chakra relates to the power between self and other and the external world. It is within this chakra that ego and self-esteem develop, and also where an overdeveloped ego struggles with intuition (Nemri, 2004). When ego has too much power and controls the spiritual body or energy field, intuition or “gut feeling” of the third chakra slides behind ego (Nemri, 2004). According to Nemri (2004), “In order to even begin to understand previous lifetimes, the Spiritual body must be upfront” (p. 39). Prendergast (2000) describes the person with a restricted third chakra as “distrustful, oversensitive to

criticism, inappropriately angry or incapable of feeling angry, emotionally overdependent or aloof, volatile, or emotionally numb” (p. 53).

*Fourth chakra: Heart (Anahata).* The fourth chakra is located over the center of the chest or the heart region and is associated with the colour green (Nelson, 1994; Nemri, 2004). This chakra is the first truly spiritual chakra and here lies the capacity to lift self above ego, which is characterized by compassion, empathy, and devotion that goes beyond self-importance (Nelson, 1994; Nemri, 2004). The energy of this chakra is pure, emotional love and control and gives power the spiritual body (Nemri, 2004). Love motivates controls, destroys, inspires and heals; however, failure and rejection, self-esteem, and trust issues are the opposing controlling powers. When this chakra is “constricted or distorted, clients typically report believing that they are bad, worthless, undeserving, unacceptable, flawed, unlovable, and all alone” (Prendergast, 2000, p. 53).

*Fifth chakra: Inspiration (Visuddha).* The fifth chakra is located over the throat and is associated with the colour blue (Nelson, 1994; Nemri, 2004). According to Nelson (1994), this chakra level is the highest level one can achieve according to Western psychology, which associates pathology with the next two levels. The fifth chakra represents honesty, “majestic wisdom, access to universal symbols, surrender to divine power, and partial detachment from specific worldly outcomes” (p. 164). Prendergast (2000) confirms that the fifth chakra is “often constricted when honest feelings are not allowed to be expressed or when there has been abuse—sexual or otherwise—and the client has felt compelled to keep the secret” (p. 54).

*Sixth chakra: Shamanic (Ajna).* The sixth chakra is located in the mid-forehead. Often referred to as the “third eye,” it is associated with the colour indigo (Nelson, 1994;

Nemri, 2004). This is the chakra level of “benign sorcery, visionary power, and prophesy” (Nelson, 1994, p. 164). According to Nemri (2004), this is the center where the brain and the spiritual body (psyche) interact; this “blending of mental and spiritual energy forms a basis for enlightenment” (p. 40). Sixth chakra energy allows crises to be perceived with unemotional detachment, thus enabling the mind to become quiet and learn the intended lesson, which, in turn, leads further toward a place or perspective of non-judgment without fear of our own Spiritual truths (Nemri, 2004). According to Prendergast (2000), all belief systems or mental conditioning, especially denial and hypercriticism, cause this chakra to restrict.

*Seventh chakra: Reunion (Sahasrara).* The seventh chakra is located at the crown of the head or a few inches above and is associated with the glow of white (Nelson 1994; Nemri, 2004). It represents a fully mature soul as it merges with its own divine essence, dissolving self- boundaries and returning to Source (Nelson, 1994). According to Nemri (2004), the seventh chakra is the entry point for Divine Energy, where the energy moves through all the lower six chakras, fills the entire body, and returns to the crown moving toward the heavens. According to Nemri (2004), this is what is meant by the phase, “I am God, God is in me” (p. 40). However, while this level of consciousness, given our collective human evolution, is achieved, it is rare and fleeting (Nelson, 1994).

This section has briefly examined the ancient spiritual and philosophical traditions of Shamanism, Hinduism, and Tibetan Buddhism. Within each of these ancient teachings are the beliefs that energy vortexes, known as chakras, surround the human body linking the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of human nature.

## Summary

This literature review has focused on gathering information foundational to answering the questions of this proposed study: 1) what is the nature of the lived experiences of adults as they transform past-life trauma into wholeness? And 2) what are the meanings attached to these experiences?

The heart of this literature review has concentrated on investigating and understanding several domains including: 1) the roots and historical foundations of transpersonal psychology; 2) the developmental spectrum of soul and consciousness as understood by Wilber (1996, 1999, 2000) and Almaas (2004); 3) abuse and trauma and the links to emotional suffering and healing; 4) the theoretical framework of depth psychology surrounding past life; 5) the historical beginnings and current day status of past-life-regression therapy; 6) the religious, spiritual, and philosophical contexts of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Shamanist understandings of past life; and 7) healing and the implications of the seven chakras.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter consists of two sections: 1) the approach to the research and 2) the research procedure. In the first section, my approach and method are outlined towards answering two questions: 1) What is the nature of the lived experiences of adults as they transformed past-life trauma into wholeness? and 2) What are the meanings attached to these experiences? The second section describes the design of the research study relative to the guiding questions of the research study.

## Approach to Research

My approach to my research study was guided by my questions regarding the lived experiences and interpretations of those experiences as individuals healed and embraced the non-dual journey towards wholeness. My intent was to embrace the philosophy of the phenomenological-hermeneutics perspective for the method of this research study. Phenomenology is the study of the features, characteristics and essence of lived experiences. Through insights and descriptions it seeks to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the way in which individuals interpret their experience and direct contact in the world (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutics is concerned with interpreting the meaning of experience and may be described as an approach or system to interpretation (van Manen, 1990). The following discussion describes phenomenology and hermeneutics in more detail and presents the rationale for the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach.

### Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Research and the Human Sciences

Phenomenological hermeneutics is attentive to the human world and how it is within all of its diversified conditions. Aspects of traditional science that require specific absolute benchmarks of objectivity are reformed within the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach. According to Rich (2004), “[Phenomenological] hermeneutics developed out of opposition to the objective, disconnected stance of the scientific method, which it declared was inappropriate for human science research” (p. 189).

Scientific research utilizes objective procedures that are intended to clearly describe, define, label, and classify gathered information into coherent and reasonable data (Jardine, 1990). When the researcher uses this objective position and becomes an

impartial observer, they are separated from the enquiry, assuming that vagueness and truthfulness are dissipated (Jardine, 1990). Rich (2004) added: “The consequence of such an approach for human science research is that the human subject becomes conceptually severed from existential reality and the world of lived experience” (p. 190). Objectivity in phenomenological-hermeneutic research is more interested in how the researcher displays, describes and interprets the object while attempting to remain loyal to the object and also staying aware that the research may become re-directed, thrown off balance or captivated by foreign or additional factors (van Manen, 1990).

Utilizing this understanding of phenomenological-hermeneutic objectivity, a brief description of the philosophical foundations and essential parts of phenomenological hermeneutics follows.

### **What is Phenomenology?**

Edmund Husserl, the architect of present day phenomenology believed that the basis of knowledge and understanding of the human sciences commenced with the experience of the individual self (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Osborne, 1990). Gall et al. (2007) stated, “The starting point for knowledge was the self’s experience of phenomena, which are the various sensations, perceptions, and ideations that appear in consciousness when the self focuses attention on an object” (p. 495).

As van Manen (1984) noted, phenomenology is “the search for what it means to be human” (p. 2). Jardine (1990), in reflection of the work of Husserl, described phenomenology and the human experience as:

[A] different way of understanding ourselves and our place in the world, one which problematizes our aspirations to clarity, progress, mastery and dominance as images of our relations to the Earth and to each other. It brings inquiry out

from under the desire for the final Word, it opens us up for the re-birth and redelivering of the Word in the soul, with the full richness and ambiguity that such re-enlivening requires. (p. 220)

Rather than separating and disconnecting ourselves from our world, phenomenology renders us whole in our entire essence as we are in our environment. Phenomenology endeavours to describe things as they are or as they already exist in the world and to submit to our existence in and “of” the world with clear, distinct, and explicit understanding (Jardine, 1990). Van Manen (1984) described phenomenological research as:

[The] study of lived experiences, the study of essences, the practice of attentive thoughtfulness, the search for what it means to be human, and lastly, that it is a poetizing activity without the latest information or news or headline and certainly without a punch line. (p. 1)

Another aspect of phenomenology is the concept of bracketing (Osborne, 1990). Bracketing is a method of communicating, through self-reflection, the limitations of the researchers’ inclinations and biases, which ultimately influence research outcomes. Phenomenology appreciates the presence of the researcher, the question(s), and determination of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In this manner, readers of phenomenological reports are able to consider the researcher’s perspective (Osborne, 1990).

So, if the aim of phenomenological research approach is to “understand a phenomenon by having the data speak for itself” (Osborne, 1990, p 81), how is this type of research conducted? Van Manen (1984) stated that there are four procedural approaches:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; and
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. (pp. 2–3)

### **Phenomenology Refined: What is Hermeneutics?**

The primary approach used for this research study was phenomenological-hermeneutics. The phenomenological-hermeneutics method is the merging of the two traditions and is the result of the work of Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1975).

According to Sass (1988), hermeneutics itself is difficult to define. However, Gall et al. (2007) seemed to simply define hermeneutics as the study “of the process by which individuals arrive at the meaning of any text” (p. 520). Heidegger (1962) describes hermeneutics as how we are already being in the world; meaning we already are in the world and come from a subjective stance in the world based on our historical and cultural experiences in the world. Subjectivity may be understood to mean that there is a foundation of consciousness, awareness and discrimination, aspects that cannot be analysed and isolated that illuminate the object of study to its fullest expanse and abundance. Sass (1988) stated that, “[Human] subjectivity cannot be understood as an analyzable combination of isolable and fully specifiable mental entities or aspects that either do or do not exist in a determinate fashion” (p. 245).

Furthermore, Sass (1988) doubts if transparency of the entire human experience is flawless:

[Experience] is not transparent to itself; it is a kind of text-analogue, an intrinsically obscure object that needs to be interpreted to bring to light its hidden

meaning, and that can be evoked only by an approximate and metaphoric, perhaps even quasi-poetic mode of description. (p. 245)

Hermeneutic research fosters the progression of a cherished and deeply personal relationship between the researcher, the research participants and the entire human experience that is being experienced. According to Rich (2004), “[Hermeneutic] research promotes the development of an intimate relationship between the research and the world under investigation; a world that the research is already embedded in and cannot objectively stand apart from” (p. 191).

Phenomenological-hermeneutics may be considered a way of understanding an individual’s lived experiences by accepting the individual and participating as a witness with the individual as their stories unfold and reveal interpretations of their lived experiences. This process occurs within the relationship between the research participant and researcher and cannot be accomplished by determining a method protocol that is strict and prescriptive; rather the entire research experience is based on a philosophical assumption that is orientated towards what it is like to be human (Rich, 2004).

In summary, phenomenological-hermeneutic investigation is a deeply rich and abundantly flavourful human experience for both the researcher and the object to be researched. It is not founded in strict protocol or guidelines but more in an abstract artsy understanding of what it is like to live as a human being.

In the next section, the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach to this study highlights the following characteristics: the position of the implicated researcher, the approach to data analysis through the delicate and sensitive characteristics of the hermeneutic circle, the representation and significance of the fecundity of the individual

case, and finally, the understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the research participant.

### The Hermeneutic Circle

According to Gall et al. (2007) the hermeneutic circle is a method of alternating between interpreting the meaning of data from each data part, or text, and the data, or text, as a whole. The hermeneutic circle facilitates the movement from the *whole* to the *part*, and vice versa, responsibly providing the framework and highlighting the central importance of interpretation and meaning. This provides the researcher with a method of moving from pre-understanding to understanding, removing, reorganizing, revisiting, and reformulating prejudices and bias. Rich (2004) stated that:

[Understanding] involves a process whereby the voice of the one involved in the understanding and the voice of the object to be understood, whether it be narrative, text, or any subject matter, are both heard and involved in an interchange which moves toward a place of shared understanding—the fusion of horizons. (p. 201)

The fusion of horizons is imperative to fully capture the participants' experiences. Chessick (1990) states that Gadamer, a forefather of hermeneutics, affirms that the fusion of horizons is “the limits to our vantage point, the limits of our empathy” (p. 265). Chessick (1990) suggested that, “[In] order for the ideas of another person to become intelligible we must discover the standpoint and the horizon of that person. Furthermore, horizons are always in motion and whenever we investigate we cannot disregard ourselves” (p. 265).

The hermeneutic circle then becomes an integral component of data analysis as discussed later on in this chapter.

### **The Fecundity of the Individual Case**

In consideration for the fecundity of the individual case, this researcher was aware of the fecund experiences of the individual story. Phenomenological descriptions may move beyond the shared themes and descriptions of the research participants' stories, capturing and embracing whole or part differences found within the individual case (Jardine, 1990). According to Gadamer (1975), the fecundity of the individual case is:

The individual case on which judgment works is never simply a case; it is not exhausted by being a particular example of a universal law or concept. Rather, it is always an ‘individual case’, and it is significant that we call it a special case, because the rule does not comprehend it. Every judgment about something that is intended to be understood in its concrete individuality...is—strictly speaking—a judgement about a special case. That means simply that the evaluation of the case does not merely apply the measure of the universal principle according to which it is judged, but itself co-determines it, supplements and corrects it. (p. 37)

Sometimes knowledge and understanding can be accumulated from those aspects of research that seem to be different or not fit into a category or emergent theme. The researcher was aware of the potential for differences found within the individual case; differences which may be considered outliers or peculiar and outside the general rule of understanding. In chapter four, examples of differences, that is individualistic experiences that are outside of the group sample is highlighted. However, the reader is invited to appreciate that it is these differences that also help capture the commonalities between the individual cases.

### **Researcher and Research Participant Relationship**

This study with a theoretical framework of phenomenology looked towards understanding experience and identifying its structure. Replacing traditional ways of

gathering research knowledge with collaborative dialogue of respect, warmth, and empathy were crucial to a shared interest in understanding the phenomena (Osborne, 1990). It was understood that an atmosphere of respectful burden, a shared interest in phenomena illumination, and a good working alliance were vital to a collaborative research relationship (Osborne, 1990). The researcher aimed to gather information about the research participants' pre-reflective experiences (Osborne, 1990). Therefore, all participants were considered research participants for this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The focus of this study was built on the importance of "understanding of the deep structure of meaning rather than surface linguistic structure" (Osborne, 1990, p. 83). The structural interpretation and analysis of the data was performed to provide a *within persons analysis* by determining the specific characteristics that represent themes and clustering these themes to then define the structure of the phenomena (Osborne, 1990). The themes and the interpretations of the structural(s) data are presented in a descriptive narrative. However, the method of determining these structures may have not yet been described elsewhere; thus, to the knowledge of the researcher, this study was the first to determine these structures by a novel approach that was not built upon any initial preconceived theory (Osborne, 1990). Therefore, the hermeneutic circle or the *interpretive perspective*, which necessitates researcher perception and sensitivity, was used in the research process and assisted the compilation of all the themes (Osborne, 1990).

To ensure that rich and thorough data were collected for analysis, a variety of methods were used to generate findings and collect information (Gall et al., 2007). The

researcher kept a research journal, transcribed the research participant interviews, and maintained detailed observational notes which facilitated triangulation of the data. The process of re-shifting through and repeatedly examining and interpreting data from a variety of sources exposed themes as well as variances.

## **Research Procedure**

**Selection of research participants.** Recruiting research participants was done through posting letters of request in various counselling agencies and community centres and by distributing the posters to past-life-regression therapists via email. The letters of request included my phone number and email contact information. I received email messages from 11 interested individuals of which five appeared to meet the criteria and were subsequently interviewed. After carefully reviewing all of the potential research participants' interviews, I found that one of the participants' experiences did not satisfy all the criteria. This particular individual was informed of my decision not to include their personal experiences and the information gathered from the interview was destroyed and is not included in any part of this study.

To bring illumination, understanding, and meaning to the transformation of past-life trauma through the non-dual journey of wholeness, the following inclusion criteria were used in the initial screening for participants of the study:

- Adults not younger than 18 years of age.
- Adults who have had an experience of trauma(s) from a past life(s) that they have become aware of in this life.
- Adults who have had an awareness that past-life(s) trauma(s) had affected their current-life mental health.

- Adults who have resolved past-life(s) trauma(s) in this life.
- Adults who are capable of articulating and identifying their experiences.
- Adults who are motivated to authentically share their experiences.
- Adults who are not in an emotional crisis and who have been transformed by their quest for wholeness in this life.

Sex, employment, race, ethnicity, exposure to the counselling processs, and career or student status were not considered as inclusion criteria in this research study.

**The initial screening process.** The initial screening process was done by phone contact. I introduced myself and described my interest in the long-term issues faced by individuals who experience pain and trauma in their current life as a continuum of trauma experienced in another life. I described the objective of the study and explained that I personally would interview the participant. I also explained that the interview process would be one audio-taped 2-to-3 hour face to face interview which would occur after the initial screening interview was completed and the perspective participant had met all the inclusion criteria. This initial screening process took approximately half an hour to an hour. It was important that potential research participants were able to articulate and describe their story; however, the following questions were used to start the screening interview:

- How did you learn about your past life(s) and past-life(s) trauma(s)?
- What was it like to carry past-life(s) trauma(s) forward into this life?
- Describe how these traumatic past-life(s) experiences have/had affected your mental health as an adult?
- Describe your current state of mental health.
- Describe how it is you understand that you have transformed past-life(s) trauma(s) into wholeness in this life as you embraced the non-dual journey?

Other questions were added during the initial screening interview to probe for more information that lead to better understanding of the issues and clarify the criteria.

The research participants were selected based on whether their answers to the five questions during the initial screening interview meet the inclusion criteria.

**Subsequent interview.** According to Rich (2004), it is important to first explain the research process and to help educate research participants on the following:

- the respective roles of the researcher and the research participants;
- the process used to collect information about the topic and how that information would be analyzed, interpreted, and reported; and
- the ethical considerations inherent in the study itself. (p. 240)

Letters of consent were distributed to three of the research participants by face-to-face contact, informing them that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained.

One of the research participants interview was conducted via Skype. This participants consent was given verbally and recorded. Individuals who have access to any research participants' information, such as the writer and the thesis supervisor, were disclosed to the research participants. To facilitate confidentiality, the research participants are identified by their personally selected pseudonyms. They also have access to their personal records and were given copies of their transcribed personal interviews. Further ethical considerations will be addressed later in this paper.

Here, I described my interest in the study and some of my personal background and experiences. I also addressed and normalized power differentials and fully explained the importance of developing a relationship with each participant. It was important that rapport, trust, collaboration and mutuality were developed with the research participants. As Osborne (1990) stated, "An atmosphere of respectful concern for participants, a

shared interest illuminating the phenomenon, and a good rapport, are essential for the dialogal relationship between the researcher and co-researchers” (p. 83).

**Interview questions.** The intent was to leave the interview semi-structured; giving room for the natural course of the research participants lived experiences to unfold in the context of their life stories. The following areas were explored and helped guide the interview process, but were not exclusive to the information gathered.

- Family of origin history
- Childhood experiences (abusive and non-abusive)
- School
- Work
- Peers and social groups
- Important relationships and partners or marriage
- Religious or spiritual experiences
- Mental health issues (childhood, adolescent, adult)

This process took approximately two to four hours.

It was important that a rich, thick description of the research participants lived experiences as they transform(ed) past-life trauma into wholeness unfolded in the interview process. According to van Manen (1984), “[It] is impossible to offer ready-made questions,” (p.17). The researcher may ask what an experience is like and then explore with the research participants, “the specific instance, situation, event or person” (van Manen, p. 17).

The following questions were included and intended generate other information and other questions to enhance and explore the phenomenological-hermeneutic paradigms as described in this chapter:

- Tell me about your first recollections of issues or problems in this life and what that looked like for you?
- Describe the meaning that you attached to your experiences of trauma on your current mental health?
- What are some of the ways that current-life issues have impacted your life?
- What were your thoughts about the possibility of past-life recollection prior to your own personal experiences?
- Describe what it was like when you first realized your current-life issues were linked to past-life traumas?
- What choices have you made in your life (childhood and adulthood) as a result of your experiences with past-life trauma in your current life?
- What thoughts and feelings have been generated as a result of this experience?
- What events, situations or people are connected with this experience?
- What thoughts and feelings did you associate with death prior to your experience(s)? How have those thoughts and feelings surrounding your own death changed?
- Tell me about any meditative, philosophical or spiritual paths that you follow.
- What are your religious beliefs?
- Do you believe in reincarnation?
- Tell me about the reactions of friends, family members, colleagues, partner to your experience
- Have you shared all of the significant ingredients of your story?

Upon completion of the interviews I asked each participant permission to contact them via e-mail should I need to clarify any parts of the interview. Each participant granted me this permission and subsequently I contacted all participants via e-mail. The initial contact was an e-mail requesting permission to ask them clarifying questions. Once I received positive feedback, I asked the necessary questions and also asked permission to use their responses in my study. All participants agreed and provided the

requested information as well as permission to use the added information to further the depth of the study.

**Ethical considerations.** The primary considerations of this study were the research participants' confidentiality, safety, and anonymity. Therefore, it was ensured that the letter of consent was thoroughly explained to each research participant [see Appendix] before beginning the interview and that any questions the research participants had were fully addressed, and that confidentiality was maintained. Had any research participant disclosed to me any information regarding current abuse, neglect, and harm of self (including suicide ideation), *minor* or *others* in severity, they would have been excluded from the study and provided with assistance in obtaining immediate help. The following items were addressed within the letter of consent:

- The length of the tape-recorded interview is between two and three hours.
- The location is in a nonthreatening, private, and mutually agreed-upon area.
- The interview is transcribed by the present researcher, and only the research participants and the research supervisor have access to the interview.
- Research participants are given copies of their transcribed personal interview.
- Participation is voluntary, and research participants are given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Once participants have asked to be removed from the study all data will be destroyed.
- Research participants are made aware that participation in the study may cause some inconveniences and risks, including the triggering of psychological or emotional discomfort. Referral numbers of counselling services are provided to the research participants.
- Each research participant is identified with a pseudonym, and their original names are placed in a locked cabinet. The interviews are heard by only the present researcher, the research supervisor, and the research participant.

- Research participants may delete any identifying information that is found in the transcripts.
- Research participants and data confidentiality are protected by using secure passwords for electronic information; print data are kept in a locked cabinet.
- Other planned uses of the research participants' data include the possibility that the results of the data be published in academic journals and/or a book and/or presented at conferences and/or university classes.
- Research participants' data from this study are disposed of once the study is complete and the results or the research is published.
- Results from this study are shared with the research participants, the research supervisor, and other academics in a thesis defence.

This section has discussed the research methods and procedures that were used to investigate the lived experience of adult as they transform past-life trauma into wholeness. The phenomenological-hermeneutics philosophy was the underlying direction for the methods offered in this section.

## **Chapter 4: Themes of Participants' Journey through Healing Trauma and the Quest for Wholeness**

*Understand this if nothing else;  
 spiritual freedom and oneness with the Tao  
 are not randomly bestowed gifts, but the rewards  
 of conscious self-transformation and self-evolution.  
 -The Hua Hu Ching-*

This chapter presents the research study thematic analysis of the participant's lived experience and includes a concise narrative of their family of origins and personal histories, followed by the shared mutual themes that arose, and concludes with an analysis of the common themes. The events of the participants' lives are presented

sequentially to help understand their originating wounds, the associated pain and manifestations of such, and their own journeys of healing through past-life experiences.

From the perspective of phenomenological-hermeneutics, van Manen (1990) clearly stated that the reason we do research and gather information from others is because: "We gather other people's experiences because it allows us to become more experienced ourselves" (p. 62). Before moving forward with the introduction of the research participants, it is important to note this researcher intentionally sought out a past-life therapist to experience a past-life regression session. As a student of counselling psychology, a client in therapy and someone deeply passionate about the growth, healing, and change of the human condition, it was important to focus on my own personal quest to know: How is this, the road to healing trauma, the soul and awakening into wholeness? Is this what it is like to be healed and whole? Is this what it means to be healed and whole? Referring to the previous van Manen's (1990) quote, to be open and gain the experience of others, I must have my own experiences so that I may have an understanding of what it is I am attempting to acquire. It was important that I be able to describe my own experience through all my senses as I lived through them, from the inside out: my thoughts, feelings, my mood and my emotions as though I was living it for the first time (van Manen, 1990). Along with all of my other life experiences, this personal experience of my own past lives and the implications for personal insights and healing will impact my analysis and interpretation of the research participants shared stories. It is through this understanding that I will seek personal transparency; striving to maintain connection to my own thoughts and feelings and experiences; being aware of my own biases as much as possible and welcoming my own experiences to help articulate

those of my participants as I effort to describe, make meaning and analyze those rich life experiences.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of this study include one male and three females. The ages range from thirty-eight to forty-nine. All participants have experienced the rawness of childhood abuse, neglect, rejection, abandonment, isolation and attachment issues. Sexual abuse occurred at least once in all participants' childhood years. The consequences of the invasion of their bodies and the simultaneous psychological rejection by their caregivers manifested itself in all participants' lives as issues with bonding and attachment in intimate relationships. Three of the four participants attempted suicide at least once, the other participant experienced several long periods of suicide ideation. All participants describe experiencing access to the abundance of knowledge or memory that exists in the universe or the Akashic records which is a field or collection of knowledge or information of all time that exists everywhere and connects everything. According to Orr (2008) "everything that exists comes from this quantum field, which is the source and foundation for all of our physical reality" (p. 62). Each participant experienced a healing or healings of current-life issues and traumas as well as transformation into wholeness as a result of past-life recall.

Shao-Lung (SL) is a forty-six year old single, childless, never married male, who is employed as a construction and concrete worker. SL was born as a twin; however his twin brother died at birth. SL met his biological birth father briefly at the age of eleven; he had hopes of living with his father, but this never materialized. His relationship with his birth father was very brief. He lived with his two year older biological sister and his

biological mother until the age of three or four when his step-father became part of his life. SL recalls being angry prior to the inclusion of his step-father in his family, but he also describes how his anger intensified as a result of this inclusion because of the intense neglect, physical and emotional abuse that were the consequences of the merging of his mother and his step-father. Both parents consumed heavy amounts of alcohol and as the family abuse intensified, SL's anger increased to the place where he began to isolate and disengage from his family. SL describes that although he found it difficult to make and maintain friends in school, he relied on good grades to give him some direction, meaning and success and to help balance the fear of everything else in his life. As SL grew older, he continued to withdraw from his family and through self-isolation he became hardened to and a survivor of the brutal and demeaning atrocities and expectations of his parents. It was through a counselling session that the abuse was discovered and at the approximate age of twelve he was taken from the family home and placed in foster care. It was during this time within the first foster home setting that SL began to re-build his trust and faith in humanity. However, it was his experience in his second foster home that his belief in the protective care of adults was once again betrayed through repeated experiences of sexual abuse.

SL's sister completed suicide approximately twenty years ago. He has been estranged from his mother and step-father since he was eighteen. He has no contact with his biological father.

At the age of fourteen SL witnessed an inner experience that he now understands as the prelude to his healing journey. However, this illustration of the power of this past life as the mythical God, Osiris was overwhelming. The fear of being found out as

someone with such incredible God-like gifts overtook him and SL consciously kept Osiris from his life. It was not until SL was in his forties that he experienced a spontaneous past-life recall as Osiris. It was through the gifts of this experience that SL began to heal his deep childhood wounds, find his inner truth and move towards acceptance of self and wholeness within the universe.

Willow is a twice divorced thirty-eight year old married female and the mother of three children; a daughter who is twenty years old, a nineteen year old son and a twelve year old son. The older children are biologically brother and sister whereas the youngest boy is a step-brother. Willow is employed as a 911 dispatch supervisor.

Willow is the youngest child in a family of three children. Her step-sister is eight years older and her biological brother is three years older. Willow's parents did not plan for a third child. Willow described that her father was devastated by the news of this pregnancy as her parents' marriage was failing. Willow's father was an alcoholic who also suffered mental health issues. He physically abused Willow's mother and her sister. Willow and her brother were not abused by her father but she described this as a time of feeling despondent terror and she would hide in the safety of closets and under furniture. It was during formative years; at the age of four that Willow and her sister were sexually abused by her maternal uncle. By the time Willow was seven, her mother, who was Mennonite Brethren and her father had separated. Her older sister, who was fifteen at that time and heavily into drugs, had already run away from home. Between the ages of seven and eight Willow experienced severe neglect and upheaval as she was in the care of her alcoholic father for a short time. While the courts and social services attempted to sort out custody of the family case, Willow hardly attended school and recalled her father

being in a drunken stupor. Consequently she and her brother became so malnourished they began losing their lice infested hair. Willow and her brother were finally taken from her father, however due to his attempts to abduct them from their mothers' care they were placed in a safe home for a short period of time before they were finally returned to the permanent care of her mother. From this time forward Willow recalled infrequent visits and birthday cards from her father and she described being more aware of the feelings of rejection, abandonment and the overall feelings of not being seen or heard. As a single parent, Willow's mother was occupied with a very busy work schedule and Willow began to manage her own life. Before high school graduation, at the age of seventeen, Willow became pregnant and was asked by the then principal to leave her high school without her high school education.

Willow's journey towards growth, healing and change first occur through the insights of Shaman in 2006, however it is not until she spontaneously slipped into a full physiological stress response in 2010 that the insights of the Shaman begin to reveal their true meanings. All three of Willows past-life experiences, which were guided by a professional past-life-regression therapist, revolve around reconciliation of relationships which include the acceptance of no relationship as reconciliation itself as well as learning how to be in relationships that are whole and complete and a reflection of the entire universal connection.

Lynn is a forty-six year old twice divorced single female who has two grown semi-estranged adopted children. In 1996, Lynn and her first husband adopted a boy and a girl who were seven and five respectively at the time of adoption. Lynn is not currently in a relationship and is self employed as a soul coach.

Lynn grew up in an emotionally abusive and physically violent home. She recalled daily emotionally and physically abusive episodes between her parents and herself. Lynn has one sibling, a sister who is three years older. Her sister played the role of the *good girl* and was not subjected as much to the daily rituals of parental abuse. At age twelve, Lynn's father's friend sexually abused her. Lynn recalled feeling very lonely, isolated, rejected and abandoned as a young girl and she remembered spending much of her alone time in a nearby field, reading. Lynn remembered the insurmountable feelings of self-hate and for relief she attempted suicide and other self-harming behaviours. Lynn's parents are still married, although as of 2012 Lynn became estranged from her father.

Lynn's road to healing occurred through two past-life regressions, both which occurred in 2012. In one session a past-life experience spurred a re-birth and other intense spiritual awakenings; the other past-life experience provided her with deep understandings, insights, resolution and integration into her current-life situation. The spiritual aspects of Lynn's healing journey which started in 2002 spurred both joy and confusion for Lynn and she sought the support of psychiatric hospitalized care as her spiritual experiences intensified beyond her own understanding. Lynn spoke frankly of her healing journey and the importance of the past-life experiences, full of conviction of the healing powers which catapulted her along the road to self-actualization resulting in a profound sense of complete oneness and wholeness with all things.

Sally is a 49-year-old female who is currently living with her second husband. Sally has two grown male children with her first husband. Sally is a published author, public speaker and facilitator of Satsung meetings and conferences.

Sally's birth was a surprise to her parents and doctors. Sally was born as a twin to a healthy brother. However, because their twin hearts were beating simultaneously the doctors thought that the pregnancy was a single robust boy. At that time the family consisted of an older brother and sister and the family was not prepared for the birth of twins. Subsequently, Sally remained in the hospital for two weeks separated completely from her mother and visited infrequently by her father. A few years later another sister was born.

As a young child Sally experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Both of her parents were alcoholics and her mother was diagnosed with manic depressive disorder. Sally's parents physically and emotionally abused her, although her memories are of her mother as the most abusive. As a young child Sally was also sexually abused by a paternal uncle. Sally describes these childhood years as a time of not feeling wanted, liked or cared for. "I thought I was the problem." By the time Sally was fifteen the abuse she suffered created so much emotional and internal pain she felt her only escape was through death, and in 1978 she attempted suicide. The following year at the age of sixteen she left home. Currently, Sally is not estranged from any family members.

Sally experienced two past-life recalls. The first one occurred in 1995. This past life manifested when Sally was in a hypnotherapy session and Sally described that the "past life slid into me." This experience gave Sally insight into her role as a healer and facilitator of Satsung gatherings. In 1998, prior to Sally's second, past-life experiences she had a profound waking-up experience in which the non-dual experience welcomed her, an invitation she did not resist and accepted into her life. The second, past-life experience helped Sally heal her relationship issues with her current husband and

occurred in approximately 2010. It was with purpose, intent and curiosity that Sally was searching to “see where connection in a past life might be affecting my life now.” Both of these past-life experiences led Sally to a place of more clarity, understanding, peace, and direction regarding her intimate relationships and her purpose in her current life. The difference between Sally and the other participants is the other three participants seemed to have embraced the non-dual path as a result of their past-life experiences. Sally described that “the non-dual path embraced me” and this embracement occurred between her two, past-life experiences. At the time of the second, past-life experience Sally was not suffering, relative to the suffering she had endured prior to her spiritual awakening in 1998 or her first, past-life experience in 1995. Sally wondered if she had healed any current-life trauma by visiting her past-life scenarios, yet at the same time she found great relief and release in both past and current lives as well as a deeper understanding of the meaning of her current-life romantic relationship. Sally is included in this study, because much like SL, Willow and Lynn, Sally’s experience with past-life recall healed her current-life pain and answered inner questions and resolved uncertainty and unsettledness.

This section has provided a brief introduction to each of the four research participants. A comment is made here in reflection of the researcher’s initial interview experience with all the participants’. All four research participants articulated their family of origin histories openly and with ease. It was through this initial inquiry and discussion of their familial histories, that the researcher experienced each individual participant’s warmth, openness, willingness, connectedness and excitement to share their journeys. This experience for the researcher was at times more than had been anticipated

and yet it set the stage for the flow of the remainder of the interview and provided tremendous opportunity to meet and join each participant as they recalled their own personal struggles and pain, their past-life experiences and their journeys towards wholeness and integration of self.

### **A Preliminary Note on Themes**

Semi-structured interviews were used to provide a snapshot of each research participant's individual current-life experiences. It was intended to gather historical personal information on all aspects of current day to day life before moving into past-life inquiry. Questions surrounding their family of origin, childhood experiences, school, work, peers and social groups, relationships, religious experiences, and mental health issues were asked using a narrative approach.

It was surprising that three of the four participants wanted to talk in detail about their current-life trauma and the childhood origins of the trauma. The interviews evolved as the research participants moved from childhood wounding to the resulting "hell hole" of pain and their efforts to cope in their current life before they moved into descriptions of past-life experiences. It seemed as though linking of their current-life issues to the discovery of past-life traumas was the door to the final way of transforming and healing the pain of current-life issues, and perhaps those issues of their past-lives as well. It appeared for all research participants that past-life issues were insightfully brought forward as themes into their current lives as a way to heal trauma in this life. Past-life exploration appeared to be a way of searching for healing through understanding the pain and suffering that was occurring in their current lives. From the perspective of healing this makes sense as trauma can only be healed when it is brought into awareness.

Sally did not appear to associate or conceptualize the abuse in her childhood and pain and suffering in this life to past-life trauma. Although Sally did link her current-life marital relationship issues to unresolved past-life trauma issues. However, Sally is a non-dual Satsung facilitator and healer and she may have previously healed her own childhood trauma within the realm of non-dual teachings. This represents an example of The Fecundity of the Individual Case. Further to this, it was this researcher's impression that Sally's approach to the interviews was from a non-dual perspective; Sally may be the sole research participant who, at the time of the interview, was engaged in full enlightenment of wholeness and oneness with the universe. Living moment-to-moment as a witness, and as a part of all that is and subscribing to an acceptance of that which naturally occurs, is meant to occur, and needs to occur, would understandably temper the significance of some of the aspects of childhood trauma in her current lifetime. This may be another example of The Fecundity of the Individual Case.

All four research participants found that it was through understanding the trauma and pain in their current lives that they were able to then explore ways of healing. They all found a repeat thematic pattern while exploring past-life work and in doing so they seemed to reconcile this life pain and perhaps the past-life pain was reconciled as well. Whether it was in the moment of past-life recall that the trauma of the past life was healed, or perhaps both past-life and current-life pain and trauma were healed simultaneously seems to be unknown. However, it seems that it took the research participants a considerable amount of pain and suffering in their current lives before they went back and transformed the repeat of past-life traumas into wholeness in this life.

All four research participants did not appear to have any past-life recollections of intense sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. Their past-life experiences appear to be thematic and repetitive of the themes in their current life. Therefore, it may have been important that during the interview they discussed and described their current-life trauma as a way of bringing awareness and understanding of the repetitive cycle of the themes of abandonment, isolation, neglect, and rejection. Even though there may be an understanding of such past-life events as tragic deaths, they did not know the details of their past lives that may have contributed to their tragedies. It was through understanding their own current-life trauma and the associated themes that they were able to link up the repeated pattern as shown by the past-life work and move towards reconciliation and healing. As a result of this, it may appear that the results of this study are somewhat reverse to the initial inquiry of this study. However, in following the method of phenomenological hermeneutics, the presented themes are the researcher's understanding and interpretations of the meaningful expressions of the inner, intellectual and spiritual life of the research participants as captured within their own defined social and historical contexts.

The research participants' shared their stories of their initial wounds and the manifestation of the resulting pain and their journeys towards wholeness of self, from the perspective of a healed self. All research participants had self-awareness and insights into their journeys that provided a solid landscape of retrospection and understanding of their experiences both in the past and in the present moment. It was from this landscape of understanding of self and the meaning of the experiences that twelve common themes emerged and are offered in the next section within the following five parts: "Part 1:

Primal Wounds”, “Part 2: The Panorama of a Broken Heart”, “Part 3: Manifestations of Narcissistic Wounds”, “Part 4: Healing the Fragmented Self”, and “Part 5: The Non-Dual Path: Trusting the Cosmos”.

These themes are intentionally organized chronologically to follow the descriptive narratives of the three participants. Sally also described her childhood trauma, however, her focus was more on the present moment and the current joy in her life as a result of her experiences along the non-dual path, as Sally would say, “This moment is all there really is.”

### **Part 1: Primal Wounds**

It was surprising because it was thought that past-life recall in regards to overcoming current-life trauma would be the kick-start of the fourth chapter. However, as mentioned three of the four participants began their narrative by really digging into their deep childhood wounds. As a result this is where the thematic analysis begins.

American psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut who is the father of self-psychology, which holds that the self-self-object relationship forms the building blocks of psychological health that endure throughout the life span, believed that a person’s sense of self is dependent on the relationship of the empathetic mirroring of the “other” which is deemed essential to that self (Firman & Gila, 1997). If people are deeply and empathetically seen, heard, and understood by a self-object, the self—or Being—thrives and develops along a path of psychological health and wellness. The following quote from Firman and Gila (1997) described the intensity of a healthy self-self-object relationship:

My grandmother used to look at me in a way that really let me know she saw me. I felt connected to her, accepted by her unconditionally. She was my beacon of

hope growing up, and even now I feel her inside of me, being with me in that same way. I don't know. She gives me the heart to get up and keep going, to live life. (p. 71)

When life relationships become unhealthy and disturbances occur that disrupt the empathetic mirroring or connection with the self-self-object, it is like there is a disconnection to Self. The person becomes wounded by the inability to connect and be in a relationship with the other but also, because of the inadequate or painful mirroring, to be in a relationship with the Self. This fracture or wound annihilates parts of the person leaving them feeling fragmented, abandoned and unsure of Self and the other. Another example is provided by Firman and Gila (1997):

[My] father suddenly shouted at me in a blind rage, I was shocked. I felt crushed, stupid, betrayed, and completely alone. I wanted to disappear, to die. It was like falling through empty space, nothing to hold onto. I felt like an astronaut cut loose from his space ship, falling into infinite black nothingness. All I could do was stand there. I was frozen. (p. 89)

It is this primal wounding that creates parts of a person that becomes split off from other parts of the Self. Those parts that have been mirrored as positive and whole are maintained and intact, but those parts that have been mirrored as negative, split off from the person are then housed separately in part(s) that characterize self-loathing, inadequacy, guilt, shame, anger etc. These primal wounds, the failure of attachment and hence the threat of non-being is explored through the next two themes: the threat of annihilation, and ruptures in attachment and belonging.

**Theme 1: The threat of annihilation.** One way of understanding the significance attached to initial primal childhood wounds and psychological health and well-being, is to review a small piece of ego psychology and object relations theory. It is

through these two lenses of development psychology that segments of the participants' experiences are highlighted and woven throughout the following section.

There are many different teachings and traditions that define and describe the origins and functions of the ego. Some teachings see ego as a primary conduit for seeking pleasure, spiritual traditions see it as an obstacle for enlightenment, the Sufis see it as its own consciousness that contains unenlightened impulses and patterns and Buddhism sees it as an assortment of inclinations which are seen in the mind as having space and time (Almaas, 1988). Almaas (1988) summarized by saying: "In many traditions, then, there is an understanding of ego as somehow false or illusionary. However—'ego' is in fact the main realm of experience of 'man of the world'." (p. 21)

Heinz Hartman who is often thought of as the father of ego psychology termed the initial state of a newborn infant as the *undifferentiated matrix* (Almaas, 1988). According to Almaas (1988), Hartman believed that the newborn matrix "is taken to contain, in an undifferentiated and undeveloped form the innate predispositions and capacities which will in time develop into the ego with its sense of separate individuality" (p. 23). "Margaret Mahler called the process of ego development "separation-individuation" (Almaas, 1988, p. 23). According to Almaas (1988), the accomplishment of a separate individuality is founded on two premises of ego development: "1) The establishment of a cohesive self-image, and 2) the internalization of a positively regarded image of the mother (the 'good mother')" (p. 25). From this perspective then, perhaps it can be said that childhood ego development transpires from within the framework of the primary caregiver, the self-object or "mother." It is from this background that Fairbairn named this method as object relations theory.

To summarize, according to Almaas (1988), object relations theory is:

[The] development of ego structure through the process of separation-individuation happens primarily through the means of the internalization of object relations through the formation of inner images of self and other- every situation or interaction between infant and mother is an object relation. Except in the very earliest phases, in which there is no differentiation at all, the infant always sees himself in relation to the mother, not in isolation. (Almaas, 1988, pp. 50–51)

In fact, according to Almaas (1988), the ego is organized and modified constantly as more and more object relations are introduced, internalized, and later identified by the child. The sense of self is an internalized accumulation of object relations from the earliest exposure of the object relations. The more congruent and balanced the child's experiences with a variety of object relations, the more integral the child's environment is and thus the development of the child proceeds normally. When the primary caregiver is not able to care for the child adequately and ego development fissures occur, the child's psychological health is compromised and the child may experience the threat of non-being or annihilation due to the failed object relationship. Also of importance, is the crucial and historical in utero work of Stern (1985), Grof (1976) and Liley (1972). The work of these individuals is consensual and suggests that the mother's emotional and physical stress is communicated to the fetus which affects future life evolution and procedural functions and the threat of non-being. Almaas (1996) stated "This means that the infant has already developed rudiments of relatively fixed forms from its prenatal experience" (p. 496). Furthermore it seems as though the Self is able to absorb memories prior to the onset of verbal memory (Stern, 1985). Equally important; these prenatal experiences are included in the first three experiential years of life that create the basic structure of the child, be it healthy or unhealthy (Almaas, 1988).

Ego psychology and object relations theory are building blocks that assist the researcher in formulating a theoretical framework for understanding each participants experienced primal childhood wounds and also provides another lens in the making meaning and analysing of the wounded experiences. Without the researchers awareness of the development of ego and the importance of healthy mirroring and a cohesive relationship with the primary matrix, analysis and my experience as the researcher would be disharmonious and result in experiences, both written and internal that may not be beneficial or favourable for the intentions of this thesis.

As the following participants' wounds are unveiled and discussed, the reader will notice that the participants' experiences are of both overt and covert wounding. Overt wounding is pervasive and includes violence, sexual abuse or physical abandonment. Covert wounding may be less obvious and even families that appear healthy often inflict covert wounding. According to Firman and Gila (1998) covert wounding consists of:

[Emotional] battering, emotional incest and enmeshment; unresponsiveness, depression, or self-involvement on the part of the caregiver; caregiver compulsions and addictions that remain unrecognized and untreated; a constant unresolved tension between caregivers, manifested in outward conflict or invisibly pervading the family atmosphere the leaving of a child alone to face an overwhelming situation; and focusing the child into a limiting role. (p. 93)

SL's earliest wounding memory is in his crib. While this wound does not appear to be of the physical world of reality and meet the criteria involved in ego development, object relations theory or overt or covert wounding as defined above, nonetheless there is agony and anguish attached to this moment for SL.

In this memory SL is aware of his ability to move the assemblage point. The assemblage point is an agent within each of us that allows us to connect with either of

two possibilities; the realities of the physical world or normal awareness or what is known as the first intention and is assigned to the right side of the body; or the second intention, which is the other world, the unknown, where one is in a heightened state of keen and impressionable awareness, the world of the entities where energy and vibrations flow and access layers and layers of conscious levels and communicate interdependently, and is assigned the left side (Castaneda, 1985). While in a state of heightened awareness, SL was having vibrational discussion with the entities when he made a choice to understand the physical world, or to connect to the right side of the assemblage point, first before he could exist within the world of entities:

I remember, I remember the reason why I choose it. I need to understand this whole new miraculous world. When I reached out and I touched that crib, I went “what is this,” all the questions, all the curiosities, my brain started flooding about these questions of all this stuff. And I was amazed at all the questions that were coming. “What is that [referring to touching the crib], how is that that I can touch it, wow, I can feel this in my fingers, and ah, I could feel my whole entire body and it was there that there was sensations that I didn’t know which leads me to believe I need to learn this stuff first. I really need to understand this, I need to experience all of this in such a way before I can explain it to the entire world, or share it with the world or whatever. I’ve always believed I am here to share something with the world, so this is why I had to do this [the switch] because I had to learn this first because it would be easier to explain it to you if I’ve had your experience.

I just have to understand this physical realm first, because being over here [switch to the left] is so easy. It was work to make this [moving slowly the switch to the right] go over here and pay attention to this physical world, and as soon as I quit working at it the switch would go over to the left.

So, when I made this choice—they knew it was my choice, that they couldn't do anything about it, but it was like, it was almost like it was a choice that we hadn't agreed upon, it was a change, I just changed the whole plan, I should have just continued on with what I was doing, right?

The initial wound occurred when:

One day I was playing with the switch, and I am thinking ah this is nice; I am reaching out and hearing all the noises, seeing all the sparkles' and all that stuff right? And then when I thought okay this is enough and then the switch wouldn't go back. I'm like "what's going on"? And I remember crying, I remember crying "this has to go back, it is supposed to be easy, this has to go back." I went to sleep, 'cause I was exhausted from crying.

It was at this place where the first split occurred for SL as he no longer had access to the left side of the assemblage point, or, the entities at will. It is through reflection and an understanding of the purpose of his life that SL was able to say, "I woke up, the switch was where it had to be (to the right; the physical world)." He was able to understand the meaning associated to this experience. SL believes he was given this as a gift at that time, one to help him understand the physical world first so that he could later explain the world of heightened awareness in a context that those in the physical world would be able to relate to and understand. While there was a reflective acceptance and an understanding of the meaning in terms of his current day life of this event, there was an underbelly of sadness from the ensuing loss of the entities' who were representative of his primary objects. It is his self-reflection and current viewpoint and understanding of the purpose of his life that give him the ability to make sense of it all. However, as a baby he was mortified and felt a sense of loss and abandonment when he realized he

could no longer easily manipulate the switch from the first order of intention to the second order of intention or his primary objects at that time.

While this example may not appear to represent the ego development and separation-individuation process that defines the mainstream theoretical view of object relations, SL shared a deep resounding loss, one of separation and the ensuing loneliness from what may well have been his primary object relation; the entities. Considering the amount of sadness and loss that he felt because of this separation, regardless of that fact that it was not a physical form as we classify objects to be, the manifestation of pain due to the separation was apparent and significantly powerful for SL.

During SL's description of this event, it was clear that he had made a choice to stay in the physical world, but it appears that he didn't have a clear understanding at that time of the consequences of his choice. He recalls that once the switch got stuck to the physical realm (the right) he thankfully was still connected energetically and vibrationally to his mother and his older sister, in fact he was able to share a deep sense of connection in that moment as we spoke that involved the same sensations that he felt as a young baby in the crib, "The physical sensation I am currently having right now, this comfort, this home-is a natural state of vibration- this moment is a good explanation of how it felt in general when I was back in the crib."

In this moment of the interview, both SL and I were aware of the clear, calm, relaxed and beautiful flowing vibrational energy that existed between us. From this point forward in the interview there was an unspoken echo of energy that defined SL's shared experiences not only from the perspective of cognitive articulation and memory recall,

but also from a deeply connected vibrational and energetic soul level between researcher and research participant.

When SL was approximately one to two years of age, while he had lost the capacity to be connected to the left side of the assemblage point, he is still able to connect with the instinctual vibrational energy that conveys to the mother the needs of her pre-verbal child. This unspoken vibrational energy, this method of existing changed for SL when he could no longer communicate vibrationally with his mother. His second wound or split occurs and SL explained:

[I]am sitting on the floor and we're playing whatever we're playing with as kids right, you know W [sister] is over here [points to the left] and I'm like "gees I want a glass of water," so I am waiting for my glass of water, cause I want a glass of water. I just thought it, I just felt it -whenever I do that the "mom" seems to get this right? And so we're playing along, I got no water, so I do it again, "I want some water," nothing; and I'm like that's really weird. And then the third time, mom comes in, mom comes from the kitchen, into the living room hallway where we are at playing, and I'm like yeah, "I want a glass of water," she's like "I don't understand what you want, SL." I want water, how difficult can this be, this has never been an issue before. She just looks at me, "I don't know what you want, SL." And I remember her looking at me confused because she is not getting this for some reason. Now I am starting to feel really weird, okay well, I can make this work, I can make this work, I can talk like mom can and W, so I'll just say it. So, I tried to speak for the first time, "I want water," and I remember how- I never taught to speak before, right? So, "oh, that didn't come out the way it was supposed to." So, I tried it again, same thing happened, right? So, this whole talking thing is horrid, it is so primitive, it was garbage, it is not working, right? What happened to you? [Referring to his mother]. So she threw her hands up and walked away, "I don't get it" and she just walked away. I was devastated. I just started crying. I never communicated with mom like that again. My sister

and I were always close and there was a point about a year after that, about two to three years all of that quiet communication stopped.

When describing his emotional response, SL said it:

[Was] the exact same feeling as when the switch got stuck, right to the *T*, exact same feeling it was like—what did I do wrong—it was devastation, you know things are going along really well and everything is great and suddenly just poof, someone pulls the carpet out from under you, it was very, very, very, morally destroying—abandoned is a really good word right? You know, it's like, “Why can this be happening, it shouldn't be happening,” I mean it wasn't me, cause my sister and I were still communicating, so what did my mom do? That was a big turning point for my mom and me. That's when stuff started happening, that led into foster homes and that was the turning point- that was the day I gave up.

The lack of connection with the primary object led to deep emotional experiences of devastation, insignificance, abandonment, isolation and an overall felt sense of *why bother?* These were heavy disturbances and SL recalls becoming emotionally despondent and very angry within the sensitive developmental milestone of the first three years of childhood.

Another massive wound occurs when SL was approximately three to four years of age. His mother became involved with a man who was physically and emotionally abusive towards SL. SL's next wound occurred when his stepfather:

[Discovered] that I was an angry child and so he thought he should get rid of that, so he used force against force. One thing led to another...locked in a basement, fed a glass of water and a piece of bread.

[I] was locked in the basement because I revolted. I am a kid, I shouldn't be feeding your cows, I shouldn't be milking your cows, I shouldn't be hoeing, we have 5 acres of field, why am I hoeing this, why am I being punished my

entire life ? - I used to get beat every day almost-if I wasn't doing the job-they would pull the belt out. Mom broke so many wooden spoons over my ass.

One of the very first pieces shared by Willow was "I was born into trauma-I was my mom's only unplanned pregnancy-I was a complete accident and it was not good news for my dad that my mom was pregnant because the marriage was already falling apart."

Willow's initial primal wounding, threat of non-being and splitting off may have occurred while in utero. Willow recalled her mother telling her "My parents got into a fight when they were driving a vehicle, and my mom was I think about seven or eight months pregnant with me at the time and...he pushed her out of the moving vehicle." In reflection, Willow stated, "a lot of it just makes more and more sense" as she wonders if her early childhood experiences with her father began on this day when her mother's intense emotions of fear and abandonment were transferred to her, unborn in the womb.

The feelings of not being connected and abandoned that may have originated in the womb begin to form into concrete memories while Willow was in the high chair and especially between the ages of two and four when Willow stated she "was completely ignored." Her life unfolded as she witnessed repeated acts of violence towards her mother and her sister and she internalized the rejection and abandonment from her father. Willow recalls trying to connect with her father by asking questions or making comments. Her father would respond to her:

"[No] one understands what you are saying. You sound just like your mother." That comment did not sit well with me because I knew what his feelings were towards my mother. I deeply knew even at a very young age, I knew that he hated her, and if he hated her then he hated me. And that was a clear message."

Another wound occurred when Willow [age four] and her sister [age twelve] are sexually assaulted by an uncle who lived with them, “[He] came home drunk one night and- sexually assaulted both me and my sister- we never said anything to anybody. We wouldn’t reveal any of this for another probably, like I was, eighteen or nineteen.”

Consequently, Willow spent her formative years alone, hiding in closets or under tables during intense periods of “furniture smashing, mom getting thrown around—really brutal things.” Willow commented that she was so terrorized and despondent that “When I was four or five years old, I would often be found hiding after hours and hours and hours in a linen closet or somewhere.” While in discussion about these past events Willow was in touch with the memories, those split off parts of not having a voice, not having anything worth contributing and feelings of not being valuable enough to be included. These were faintly present as they became translated into her body in the moment, the here and now.

[It’s] a physical feeling, the deeper I go into it. So for me it’s always in my chest or my stomach, I can physically feel the pressure and the pain. Another feeling I have had for a long time is have you ever choked back tears, like you feel you wanted to cry but you could not and you get that tightness right in your throat? That is the feeling I get when I am held back from expressing what I need to express.

For Willow, early threats to existence showed up as feelings of not been seen and heard; feelings of rejection, abandonment, and isolation; and the fear of security and stability that ensues with witnessing continual violence and chaos as a young child in her family of home origin. For Willow, the process of ego development and a strong sense of self through self-self-object(s) may have been fiercely interrupted with paternal object

relations fissures that occurred initially while in utero and continued forward into her childhood.

Lynn also experienced sexual, emotional, and physical abuse in her malleable youth; however unlike SL and Willow, the primal wounds of her formative years appear to be less impactful to her mental health as a pre-school child. Lynn describes her young childhood years being filled with isolation and loneliness however she commented that “I was never depressed as a child because I feel perfectly at home in that scenario.” The scenario that Lynn referred to is:

[There] was a lot of daily and weekly violence in my home-between my parent's, between me. He [father] used to verbally abuse her [mother] so badly, and me as well. Calling her every name under the sun and me as well and, you know the fist through the wall and pans being thrown, screaming, every week of my life was like that. It was constantly terrifying. Constantly in a state of fear and thinking how do I solve this?

Even though Lynn felt perfectly home in this situation, she was terrified; she soothed herself by spending her “entire childhood in this lifetime in a field alone-with books.” Lynn explained that her young childhood life experiences in this life and her acceptance of the loneliness and isolation and the months upon years spent in the field outside alone reading books is because she did not “have the awareness of what you [she] experienced. So you have no ability to make any changes if you are not aware of what was wrong- so I came back into this [life] as a child being totally isolated.” In reflection and speculation Lynn believed:

[That] my soul is an evolutionary process and I believe that I did not understand the concept of love and community. So I choose parents that also did not understand, so I am attracting the same energetic awareness. So, I would just

invite myself [to this current life] because it is what I am familiar with, it's what I know; I would just feel comfortable there. I do not know what love is or what belonging means. I have no concept of that. So I feel perfectly at home. It was not until you [I] become older then you start to understand, logically, okay this is not the best thing and I actually do need love.

Lynn inserted an understanding of the teachings and lessons of this life and the soul's goal to transform past-life errors rather than repeat them. Her experiences and her awareness of the meanings of her childhood are interpreted and are attached to this life based on a conceptual understanding of past-life research, regressive therapy and the interpretation of such.

A perspective that is inclusive of the conceptualization of the souls journey and the repeating of past-life errors, contemplates Lynn's experiences through the lens of primal wounding, object relations theory and the threat of non-being. In Lynn's situation the pieces of her that were intact and not split off were able to go to the field and enjoy nature and her books without feeling depressed or lonely. There were other parts of her as well, much like Willow, Sally and in later years for SL who all found solace and coping through isolation. The split off parts that feared annihilation and did not feel worthy of love, adoration, tenderness, intimacy, community or belonging, used isolation as a method of coping for all research participants. Although thoughts of suicide ideation and suicide attempts will be looked at further into this chapter, an appreciation of the strengths of all four research participants is noted here. Without these tenacious abilities to dissociate and find places of peace and comfort there is an unknown element of darkness that may have been too heavy and pervasive with outcomes far less desirable than those in this research.

Disruptions in ego development and separation-individuation process show up for Lynn in elementary school. Without having a solid sense of self based on adequate mirroring and the positive introjection of the *mother object*, Lynn did not have the skills and found it difficult to communicate and socialize with others. Her coping mechanisms of isolation were not available to her at school and as a result:

[School] was very hard, concentrating was very difficult due to the drama/fighting at home, it made me anxious, I did not sleep well, lots of parents fighting happened during the evenings/night. I had a hard time making and keeping friends due to my extreme lack of worth due to my father's constant criticisms. Once some girls came over after school on their bikes but my dad yelled at them and told them to go home because they just threw their bikes down. They were too unruly for my dad. It was embarrassing.

Lynn sense of not belonging was very strong in school. She struggled to find ways to communicate and socialize with other school children and she felt more isolated and mismatched as she experienced many failing marks.

[I] didn't have to do homework cause my father did not believe that kids should have to after an eight hour school day. So I got a lot of failing marks. I skipped out of school. Did not graduate. I was totally unaware of what it took to even graduate. No parental involvement with school or anything else. I lied to my parents and told them I graduated and that the diploma was coming in the mail. It didn't and they never asked and they still do not know.

To compensate for the threat of non-being, Lynn found that she lied not only to her parents, but to many others and in many situations. "I guess I was always trying to be better than who I was. Still am at times. I lied and told stories to make myself seem cooler." Without an understanding of her own Self, without experiencing a wide realm of

possibilities of positive object relations, Lynn had compromised resources to assist her in trying to belong, make friends and succeed in school and after school life.

Sally's recalled being very lonely and neglected as a young child and not knowing how to fight back during abusive events. In reflection of those times when she was severely physically and emotionally abused by her mother, Sally said "I was so shocked because it just never occurred to me to stand up to it. I was submissive. I was just completely always taking it. I never knew to stop, or try to get away." Sally had internalized and identified with her primary matrix. Through the consistent physical and emotional abuse, the only object relations Sally could connect with was that of a receiver of her mother's own wounds played out as hostility and rage towards Sally. From the perspective of meaning making of this abusive time Sally now understands that "the benefits of that afterwards-I realized that what I was doing was actually receiving their anger-she [her mother] is just repeating what happened to her.

Sally remembered leaving her body and going into a blue light above her head during physical abuse. However, it wasn't until 1993 that Sally's amnesic memories of sexual abuse were awakened when she started tantric practice. Although Sally was fully aware that she had left her body during physical abuse, it was at this time she that recalled leaving her body during both sexual and physical abuse. Sally recalled:

[It] is so much energy, and then learning to dance with it. I mean, as a child, what I did is, I went into a blue light above my head when stuff was happening. I was aware of that at the time because I knew that there was a part of me that says, that even said that you cannot really hurt me.

When the abuse was over she would come back into her body and she noticed that she would be numb in those areas where she had physically endured pain. Sally further recalled:

[I] went just above my body and witnessed the whole thing that was happening, and then I would go to my room or someplace, you know, out in the backyard or woods or whatever and console myself –the feeling would come back into my body. The little girl was really hurt and took it personally.

Sally's despair and fear of annihilation show up as parts of her dissociated from her whole self. Until 1993, Sally coped from the sexual abuse by splitting off the experiences of the devastatingly abusive object relations, creating walls of amnesia, with barriers, which prevented access to those aspects of Self where her rage and pain were contained. Sally coped with the physical and emotional abuse of her alcoholic mother similarly in that she witnessed or dissociated herself from the event by being above within the blue light, without any physical or emotional feeling in that moment, however, without amnesia. Consoling herself in isolation after the event is an attempt to avoid the threat of non-being. Those caring and nurturing parts of her young self, encouraged feeling back into the violated parts of her body as she comforted those parts that were dissociated during the event; those feelings of shame, guilt, fear, humiliation and anger.

In summary, it appears that in all four of the research participants' experiences, events and situations created some fears of non-being or annihilation. The accomplishment of separation and individuality seemed rather non-existent as each participant was misunderstood, neglected and abused. Ultimately their ego development became fragile and normative growth was compromised creating barriers that prevented a solid cohesive self-image. The internalization of a positive object relational image of the

mother was obstructed and restrained by parents who were perhaps reliving their own fears of non-being and annihilation.

To complete this section on primal wounding, a further look at how the wounds of attachment and belonging affected the psychological development of each participant is explored.

**Theme 2: Ruptures in attachment and belonging.** The method inherent in this thesis is from the perspective of phenomenological hermeneutics, or, the understanding of lived experiences and the meanings attached to those experiences. According to Ruden (2011) “Meaning arises as a result of our innate need for attachment and our previous experiences” (p. 43). Furthermore, Ruden (2011) explained “Attachments, physical, personal, and public, are the fundamental brick and mortar of meaning. Without attachment there is no meaning” (p. 44). Given this understanding of the significance of attachment to making meaning, and the underlying method outlined in this thesis, it is essential that attachment and the primal woundings that occur around attachment, bonding, and belonging are discussed.

Attachment theory is a global way of understanding how relationships work and emphasizes the importance of the early linkage and bonding of emotional connection between the infant and the principal caregiver (Flores, 2007; Ogden et al., 2006). Attachment theory particularly looks, according to Flores (2007) “at the way the lack of secure attachment influences early patterns of internalized relatedness (internal working models) and that is perpetuated throughout adulthood” (p. 46).

Ogden et al. (2006) explained that secure attachment occurs between caregiver and child “through reciprocal, attuned somatic and verbal communication” (p. 47).

Secure attachment is demonstrated when the child is able to explore the environment while in close proximity to the parent and when the child is feeling too physically removed from the parent, comes back to the parent without fear or restraint, and is confident to initiate both physical and emotional contact (Ogden et al., 2006). Children who are securely attached are easily soothed when distressed and able to move through the distress towards calmness and reengage in their activities (Flores, 2007). As adults, they have a solid capacity to self-regulate their own emotions and behaviours.

Parents and children are in emotional relationships with each other and are emotional regulators of each other (Flores, 2007). It is through these patterns of emotional regulation between parent and child that four distinct methods of responding to the primary caregiver have been identified: 1) securely attached children, 2) insecure-avoidant children, 3) insecure-ambivalent children, and 4) insecure-disorganized children (Flores, 2007; Ogden et al., 2006). A brief look at the attachment styles and their definitions follow; please refer to the preceding paragraph for the definition of secure attachment. According to Flores, insecure-avoidant children rarely mind when separated from their primary caregiver and upon being reunited they physically linger close by but demonstrate aloofness. Insecure-ambivalent children “protest when the primary caregiver leaves the room, but cannot be pacified when reunited with the caregiver. Insecure-ambivalent children tend to either bury their heads in the caregiver’s lap or cling furiously to the caregiver” (Flores, 2007, p. 48). Insecure-disorganized children do not seem to have an established pattern. Upon removal from the caregiver, they either freeze up or collapse when reunited with the caregiver; they do not demonstrate emotional bonding and often stay physically removed from the adult (Flores).

In all four of the research participants' histories, issues of attachment are responsible for many initial wounds and hence also responsible for early interpersonal trauma with the primary caregiver(s). Also, all four research participants appear to have attachment profiles that resemble insecure-avoidant behaviour.

SL's experience of being locked in the basement for three months and only allowed to come upstairs for "a glass of water and a piece of bread" had a lifelong lasting effect on him with respect to attachment to his family members. While he had the physical freedom to come upstairs after the three month period of "lock-up was over," he would not allow himself that freedom; he would "get up and go to school and come back, and never talk to nobody about nothing, cause I was afraid." From the ages of four to seven years, SL isolated and protected himself in the basement; in this way, he avoided his parents and the fear of being beaten and subjected to the verbal barrage of criticisms, lies, and broken promises.

Willow, also isolated herself, hid and protected her young self from the painful experiences of being ignored and not validated as a member of the family. Willow described a situation which forced her to choose between her parents. Her fear of her father and her insecure attachment to her mother seemed to have left her uncertain as to who she was attached to as she chose who to live with based on her siblings' choices.

[And] there was a big fight and my mom got thrown across the room. The RCMP got called; I think a neighbour called them. And the police officer interviewed all of us and asked us who we wanted to live with. My sister said my dad, my older brother said my dad, and although I wanted to say my mom I felt that I couldn't because my older brother and sister said with my dad, so I said Dad and then the officer took my mom and she basically was told she had to leave. For the next three months of my life my dad was in a drunken stupor and I never attended

school hardly at all—he never fed us or looked after us— we were a mess, the place was uninhabitable—my brother and I both had lice; he had scabies; I had ring worm; and we were malnourished and our hair was falling out.

Shortly after Willow was reunited with her mother, however this is a significant attachment wound for Willow as the bond with both her parents is further destroyed by this event.

Willow commented that from around the age of eight or nine, until the time she was eighteen “I think I received three birthday cards—once a year I go out there probably and visit him and stuff. I just never really felt like I was—I could never be close to him.”

While Lynn also found temporary solace in isolating herself from the verbal and physical abuse and violence, she also was “in a constant state of fear and thinking how do I solve all this?” Worries of parental rejection and abandonment were constant for her. Her insecure attachment kept her repeating isolating behaviours. Lynn described the incongruence of the fear of being with her parents and yet also feeling the deep yearning to be attached to them amidst all the chaos.

[Every] week of my life was like that. It was constantly terrifying. And how do I save my dad? At one point me and my sister both wanted my mom to divorce my dad. And one day she packed up her bags and she was going to leave, and she didn’t take me. I was so upset. I carried this memory my whole adult life. I was probably eight years old or something at the time.

Further wounds of attachment occur for SL when he was approximately eight years old. His family moved to another province. While travelling to their new home, the family stopped at a gas station. SL remembers the owner of the shop being very friendly, giving SL and his sister treats and souvenirs. When they were finished this stop, SL could not find his dog; while he tracked him to a shed, his stepfather and the owner

were adamant that the dog was not in the shed and that the dog had run away. SL recalled this moment:

[He] gave my dog away to the guy in the gas station- Everybody knew it and nobody would admit it- He gave my dog away because he couldn't get anywhere near me when the dog was around and he got tired of it. So, I'm really choked. Um, now I'm really choked, right. I mean you thought I was an angry kid before, yeah, it's all bad. So we're moving and you gave my dog away, right?

It appears as though SL was terrorized by his step-father and with no attachments to a caregiver he was unable to associate any meanings of what a healthy attached relationship felt like on a deep emotional level. Having experienced only neglect and abuse and perhaps lacking experience of what trust and loyalty is, SL was thrilled when the owner of the gas station was attentive to him and his dog, and offering pop, snacks, and other items. SL also shared that he was able to relive that experience while he shared the story. He said, "I am reliving the experience, right, the feeling is disappointment, it's sad, that was the only piece of security I had."

More attachment issues show up when SL was ten years old. Somehow, it was reported that SL was being physically and emotionally abused and he was placed into foster care. This was a traumatic time for SL:

[I] didn't want to go—the wife being beat by the husband doesn't wanna go. I didn't wanna go. I wanted to stay at home—It's what I know—I don't wanna be beaten by anybody else. I wanna be beaten by these guys—I didn't wanna go and it'll only be for a month or two. You're lying, I know you're lying. You're always lying. They were lying. I knew they were lying. They lied, and it went into, oh, six months and slowly we didn't get to see the family.

As an insecure-avoidant child SL was avoiding any emotional support from others, his own internal ideas of self-worth would have kept him from seeking support and informing other adults that he was being severely abused and neglected. His fear and the stress of facing and tolerating an unknown future may have created more anxiety than the anxiety he already knew.

Over the time span of 6 months while in this first foster home SL recalls that his foster parents were “really trying to reach me, and I would not let them—I just have nothing to say, I would not volunteer any information. Why would I, right?” Feelings of rejection re-surfaced just as SL was starting to feel he might be able to trust his foster family. When he was twelve he was moved from the first foster home [foster mother was pregnant]. SL recalled, “so, they had their own kid now, they do not want me.” He went to live as a foster child in the home of his then social worker. SL reflects about how he was re-building trust with his second foster home. He had spent a fair amount of time with the second foster family because of his relationship with his social worker, “We’d go out to the beach or whatever, previously—I spent time with this family—and the foster home before was their friends, so I was always hanging out with this family—this was the best place I’ve had since my crib.” Within this family system there were biological children of whom one was another boy who was bigger, older and stronger than SL. It is in this setting that SL was sexually abused.

[It] started with the body massage, and then one thing led to another and then like, well, I don’t really like this but, you know—he was older and he was bigger and he’s, doing the wood chopping and that, so, so I mean, I was the youngest one and he used to pick on me a little bit and do things to me that his brothers did to him.

SL described his time in this family as a time of learning how *normal* families functioned. The normal every-day stuff of twisting arms, holding down a younger sibling and stuffing grass in their mouths was something SL was unfamiliar with and was beginning to learn. SL notices “looking back that was normal, but I did not see it as normal. I am like; here we go again, all this stuff.” Considering he could not understand what meaningful attachment styles looked like, it makes sense that when he was sexually assaulted he recoiled in silent fear. SL described, “I was afraid again. I was definitely afraid of this guy. I did not want to go to bed. I did not want to be anywhere, that whole fear.”

The sexual assault that Willow experienced at the age of four and the ensuing shame and fear that maintained a fourteen year silence is similar to SL’s situation of fear and distrust. However, once Willow revealed the truths about her uncle the resulting behaviours of the family characterize families who are not securely attached. Twenty years after the sexual assault, Willow recalled the events that occurred when she shared her experience with her family:

[It] pretty much busted up the whole family. To the point where one of my uncles just died recently and his funeral was last week and it was one of the most awkward funerals because-my granny [uncles’ mother] will not come over and talk to me because my uncle is there.

Further attachment issues may result as a consequence of birth. Both Sally and SL are twins. SL’s brother did not survive birth; however, Sally’s twin brother did survive. What may be evident in both Sally and SL’s birth situations are that both of their primary caregivers may have been experiencing substantial amounts of stress during and after the birthing process. If so, high levels of stress may have prevented the primary

caregivers from bonding and attaching both emotionally and physically. In SL's case, the mother may have been experiencing intense emotions of grief and sadness which may have kept her from bonding with her surviving baby. Sally's parents may have been experiencing equally intense emotions but from a slightly different mind-set. Sally's parents were not prepared for twins, therefore Sally was not expected. Doctors at that time thought that Sally and her brother was one big baby boy as their hearts were beating simultaneously in utero. Sally explained "I was left in the hospital for the first two weeks of my life with my dad bringing some milk when he could. So I was separated from my twin, mom and dad too."

"Part 1: Primal Wounds" has included two themes: 1) the threat of annihilation and 2) attachment and belonging. In summary, early childhood primal woundings, attachment issues, and resulting trauma(s) not only created a failure within the parental and social engagement system of each participant, but it also undermined each of their ability to recover from the wounds, reorganize, and feel safe.

## **Part 2: The Panorama of a Broken Heart**

Before moving forward onto themes 3 and 4, a note is inserted here from the researcher. In this moment of writing, I reflect upon commencing this research thesis. I had vague notions of the themes that may present themselves; I knew there would be developmental childhood wounds amongst my participants and my literature review guided me along that moment in time, accordingly. However, as I move into writing this next section, I am aware of two parts of myself. There is a part of me that is deeply rooted in my experiences as the researcher, but there is another part of me that is curiously witnessing this process of writing this section from the panorama of my own

broken heart. This latter part is the neglected and abused child, the part who internalized both rejection and abandonment and as an adult experienced the ensuing doom and darkness of existing in vast, never-ending nothingness and hopelessness. Therefore, analyzing and articulating on paper those experiences of my research participants are deeply interwoven within my own and although many of my wounds have healed, I am aware of potentially presenting biased theoretical perspectives that resonate with the path I choose in understanding my own journey and experiences. In fact, the participants' experiences may appear to me as their experiences, but I cannot guarantee that they will not be an echo of my own experiences. Therefore, as I write, both my past experiences and the internalization of those experiences may subtlety and unconsciously surface.

In this moment, my thoughts on interpretation and analysis of the research participants' experiences is exemplified in this quote from van Manen (1990), "to write is to measure the depth of things, as well as to come to a sense of one's own depth" (p. 127). This quote succinctly describes the overall *felt sense* of wholeness and awareness of personal depth of self for this researcher in this moment of the writing process, but also lays bare the unknown and the depth of what may arise as I move through this section. There is also an awareness of the potential for a radiant piece of rich understanding of self that may arise as I experience the writing of this section from the perspective of both myself and that of my interpretation of my research participants.

As has been discussed, the primal wound occurs due to disconnect or fracture of empathy between the primary caregiver and the child. The resulting split or repression leaves pieces of the human personality; the human psyche [the spirit/soul] and the human body, disunited (Almaas, 2004; Firman & Gila, 1997). When parts of the soul child,

which is the condition of the soul from birth to the approximate age of three, splits from our being or experience itself, it remains in its initial condition and does not independently transcend and mature (Almaas, 2004). Van der Kolk et al. (1996) stated that “people who were traumatized when they were three years old may continue to process intense emotional states with the developmental capacities of young children” (p. 318). This may give insight into the popular phrase shared by non-empathetic friends, partners, family members, or colleagues: When will he/she grow up? This type of reaction from individuals in relationships with deeply wounded others may widen or deepen a previous gap or split encouraging already powerful defense mechanisms and perhaps further internalizing the original wound.

According to Firman and Gila (1997) our essential essence is split into negative and positive I-Self relationships or streams of lower and higher unconsciousness, as a way of surviving the nonbeing wounding. Firman and Gila (1997) stated: “Here is not a split in something we can reflect and act upon, but a split in the place from which we reflect and act. Deeper than consciousness. Deeper than will” (p. 122). Characteristics associated with the lower negative unconscious include: low self-esteem or worthlessness, isolation, abandonment, helplessness, hopelessness, terror, shame, self-blame, wanting to die and guilt (Firman & Gila, 1997). Conversely, characteristics associated with the higher positive unconsciousness include: beauty, wholeness, perfection, order, justice, self-sufficiency and playfulness (Firman & Gila, 1997). It is the opposing forces or the balancing opposition between these two levels of consciousness that work to maintain the split, hiding the wound. It is the darkest place, a place where the split freezes an emotional developmental piece of the person, a place

where the ego can no longer defend and balance the opposing forces of the Id and the superego against the pain of the oozing wound, that the person capitulates and internalizes abandonment and rejection. This pervasive darkness of giving up morphs into feelings of disparity, hopelessness and isolation and defines the panorama of a broken heart (Almaas, 1996).

**Theme 3: Coercive internalization of rejection and abandonment.** Childhood fissures of empathy from the primary caregiver may show up as internalization of parental rejection and abandonment and perhaps is best understood by the concept of perpetrator or *parental introjects* (Putnam, 1989; Watkins & Watkins, 1997).

Parental introjects are internal parts of self that are usually constructed in childhood. These internal parts represent the child's interpretation and understanding of the point of view of the self-object or parent and are introjected into self. It is developmentally normal for children to introject or internalize the self-object as part of the roadmap to developing consciousness (Paulsen, 2009). According to Paulsen (2009):

[The] child who is alone in her room may say aloud to herself, "pick up your socks!" in the tone her mother said yesterday. In doing so, she is beginning to achieve the developmental milestone that will enable her to internalize the functions of self-control, including self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement, self-direction and more. (p. 38)

However, during moments of repeated abuse or lack of empathetic connection from the caregiver, the child does not have access to the normal milestones of development and self-regulation and mastery. The child who lives in an environment of discord will still develop and craves mirroring; therefore, the child may unquestionably introject the abusive behaviours, values and beliefs from the self-object or the other. The

perpetrator or the introjected parent or other becomes blurred and the child may be unable to distinguish between themselves and the introjected perpetrator or parent (Putman, 1989). If the parent or self-object is the perpetrator, the self-object is also the source of attachment and love. Subsequently, the child introjects the abusive part of the self-object but the child also reduces the anxiety of losing the love of the self-object part of the parent by introjecting the love aspect of the self-object as well (Paulsen, 2009). It is the internalization of the lost love aspect of the self-object that modulates and harmonizes the experiences of abuse and conflict of the self-object. When the child is manipulated through the procedure of abuse by the self-object, the child is seen as an object or as nothing. The wound may have catastrophic consequences as the child's identity or self-structures begin to see oneself without humanness. The cycle and expectation of abuse becomes ingrained in the child as the self is translated by the child as something to be used or something that has no identity or is a nothing (Paulsen, 2009). According to Filman and Gila (1997):

[Moments] of shame as a toddler will be aligned with later moments of shame in grade school, then with similar moment of shame in adolescence, and so on, until finally the experience of shame in adulthood involves a complex organization of memories, physical sensations, feelings, and thoughts. (p. 125)

The perpetrator or introjected parent's perspective becomes the child's perspective. The introjected other or parent is demonstrated by a child who has low self-esteem, intense self-criticism and little compassion for self. This stratification of the lower consciousness, which is organized around a common theme in personality, is referred to as the system of condensed experience or COEX which was discussed in the literature review of this thesis (Grof, 1976). It is here, in the stratification of the lower

consciousness where the introjected perpetrator or parent resides and is translated into the felt sense of abandonment and rejection in each participant.

SL's emotional needs were rejected and replaced by parental physical beatings, containment and isolation, and demeaning verbal assaults. SL's introjected parent part was internalized and flourished as self-loathing, anger and self-hate. The culmination of repeated abuse and the internalization of the introjected parent left SL with this description of his childhood self:

I was not a likeable kid, [I] did not have any friends at school, nobody liked me at school. I was angry. Nobody likes a sour puss, not even a sour puss. You know, you know, I was an ugly kid.

When SL shared this in our interview, the statement, "nobody likes a sour puss, not even a sour puss," appeared to come forth as the voice of one of his caregivers. The introjected adult scorning part may still linger in this memory part of SL as a young boy. It appears as though SL transitioned his caregivers' beliefs of who he was into a memory that still, in his responses, has resonance of his young wounded self. SL further recalled his thoughts as a young child: "I'm so ugly on the inside, I am ugly on the outside, I looked in the mirror and I'd go, "God, I'm so ugly." SL further recalled: "I was such a beautiful baby; I had the most beautiful bright blue eyes, like sky blue and I was a very beautiful baby." In this descriptive reflection, there appears to be some mourning, or grief over the loss of his innocence and own innate potential. Prior to the abuse, prior to the presence of those introjected parental beliefs, perhaps this a memory reminiscent of knowing his own essence, truth and self-love?

Willow childhood experiences surround memories of not being seen or heard, but rather ignored by her parents. The introjected parent part of abandonment and rejection

is due to a lack of appropriate mirroring and acknowledgment. Willow stated that as a young child she felt that:

[I] am here in this family but completely not connected; there is nothing I can get from them, I'm not learning from these people, I have nothing to learn from these people and truly be myself, and they still don't know who I am.

For Willow, the lack of connection to the self-object and unsuccessful mirroring of feelings of being worthy resulted in feelings of being ignored, leaving an introjected parent part that strikes deep to the core of soul and self. Willow described it as a feeling of "you weren't wanted, that you have no purpose."

Those aspects of Lynn's introjected parent parts are the consequences of physical and emotional abuse. These introjected abusive parent parts are the containers that hold her parents' responses to her needs for mirroring of acceptance and love. For Lynn these are translated into feelings of not belonging, rejection and abandonment. The internal critic of self, or the introjected parent, consequentially provided an existence in isolation and loneliness. As Lynn describes; "I was an outcast from my own family." The abusive actions of her parents repeatedly told her that she was faulty and that she was not a contributing member of the family. Her parents' abuse left Lynn projecting their mirroring that she was empty and she had nothing to offer. Lynn felt that she must "always look outside of myself for that feeling of connection." These intense introjected feelings of rejection, abandonment, self-loathing all compounded by an intense internal critic, led Lynn on a life journey of grabbing onto the other in attempts to find her true self.

As a young child, Sally recalled feeling "if I'd only been different, then maybe it [abuse] wouldn't have happened, right?" Sally introjected her parents blame and shame

which kept her disconnected from her family in a childhood life that Sally describes as “very lonely, yeah, very lonely.” Although Sally felt abandoned, rejected, and alone, she introjected her parents blame and thought she wasn’t good enough and deserved the punishment. In efforts to survive the effects of the abuse Sally disconnected from processing her emotions, which may have energized some somatic and other dissociative type responses such as numbing out and amnesia. These will be looked at in more depth in “Part 3.”

In summary, it appears that in all four of the participants’ pre-school experiences, the mental images of self as mirrored and manifested by the self-object, created a sense of self, or lower consciousness, that was introjected with feelings of shame, self-loathing, anger and self-hate. These intense feelings compound and create further feelings of abandonment and rejection; all as a result of the abusive experiences and expectations with the self-object.

Theme four will address the internalization of the introjected parent and the movement from lack of nurturing and support and the ensuing darkness of rejection and abandonment towards the intense feelings of disparity, hopelessness and isolation.

**Theme 4: The abyss of disparity, hopelessness, and isolation.** A viewpoint has been put forward regarding the detrimental effects of childhood abuse on healthy childhood psychological development. There has been discussion on object relations theory, ego and self-psychology theory, attachment theory, the importance of healthy mirroring and the resulting psychological splits that occur when children are physically, emotionally and sexually abused rather than seen and heard for whom they are. An offer to understand the deep internalization of childhood abuse and wounding on the child’s

core self and physic structures has been probed through the theory of the perpetrator or parent introject. In this next section the impact of the participants experienced childhood abuse is discussed through the theme of *giving up*. The resulting disparity and the impending doom of hopelessness and isolation are explored through the theoretical constructs of trauma, dissociation, and tonic immobility.

As children, all four research participants, through physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, remained within the family unit without disclosing the abuse, maintaining the secret and surviving by holding onto pieces or illusions of safety or belonging in whatever way it was customarily offered. They paid for this illusion of safety by giving up their own authenticity. Their deep wounds were split off and dissociated and held in certain ego states and perhaps unavailable in other ego states, but nonetheless would keep them dissociated or safe from the truths of their abusive experiences and maintain what is called the *survival* or *family trance* (Filman & Gila, 1997). According to Filman and Gila (1997):

[The] family trance is the unifying center that forces a constricted identification or role upon the family member. To be in the family trance is to be so completely identified with one's role in the family, so identified with the values and world view of the family, that important aspects of ones' own personal experience remain unconscious. (p. 170)

The family member expends vast amounts of energy staying in this trance at the cost of all other elements of their own beingness. Abused children often run on automatic pilot, numb and frozen with colossal shame and guilt to which they surrender their silence as a part of the family trance.

With this surrender of who they are through the darkness of shame and guilt the felt sense of giving up, not mattering, and wondering who cares, repeatedly shows up as a sign of the trauma of childhood abuse. Levine (2010) discussed trauma from the perspective of flight or fight, but also from another perspective that is referred to as *tonic immobility*. Tonic immobility not only includes the freezing aspect of traumatic response where every muscle is unable to move, it also includes what is called a *fold* or a collapse into helplessness (Levine, 2010). According to Levine (2010):

[Trauma] occurs when we are intensely frightened and are either physically restrained or perceive that we are trapped. We freeze in paralysis and/or collapse in overwhelming helplessness—this collapse, defeat and loss of the will to live are at the very core of deep trauma. (pp. 48–49)

For all participants there was a pervasive overwhelming sense of giving up, of no hope, no joy, no connection to others, no inclusion with others, only isolation fear, terror, despair and despondency; a collapse of the will to live. As well, all participants lived their life in the family trance as they attempted to survive without being seen or heard, without acknowledgement of their basic psychological and developmental needs, all in an effort to maintain a sense of safety and stability and eluding the next abusive outburst.

Referring to the huge loss of non-verbal communication with his mother and later his sister, SL stated:

[That's] when I said, okay I am done. I give up, if this is how we are going to play this game, then I give up, I don't care. I don't care if this works for me or not anymore. I'm here, I'm going to be here and I don't care anymore.

When referring to the move to British Columbia when his dog was taken, SL recalls: "And it doesn't matter what I say, we are moving. I give up. You know it is

even pointless for me to communicate with these people [parents] because they don't care."

Willow recalled the time she was mandated to spend three months with her father. She became malnourished and sick as her father attended to his needs for alcohol and left her and her brother without means to take care of themselves. Willow recalled being "so terrorized, I was so despondent, I gave up any hopes or aspirations of anything." When Willow discussed her family of origin members, she said "ever since I was little, little, little—I was here in this family but completely not connected."

Lynn also recalled a huge emptiness, loneliness, fear and lack of connection in her family and continually trying to find some meaning, some belonging, a sense of existence. She recalled that she would always be "grabbing onto it and taking what was there, not even understanding what I needed or wanted but just taking what was in front of me."

For Sally, along with the isolation and hopelessness there was numbness in her body after physical and sexual abuse. Sally may have dissociated all memories of the sexual abuse. Her embedded amnesic response went undetected until she was in her early thirties. Sally's traumatic response to sexual abuse and the resulting numbness in her body and the amnesia are characteristic of trauma. Levine (2010) explained "traumatized humans don't actually remain physically paralyzed, they do get lost in a kind of anxious fog, a chronic partial shutdown, dissociation, lingering depression and numbness" (p. 52). Lingering depression is often thought of as despair (Greenspan, 2003). According to Greenspan (2003):

[To] despair is to lose all hope; to feel empty and desolate, adrift in a lonely sea, to exist without a sense of purpose or faith, to be disconnected from the flow of

life, exiled from the universe of meaning—it can be submerged from awareness for long periods of time and become the emotional substratum of a life. (p. 117)

All participants had a sense of giving up and surviving in disparity and hopelessness. As they navigated through their young lives in a family trance, obeying all the rules that stripped them of their essence and without opportunities to explore any part of themselves other than the ‘I am alone part’, they were overcome by feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness and not belonging.

“Part 2: The Panorama of the Broken Heart” has included two themes: 1) coercive internalization of rejection and abandonment and 2) the abyss of disparity, hopelessness and isolation. In summary, a way of understanding the internalization of the research participants’ primal wounds has been offered through the theoretical construct of the perpetrator or parent introject. It is through this theoretical construct that the formation of self-loathing, anger and self-hate, or aspects of the lower consciousness, is conceptualized. Lastly, the family trance is suggested as a coping mechanism for surviving the debilitating and dissociating effects of the trauma of physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

### **Part 3: Manifestations of Narcissistic Wounds**

The occurrence of primal or narcissistic wounding, or the loss of connection with the Essential Identity, and the resulting internalization of hopelessness, isolation and rejection often leave the person with unyielding experiences of shame and abandonment. The disintegration of the self, or the splitting into a good self and a bad self is the result of the wounding (van der Kolk et al., 1996). The bad self-representation of the person feels “ashamed, deficient, worthless and not good enough” (Almaas, 1996, p. 312). To

survive the degradation of bad self against the Essential Identity or good self, it is natural to defend against the pain of the narcissistic wounds. These defensive mechanisms are the ego's responses to the consequences of childhood developmental trauma and may manifest in later childhood, adolescence and adulthood as: 1) attachment issues, 2) biochemical disturbances, 3) affect or emotional dysregulation, 4) dissociation, 5) impulse-control issues, 6) cognitive disturbances, 7) poor self-concept, and 8) narcissistic disturbances (Weinhold & Weinhold, 2008). The following section inquiries into the manifestations of the narcissistic wounding of each participant in the areas of self-regulation, maintaining relationships, dissociation, and self-destruction.

**Theme 5: Self-Regulation: Navigating the “Window of Tolerance”.** As has already been suggested, secure attachments to the primary caregiver or self-object appear to be a defense against trauma. As children mature, the safety of the self-self-object relationship and the skills of self-regulation inherently learned within this relationship gradually extends outwards to the social community. According to van der Kolk et al. (1996):

[Child] interplay gradually extends itself to include a combination of skills to regulate emotional arousal and to derive comfort from social supports. Coping with stress entails such factors as being able to mobilize one's skills to take care of oneself, knowing how to access social support and being able to rely on protection from outside when one's own resources are inadequate. (p. 185)

Consistent and empathetic support from the caregiver seems necessary for children to learn to soothe themselves and to seek assistance and comfort from others. When developmental childhood trauma interferes with necessary attachment and

bonding, a loss or lack of the processes of self-regulation occurs and shows up as issues with self-definition (van der Kolk et al., 1996). According to van der Kolk et al. (1996):

[Loss /lack] of self-regulation may be expressed in many different ways: as a loss of ability to focus on appropriate stimuli; as attentional problems; as an inability to inhibit action when aroused (loss of impulse control); or as uncontrollable feelings of rage, anger, or sadness. (p. 187)

Ogden et al. (2006) also suggested that it is the cognitive and emotional processing that is inhibited by experiences of trauma. Cognitive processing becomes difficult as the traumatic memory is usually formed as maladaptive and inflexible.

According to Ogden et al. (2006):

[Thoughts] such as ‘I am useless,’ or ‘It was all my fault’, continue to organize experience, which is shaped by pervasive patterns of cognitive distortions; these distortions result in persistent experiences of low self-esteem and defeat, as well as chronic perception of lack of safety.” (p. 9)

Emotional processing is also restricted and is evident in that traumatized individuals “characteristically lose the capacity to draw upon emotions as guides for action” (Ogden, 2006, p. 11). According to Ogden et al. (2006):

[They] may be detached from their emotions, presenting with flat affect and complaining of lack of interest and motivation in life and an inability to take action. Or their emotions may be experienced as urgent and immediate call to action; the capacity to reflect on an emotion and allow it to be part of the data that guides action is lost and its expression becomes explosive and uncontrolled. (p. 11)

As shown in Table 2, Ogden et al. (2006, p. 27) model, ‘the window of tolerance’ organizes and describes the three areas of self-regulation. The top section includes the reactive types of responses or the hyperarousal zone, the middle section is the optimum

zone of arousal, and the bottom section includes the flat affect type of responses or the hypoarousal zone.

**Table 2**

*Window of tolerance*

Window of Tolerance	
Increased sensation	
Emotional reactivity	
Hyperarousal Zone	Hypervigilance
Intrusive imagery	
Disorganized cognitive processing	
Window of Tolerance: Optimal Arousal Zone	
Relative absence of sensation	
Numbing of emotions	
Disabled cognitive processing	Hypoarousal Zone
Reduced physical movement	

Given that individuals who experience severe childhood developmental trauma have a narrow window of tolerance for stimulation, hyper- and hypoarousal may co-exist as the person fluctuates from one to the other as attempts are made to process emotions (Ogden et al., 2006). This pitching between cessation and outbursts of energy becomes the manner of attempting self-regulation and presents issues and challenges when faced with situations that necessitate a balanced and appropriate feeling based response (Levine, 2010).

The information in Table 2, provides the framework for the next section which seeks to conceptualize each of the participants' experiences relative to the narcissistic wounds and the resulting self-regulating behaviours.

All four of the participants' experienced fluctuations of emotional reactions within both the hyperarousal and hypoarousal windows. These experiences vacillate between hiding and isolation to anger and hostility.

During SL's young childhood, the daily physical and emotional abuse and the resulting lack of connection and mirroring with his caregivers propelled him into the zone of hypoarousal:

[I] quit talking, you know, it doesn't matter anymore, so why would I communicate with these people? Everybody I am around is angry, nobody, all of the old men are bitter, nobody, parents are angry and, you know, everybody's not a happy camper, right?

SL described as a young child that he introjected those feelings of anger. Consequently, he would self-isolate in the basement of his parents' home to mediate the anger and fear. "I am only angry and upset when I am around people, right, because they are all angry and upset." SL used self-isolation to attempt to regulate his emotions and stay within the optimal arousal zone, however, his cognitive processes found it difficult to manage his developmental split off parts which were festering wounds suppressed and existing outside of his own consciousness. These splits would show up occasionally and pull SL into the zone of hyperarousal. As an older child, SL recalls the reason why his parents sent him to counselling, "Now and then I would have an outbreak. Right? You know, ah, I hate you all! And then walk away, right, whatever! I refused to do stuff!"

As SL grew older his unresolved splits continued to fester and pull him into states of intense hyperarousal. SL described that his anger was so intense that when he was in his twenties he decided to seek retribution from the boy who had sexually assaulted him while he was in foster care. SL's consciousness is fully embedded and identifies solely with his pain; he described the phone call he made to his violator:

[I've] got a forty-five here. I'm gonna come and I'm gonna put a bullet in your head because we need to sort this out, and I think that's the only way it's gonna work. Guess what, it's gonna make me feel better to kill you, and we should kill your sister while we're at it, first, so you get the feeling first.

In his early forties SL recalled another moment of intense desire to be seen, heard and understood. He was working for a family earning one-half of what his skill level demanded on the trades market. He felt compromised by this situation but because he liked the family and was learning a new trade he stayed in their employ for approximately two years. As he began to trust the family and feel comfortable a situation occurred where he felt betrayed. Some of the other family members cajoled him into joking on the job which led to a distraction in his work which further led to the manager noticing an error. SL vividly recalled this moment:

[The] manager walks by and says, "You got that block in the wrong place, SL." Ah, fuck, right? So I go to hit it with the hammer, "you break that block and you can go home fired." Grrr that was it! Rah, smash! I totally jumped off the thing and I walked over to him. "You got a problem with me? Bring it, come on! So, he just walked away. I'm like, okay, I'm done.

In reflection SL commented: "I got angry quickly when things didn't go the way I planned or something unexpected came up. I would throw tools, cuss and curse the world or the object of my frustration. Anger is how I was taught."

Willow recalled the isolation and loneliness in her family home and escaping into activities that are characteristic of hypoarousal and interrupted cognitive and emotional processing. Willow remembered her report card in grade three: “The teacher said, you know, Willow has difficulty staying focused in class and often we find her hiding under her desk.” It was around this time when Willow was in grade three that she began to “get angry with things and notice things—not being seen or heard and that really started to bother me back then.”

For Lynn, in discussions regarding the amount of alone time she had experienced without feeling depressed or sad, she recalled her entire life up to her late teenage years` as:

[Invisible], worthless, insecure, anxious, fearful, terrified, desperate to be liked, but sad? I can't recall that feeling. I spent a lot of time alone and wasn't depressed because I never had contrast. I never knew connection to others so there was nothing to miss. Nothing to be sad about.

Lynn' self-imposed isolating behaviours, the numbness, the inability to concentrate in school as well as the struggle with making friends and fitting in with others, is a result of dysfunctional cognitive and emotional processing. Therefore it appears that during Lynn's younger childhood years that she may have spent considerable time in a zone of hypoarousal. Lynn existed in this zone until she was around the age of sixteen when she began to attend parties and consume alcohol. While alcohol still kept her isolated and numb there was an alcoholic illusion that she was connecting with others and feeling sensations that were unavailable to her in a sober state. This alcohol induced illusion of existence would occur in the zone of hyperarousal, but Lynn would still be disconnected and removed emotionally from others. Lynn recalled:

[I] drank two to three times per week and partied, just laughs, no one knew me, not even my boyfriend. It was common to never talk about yourself, just what we were going to do next weekend. We just did things together. Laughed a lot, drank a lot, acting silly. Looking back, drinking covered up all my social fears and insecurities, but I was unaware of that then.

Sally spent most of her young life in the zone of hypoarousal, staying disconnected from others and keeping herself quietly out of the way of her mother's never ending violent manic depressive episodes. Sally recalled: "I didn't feel liked, wanted or cared for; I felt I was a problem only." Sally navigated the abuse and numbed herself to the intense psychological, physical and emotional pain by splitting off from the experience through disembodiment during violence.

In later life when Sally was a young mother, she began to feel her own suppressed internal wounds. These awakened feelings were excessive and she felt a strong urge to relinquish her pain onto her children, much like that of her own experience with her mother. It is here where the internal emotional suppression of years of abuse has stood in silence, within the zone of hypoarousal, that a shift occurs and the energy is moved into the zone of hyperarousal. During this shift there is an intense need to unleash all the energy and emotions. The need for discharge is barely containable for Sally. Sally described this time period:

[It] [abusive energy] came to a head when I had my own children, with that is a feeling to hurt them. I had to get help because, of course all this energy, all these emotions were like just, I was going to go insane if I didn't.

Sally sought help and found workshops and support groups for Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA), however, she found that she would move from moments of existing within the optimal zone to a state of hyperarousal "when I started to feel like I couldn't

hold on or, you know, I might hurt them, I would look for the next workshop and go away for the weekend."

It is within the optimal zone of tolerance where the person has a chance to reflect and witness thoughts and feelings before responding. According to Levine (2010) due to pervasive trauma, the dysfunctional cognitive and emotional processing of the person does not get a chance to observe sensations and emotions, but rather becomes those sensations and emotions. It is the ownership of sensation and emotion that pushes the person out of the optimal zone of tolerance.

In summary, through the experiences of the participants, this theme has expressed examples of the two extremes of the window of tolerance; hypoarousal and hyperarousal. Due to the catastrophic wounding of their true self, few of the shared experiences within this thesis of the participants were found within the optimal zone of tolerance. Participants often found themselves in one zone or the other or fluctuating back and forth. Either way, the states of hyper-hypoarousal mandate an extreme amount of energy. This expenditure of energy leaves the person with an experience of being out of sorts with distorted thoughts, blurred memories, and over reactive and under reactive responses to stimulation that may leave them with shameful feelings of being out of control. Individuals who cycle through the zones of the window of tolerance, not only struggle to regulate themselves, they struggle to maintain healthy boundaries and relationships with others. This is the focus of the next theme.

**Theme 6: The burden of maintaining relationships.** It has been suggested that the ability of the ego to regulate is extensively determined by the internalization of the self-object. When the internalization of the self-object is distorted, the ego is influenced

by defenses and falsehoods that do not mirror the person's true identity but rather create confusion and misunderstanding resulting in self-regulating behaviours which are often inappropriate, inexact and inefficient (Almaas, 1988). The person efforts to find equilibrium or the optimal zone of arousal, but does not have the structures of a well-integrated ego in place to facilitate stable emotional reactions. This often pitches them in and out of the 'black hole' of painful memories and in a desperate attempt to regulate their emotions, as they mature; the ego often looks to relationships as a way of filling the hole and avoiding the pain (Weinhold and Weinhold, 2008).

All of the participants experienced intense abuse through all childhood developmental stages. The cessation of the abuse was in the range of 12–15 years of age for all participants. All four of the participants' narcissistic or primal wounds and the distorted and disorganized regulation of ego are evident in relational experiences. All research participants experienced sexual abuse, and all participants kept the abuse a secret, privately enduring the physical, psychological and emotional injuries. While all forms of abuse impact interpersonal skills and relational development, the narcissistic wounding that occurs during the oedipal stage of psychosexual development, which is the developmental stage between the ages of three to six years further impacts sexual relational experiences and is also a point of inquiry within this theme (Almaas, 1996)

Kohut (1977) whose theories seem to complement and perfect those of Freud stated that normal oedipal development occurs: "If the child enters the oedipal phase with a firm, cohesive, continuous self, he will then experience assertive-possessive, affectionate-sexual desires for the heterogenous parent and assertive, self-confident, competitive feelings vis-a-vis the parent of the same sex" (p. 230).

Mirroring and affirming a child's sexuality and gender is important. Not only is the mirroring of the self-object important but the self-object state of sexual wellness and health are also important (Almaas, 1996). Children, whose parents are proud of their masculinity and femininity and value their sexuality, mirror this healthy attitude back to their children.

Conversely, according to Almaas (1996) if a parent responds to the child during the development stage of three to six years of age without empathy and mirroring of the child's developing sexuality, the child will view his own oedipal feelings as something unnatural and not an expression of his own development. Almaas (1996) stated: "Rather than integrating his assertive affection and competition, and realizing his gender identity, he is now narcissistically injured, and thus, he loses the joy in his oedipal development" (p. 373).

Abuse and neglect during the oedipal stage may have long term devastating effects on the erotic and passionate self and create a quagmire of difficult situations for mature intimate relationships. According to Almaas (1996):

[The] individual will generally find it difficult to recognize and appreciate appropriate behavior and boundaries in the erotic, sexual, and emotional spheres in relations to others, will tend to be too permissive or too rigid, too seductive or too aggressive—difficult and problematic to have and sustain a long term intimate relationship. (p. 376)

During SL's second foster experience he was sexually assaulted by his older foster brother. As a result of historical emotional and physical abuse, especially during the oedipal stage, SL was heavily compromised in this situation. His poor self-worth, lack of trust in the self-object, and his reoccurring fears of punishment kept SL quiet.

Fearful of his foster brother's threats to keep the secret, SL did not share the abuse. SL stated: "How do I do this? They are not going to believe me, because first of all it is their son and blood is thicker than water."

Based on his own shattered experiences in his family of origin SL assumed:

[This] obviously, this is normal family life. Well apparently, it was their normal family life. But uh, he did this to me because his brothers did it to him, and their brothers did it to them. It was normal family life for them. Right? So apparently the parents knew about this? Little did I know?

Throughout her childhood and adolescent years Willow is reluctant to share with her family the sexual abuse that occurred as a young child. The fear of being further shamed and abandoned is heavy and prevents Willow from disclosing the sexual abuse. For approximately fifteen years a part of Willow lives a mortified split off existence. At approximately nineteen years-of-age, she shares the secret. Willow remembered: "We never said anything to anybody. We wouldn't reveal any of this for another probably like I was eighteen or nineteen or so. When I finally revealed it and it pretty much busted up the whole family."

Lynn's encounter with sexual assault occurred when she was twelve. Lynn recalled:

[My] father's friend only tried once, he did not succeed beyond lying on top of me and trying to kiss me. I got away and he was too drunk to walk. It was a one time, however that's the kind of people he hung around with so I was subjected to that. My parents were also very flirtatious with other couples, there were no boundaries. So, I experienced a lot of do whatever with whoever.

Through disassociation, Sally had blocked out all memories of sexual abuse until she was thirty years old. Just prior to her awakening experience in 1998 she began to

explore the practices of tantra. Sally recalled: “Opening up to the possibility of being with this other lover, uh, my body started to open and, uh, all sorts of energies that I didn’t know existed started running and with that came the memories.”

Interferences and wounding during the oedipal stage creates boundary issues that spawn a vulnerable child to sexual predation. Further to this and interwoven with sexuality issues are attachment issues and ineffective interpersonal skills. Compounded together, further concerns with relationships are inevitable.

Even in the harsh circumstances of his home environment SL’s inner self looked for adequate mirroring and connection to his self-objects for several years. However, with the consistent inadequate mirroring, SL felt betrayal and deceived. He ‘gave up’ seeking empathic mirroring after experiencing tremendous amounts of physical and emotional abuse. His introjected deep core belief of shame spilled over into all relational aspects of his life, including school where he had experienced good grades and easy relationships with his teachers until approximately grade six. SL gave up working in school because of promises and rewards made by his parents and other adults that never materialized. SL described:

[I] got straight C’s in grade six. I didn’t put any effort in. I deliberately chose not to put any effort in. And, they put me back to grade six. I didn’t fail, I just got put back and the reason why they put me back was because I could do better and I didn’t put any effort into it.

SL further described how this deeply wounded and discouraged him:

[That] guy, that guy, passed with D’s and I was, so I gotta go back again? Okay, well, obviously, why am I gonna put any more effort into anything because, you know, I followed all the rules. I made this line. Here you guys put this line here,

and I made just above that line, and I didn't even get where I should be, so why do I care? No good deed goes unpunished.

During his experience in foster care, SL recalled his first opportunity to make a choice. Due to incompetent mirroring, SL had not experienced the decision making process and was fearful, uncomfortable and unfamiliar with having a choice. While on a family outing to buy shoes:

[We] went to get some new shoes and the lady asks me, "SL, do you like them?" I was dumbfounded. What do you mean? Do I like those? I didn't understand the question, what do you mean do I like them? "Well, do you like them?" Well, they fit. And I looked back at the look on her face and she was amazed that I didn't know if I liked them or not.

SL struggled with relationships with women. While SL was in relationship with a woman, SL's narcissistic wounding would leave SL feeling used and controlled by his partners. SL felt that his partners would connect to his energy and their egos would assume that they were in control of the relationship and he was their "little peon". In trying to regulate his own interpersonal emotional and sexual self, SL vacillated between "I was always too giving" and treating women "like crap". SL commented:

[Relationships] were strange for me. I've been in a few of them. They've all been the same relationship really. Everybody wants to control this [his energy]. It always starts the same. Wow, this guy's so great to be around. He's like awesome. I can just feel his energy. I could spend the rest of my life hanging out with this guy because he is so awesome.

Looking further at the difficulty of relationship's, SL's narcissistic wound and the intrusive parental introject are noticeable. SL further commented:

[The] relationships broke down because they were not whole and understanding the energy and then suddenly I become responsible for their feelings and you made me do this and you made me do that. This has to be the foul of my relationships. You made me cry, you hurt my feelings. Well, if you don't want to know the truth to the question, don't ask me the question. Don't make me responsible because you didn't like the answer and it made you upset or made you cry. I am not in control of your emotions.

Much like SL, Willow introjected her parents parts of not being valued enough to be seen and heard. Her shame and guilt and isolation from her family keeps her moving through her life without an understanding of, or access to her own essence and how to connect with others relationally.

Willows mother was a successful business woman. From the ages of twelve on Willow was very busy participating in school sports and working. Willow recalled this time: "I managed my own life and if I only called upon her when I needed something, and so I would just kind of, keep going."

By the time Willow was 21 years old, she had with two small children and had been married for three years. Prior to Willow's first marriage there had been a family disagreement regarding her future husband. Willows mother had investigated her fiancé and found information that indicated he was not who he seemed to be. As a result of this information Willow's mother backed out of the entire wedding planning. Willow described:

[All] of a sudden she just changes her mind on the whole thing. Like, invitations were made, everything was done, the stuff was booked, and the dress was bought. Everything was done and then she was like, no I'm changing my mind, I'm not for this. So for a while there my mom and I didn't talk because I was like I'm

doing this and I'm doing it the way it had been originally planned. There was pretty much no body there on my wedding day.

Willow described the end of her first marriage: "What happened was that he just left one day. I didn't know he was planning on leaving but I got a note and \$60.00 on the table. And that's what I woke up to."

According to Weinhold and Weinhold (2008) adults who have suffered developmental trauma have difficulty harmonizing and sensing the values and emotional states of those they are in relationship. The man she had married had a history of "getting into a community and manipulating through relationships and then causes problems and leaves." Willow's earlier childhood experiences may have created some distrust and suspiciousness regarding the reliability of her mother's loyalty and commitment. Willow may have discounted the information her mother knew and chose her new husband as a potential new accurate mirror. Due to this 'blinding', Willow was unaware that her husband had incurred debt in her name and was fraudulent with others in business. Willow described "So, I just made arrangement to pay that [debt] off—twenty, with two kids and a grade level education, and I was evicted."

About one-and-one-half years later, Willow met her second husband, Jeff, had her third child; she stayed in this marriage for 10 years. The marriage dissolved because "he had cheated on me and stuff like that. I couldn't get over it. I just couldn't do it, it was just too much." It was during this time when the marriage was dissolving that Willow's second child, who was fourteen, ran away from home and Jeff's emotional state was irrational. Willow recalled:

[It] got really crazy, really crazy. So when it was all ending with Jeff, he got very violent. At one point in time he phoned me, and he was driving and he had Casey

[their son] in the car with him and he said he was on his way to Edmonton. And he told me that he had his police weapon with him, and he was either going to shoot himself or he was going to drive in front of a semi-truck.

Much like Willow, Lynn also suffered immense pain in relationships; her experience of neglect and abuse left her in the deep throes of self-isolation and she struggled to connect within her own family and others. The pattern of aloneness, without close bonds to family or significant others followed her through her youth and into her adulthood.

Lynn recalled her school relationships:

[I] wasn't excluded but I didn't really fit in either. I was so small that when puberty hit, I became an outcast. I got teased a lot for being so small in high school. In grade seven, one other 'puberty stunted girl' liked me, and I liked her; we were both immature for our age. We saw each other a couple times after-school, but she was too shunned by others, and I was embarrassed to be seen with her. I made one friend in grade eight. I remember how desperate I was to make her my friend because by grade seven I had none.

Issues in relationships with romantic partnerships creep into Lynn's life and remind her that she is still captured by the fears of not belonging and physical abuse. In reflection of her endeavours to belong and create a meaningful life, Lynn recalled when she and her first husband adopted a five year old boy and a seven year old girl:

[I] adopted two children; basically they are not in my life anymore. I didn't know how to bond, you know and they were incapable of bonding. We were all kind of like foreigners living together, so there was never any glue to begin with so it doesn't take much [for things to fall apart]. My son got diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome when he was eleven. It was a lot of drama, a lot of work, a lot of pain with that and I was just like tired. Because there was no bond really anyway, so it wasn't a lot to give up [working on the connection and bond].

By the time Lynn is forty she has been through three major relationships and two marriages, two of the relationships were with the same man whom she married the second time and whom was physically abusive toward her. Lynn left her abusive marriage in 2006 approximately six years ago, Lynn reflected: "I had so much drama and pain in my life, like forty years of it already. So I said you know what? I'm just tired, and I slept for a year. I was like I am not doing anything"

While Lynn's birth parents are still in a marriage together, and her father is still abusive towards her mother, Lynn recently became estranged from her father. Lynn stated that she broke her relationship off with her father because: "I've been trying to break being a victim and seeing myself as a victim and being subjected to violence." In doing so, the thought occurs if the same pattern of isolation and aloneness is still moving through Lynn's life yet outside of Lynn's awareness? Her deep need to be free of the abusive relationship with her father may lead her into the very throes of the hell of isolation which she has been looking to escape.

For Sally, maintaining a relationship with her parents presented huge issues as she was convinced that she was the problem in their family. Without the connection and protection from her parents, the internalized shame and guilt persuaded Sally that she had to take the abuse from her parents. Sally explained how it was her brother that broke the family trance:

[My] twin brother who stopped the physical abuse from my mom when we were eleven or twelve years old, simply by standing up to her, it just never occurred to me to stand up to her. My mom had picked up a brush or something from the counter and was sort of coming at us and he jumped up in front of me, just took a step towards my mom and said, just shouting at her and saying, go ahead and take us with the butcher knife, why don't you go and get a butcher knife, just get it

over with, why don't you do that, and she stopped in her tracks and just looked really stunned and she never, never did it again, she never hit us again.

When Sally was sixteen she decided to remove herself from the very home she was not included in or felt to be a part of. Sally recalled that even after a tragic event her parents were too caught up in their own pain that they couldn't take care of her:

[I] went and lived with friends against my parents' wishes. Then I went out with my boyfriend to pick up friends when we were in a serious car accident. My parents came to the hospital to get me. Because I had a head injury and had been knocked unconscious the hospital insisted that someone had to be with me for seventy-two hours if they were to release me to my parents care. I was very badly bruised up with ten stitches in my head and about seven in my leg. I couldn't go up the stairs, so they put me on the couch. Then with me all shaken and hurt, my dad said that if I went out with my boyfriend again he would kill my boyfriend with his shot gun and then my parents left me at the house alone until the next evening. I had to drag myself across the floor to go to the bathroom. No one to care for me.

Sally's relationship with her twin brother was and is still significant. Sally feels a solid celestial connection with her twin brother. Sally described:

[We] have mental telepathy, it would just show up every now and again in all sorts of ways, not in the way that people think, you know, that you hear everybody's thoughts or something like that. It's just that you're with somebody so deeply knows you that you work in unison.

Their shared experiences, similar mirroring, wounding and introjected parent parts may have provided a common ground and understanding of self. Thus relating and mirroring back to each other may have provided a small sense of belonging and security amidst the abusive chaos.

This theme has deconstructed the participants' relationships and interpersonal issues as a result of childhood developmental trauma. Inaccurate self-object mirroring and empathetic responses and resulting narcissistic wounds impact a person's relational experiences and often leave them with blurred relational boundaries and vulnerable to sexual predation. Struggles with interpersonal and relational obstacles may be a trigger for the person to experience difficulties in regulating their emotions and consequently engage in other behaviours. Children with childhood developmental trauma often attempt to self-regulate through self-destructive behaviours such as suicide ideation and dissociation; the focus of the next theme.

**Theme 7: The dance of destruction.** This theme targets the complexities of suicide ideation and dissociation as an adaptation to regulating the impact of childhood developmental trauma. An individual who has split off parts has an arsenal of detrimental resources to defend against the pain of the primal wound. Self-wounding, which is inclusive of dissociative experiences and suicide ideation is one of those resources. Further personal devastation often occurs as the person attempts to defend against the pain of the primal wound.

Briefly reviewed, from the perspective of object relations, loss and emptiness are related to historical 'negative merging', or the child's unsuccessful bonding and mirroring with the primary caregiver. The resulting rage and frustration during the childhood years are internalized as 'bad representations' and become the defensive structures of ego (Almaas, 1988). The ego divides the person from their own true essence and the internalization of bad may create such self-hate and self-loathing that the person idealizes suicide. According to Almaas (1996):

[The] longing is not for death of the body; it is for the death of the ego, the structure that separates the self from its nature. And when there is still a great deal of self-hatred present, this longing becomes a masochistic suicidal tendency. (p. 562)

SL eloquently described two parts of his dissociated self, the part that kept him alive, or the good representations, and the split off part that contained his own self-hatred, or the bad representations that pushed him into thoughts of suicide:

[My] attempt of suicide was by taking as much codeine as I could get my hands on, at the same time, I couldn't take the pills, regardless of how much I wanted to die....Life was indeed sacred, and I could no more harm myself than I could another. When I was in the military I joined hoping to get away to Bosnia or something and get shot and die, but regardless of looking for a reason to die, I did find in fact a reason to live. This was in my late twenties, in the military and it would be a long haul back to finding a purpose for living.

Willow described her experience with incomplete suicide:

[I] had no responsibilities that weekend whatsoever and I had written a goodbye letter. I had poured myself a full bottle of straight; I don't know what the heck it was, Whiskey or something—and this is a story I've never told anybody so this is really interesting. I had rounded up every single left over prescription or whatever I had in the entire house. I put them all in my hand I remember there was about 30–40 pills there, and I thought all these mixed together with the alcohol something's gotta happen. And I swallowed them whole and went to bed. And I thought "alright, I'm good with this." I felt completely at peace. I didn't even cry, I was just like, "I'm coming home." You know, I gave it a good go, I just can't do this. I made sure everything was organized you know like insurance policies and all that stuff I had everything all ready to go. And I thought oh okay. My alarm went off at the next morning, at 7:30. Here's where it's going to give you goose bumps. I didn't even set it. I had no side effects. I didn't even feel drowsy.

Lynn recalled and illuminated her experiences with suicide ideation:

[I] was 19, drunk. I was maybe missing my boyfriend, and I may have already cheated and slept with Jim. I think we got into a fight about me wishing he would just leave me alone. I punched him in the face through his open truck window cause he followed me home that night. I wanted him to stop pursuing me. Then I lay in the ditch to try and freeze myself. I don't know why. Generally hated my life and myself I think. Looking back from my perspective now I would guess that home, and relationships were too painful. All the times, a lot of times, I thought about suicide, mainly in my thirties till I was 43, was to do with feeling alone, unsafe, scared and unloved. Loss of connections or painful ones, especially losing my pregnancies, not being able to bare children, losing three men that I loved very much plus two close girlfriends, plus just a hard time looking after myself as an adult after my second divorce.

As a result of the pain of isolation and aloneness, all research participants experienced the lure of the ego to terminate their bodies and any hope of discovering their true essence. Three of the four research participants were able to move through their own suicidal pain without seeking support from professional counsellors, relatives or friends. Sally's experience is somewhat different; she seeks the support of an abusive caregiver, her mother. Sally's feelings of not being wanted or liked culminated in an incomplete suicide attempt when Sally was 15 years of age. Sally recalled:

[I] thought I would help the situation by taking myself, the problem, out of their lives, that I was simply no good. What happened after I drank a glass of poisonous solution, is an amazing energy came through and I realized that I want to live, that there was no doubt that I wanted to live, so I went and woke my mom up and told her what I had done and for her to help me because I didn't want to die. She helped me to stick my finger down my throat and throw up the poison. I was very sick the next day but I did not die. She [mother] blocked out the

experience [I found out later], so did not ever speak of it. But I knew from then on that I did want to live so suicide, although considered from time to time later, was simply not an option as I knew beyond whatever difficult time I found myself in, I wanted to live anyways.

As is evident in the above, when the wounds of the dissociated split off parts emerge, the pain is too intense and suicide is often considered. However, though the hellish road continued, with all research participants there is an aspect of their good representations, or of their true nature that peeked out and gave them a sense of hope to move forward in their bodies and work through issues of life.

As has been discussed, staying within the window of tolerance and self-regulating is difficult for a person who has internalized self-hate and splits off parts and dissociates pieces of themselves in an effort to moderate the ego. The traumatized person is triggered when oriented towards the split off part that represents the traumatic event and is able to only function within this very narrow field of consciousness (van der Kolk et al., 1996). The realm of consequential reactive hypo-hyperarousal behaviours is a consequence of the traumatic event and some of these have been discussed. However, in this last section, exploration of Sally's dissociative experiences of moving towards the 'blue light' during abusive events is noteworthy of another type of dissociation that was not experienced by the other participants. For the purpose of this thesis, this is an example of the fecundity of the individual case and is considered as such.

Sally's out of body experience and the witnessing of her body being abused either sexually or physically from the perspective of hovering in blue light appears to be an abuse induced altered states of consciousness (ASC) and depersonalization. According to Nelson (1994):

[In] its mild form, depersonalization induces a sense of numbness or deadness, accompanied by estrangement from the body and ordinary reality. In its extreme forms, depersonalization results in a complete detachment from the body, including self-observation from a distance. (p. 64)

Sally also experienced amnesic barriers due to the sexual abuse and did not recall this until she was in her thirties. Amnesic barriers keep the person from having access to all parts of themselves and therefore dissociate the painful memory out of conscious awareness. Van der Kolk et al. (1996) explained:

[As] people are being traumatized, this narrowing of consciousness sometimes seems to evolve into a complete amnesia for the experience—this “forgetting the event which precipitated the emotion” (Janet, 1909) has been frequently found to accompany intense emotional experiences in the form of continuous and retrograde amnesia. (p. 285)

In dissociation without amnesia, anger usually activates and wakes the ego which assists the person’s capacity to adjust and regulate (van der Kolk et al., 1996). With Sally’s experiences of sexual abuse and resulting amnesia, it appears as though the ego had lost its effectiveness and was paralyzed.

In summary, split off parts of one’s self or those that are dissociated from the person seem to be arranged by a different state of mind, keeping the person on the edge of being disoriented and unable to live in the moment. Children who experience repetitive and acute trauma develop what is known as ‘tertiary dissociation’. Van der Kolk et al. (1996) explained: “Elements of the traumatic experience may be organized by a separated state of mind, which may only come into play when that particular element of the traumatic experiences is activated” (p. 192). To regulate emotions, when traumatic

experiences or the split off dissociated parts are intensely activated, to a place of intolerable pain, all research participants attempted incomplete suicide.

Sally's ASC and depersonalization experiences are rich, interesting and intrigue me for further investigation, however, they exist on the fringes of the common themes of this section and exemplify the fecundity of the individual case.

"Part 3" of this analysis has included three themes: 1) self-regulation: the window of tolerance, 2) the burden of maintaining relationships, and 3) the dance of destruction. These three themes have explored the manifestations of the narcissistic wounding of each participant in the areas of self-regulating behaviour, maintaining relationships, suicide ideation, and dissociation.

#### **Part 4: Healing the Fragmented Self**

*There is a primordial Essence characterized by unconditional love, joy, serenity, and wisdom, from which we have become separated and to which we can return by moving out into the vaster realities of awareness.*

—Ernest Pecci

Thus far, this chapter has presented a snapshot of how the manifestations of trauma have impacted each of the research participants' core psychic structures of self. Additionally, a glimpse of the painful methods of coping and adapting to neglectful and abusive childhood experiences has been shared.

On occasion in our own lives, we witness psychological pain that is often articulated physically and or emotionally by heartbroken demoralized persons in our society. Throughout our own day to day living, we may occasionally 'bump into' these individuals, and we notice their pain as they helplessly muck about in their version of hell, perhaps suffering and drowning through the vices of addiction and mental health

issues. Some of these individuals stay in this realm for an eternity; others spin in and out vacillating between tranquility of what appears as health, dropping back into the black hellhole of shame, tormented by the power of their own egos. Others find their journeys take them in different directions, perhaps a trusting ‘other’ or compass guides them towards their own true self and essence, or a healing of their fragmented self. “Part 4” of this chapter explores three themes: 1) transcendence: the fringes of linear time or each of the research participants’ past-life experiences, 2) transcendence: other dimensions of consciousness, and 3) transformation and integration: a reintroduction and integration of split off parts and wounds.

**Theme 8: Transcendence: The fringes of linear time.** While many transpersonal experiences appear to be centered thematically and preceded by powerful encounters with birth and death, there is a group of emotional transpersonal experiences that go beyond space and time. According to Grof (1988): “transpersonal experiences can be defined as experiential expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual boundaries of the body-ego and beyond the limitations of space and time” (p. 38). Placed in the context of the journey of the soul, it may appear as though transpersonal experiences that push the boundaries of space and time are simply our intuition leading us back to our essence or our Source. According to Lucas (2007):

[It] is our intuition that leads us to realize that we are on a journey of the soul back to our Source and that what occurs in each lifetime is appropriate for the stage of that individual’s journey-journeying toward this universal flow of energy is the meaning of spirituality and the purpose of our stream of lifetimes. It embraces a consciousness essentially unlimited that is continuous, has no boundaries, knows everything, and forms our essential core. (p. 25)

With this comes a degree of understanding that transpersonal experiences may be equivalent to the entire realm of existence itself. To contextualize this concept there are two approaches to understanding transpersonal experiences and consciousness. These two approaches are hylotropic, or matter oriented consciousness and holotropic which is consciousness that is focused on the entirety of existence (Grof, 1988). According to Grof (1988):

[In] the hylotropic mode of consciousness, we experience only a limited and specific segment of the phenomenal world or consensus reality from one moment to another-defined by our spatial and temporal coordinates in the phenomenal world, the anatomical and physiological limitations of our sensory organs, and the physical characteristics of the environment. In the holotropic mode of consciousness, it is possible to reach, in addition, all the remaining aspects of existence. These include not only access to one's biological, psychological, social, racial, and spiritual history and the past, present, and future of the entire phenomenal world, but access to many other levels and domains of reality as described by the great mystical traditions of the world. (p. 39)

The focus of this theme is to peek into the holotropic mode of consciousness and past-life experiences of each research participant and to provide insight as to the personal historical impetus of these experiences.

To give a backdrop and fully illustrate SL's past-life experience, a brief historical summary of the Egyptian god of the underworld and of vegetation, Osiris, is shared.

Osiris was an Egyptian King who was murdered by his brother Seth who was jealous of Osiris' power and popularity. To ensure that Osiris would never rule again, Seth cut Osiris' corpse into fourteen pieces and spread them around Egypt. Osiris's sister-wife, Isis was able to find all but one piece of Osiris's body and she attempted to transform him back into life. Isis was unable to bring Osiris back to the living and so he

travelled to the underworld where he gave the earth the very first energy to sow the seeds of agriculture and was known to be the guardian of the afterworld. Osiris' son Harpocrates (Horus) to this day attempts to avenge the wrongs that Seth committed. It is this battle of good versus evil that still rages on as the inhabitants of the earth struggle for peace in present day living. Continually the battle moves from the forces of good towards the forces of evil and back again and is represented in our modern global wars and struggles. The day that Horus wins against Seth, it is believed that Osiris, King of the Dead, who represents the belief in re-birth and the order and preservation of justice, will return to rule the world (Wikipedia, 2013).

In his early twenties, SL's past-life experience as Osiris was spontaneous and came as a voice. SL recalled: "it contacted me and it went, 'I am Osiris', or 'we are Osiris'." When further describing this initial experience SL stated: "I didn't get any more communication other than that, and it still freaked me out." This edict that was given to SL scared him and kept him from seeking further knowledge from this source. As a result, SL ignored this cannonball message for many years and it was not until later when SL was in his early forties that he became intrigued and interested in Osiris. SL described:

I was looking for and trying to expand myself and in examples of expanding myself, I had a vision of a whirlwind, a tornado, and, there were lights at the top of this vortex. I know it was—I know what it is now. It's how the thought pool comes into the human and it comes in through like a tornado thing, a vortex. And there are little lights at the top. These little lights are guardians, right? There's a few of these lights which are guardians for the Akashic records they're called. And there was a battle somewhere, and I was, I was shot with this big energy thing. Blast right? And I was destroyed; I was literally obliterated and sent across 15 dimensions.

SL translates the roots of this visual experience back to when he was a baby and lost all his energy; consequently, his life went from actively choosing where the switch could be and telepathically communicating with the entities and his mom, to a life of isolation, abuse, and hell. SL commented:

[I] came here complete—I came here to give the earth my energy, because it didn't have any. The earth can't give you energy if it doesn't have it; something has to come to bring it. I came with the energy to give it to the earth, so that it could give it to the rest of the people—here's the two choices, 1) somebody took the energy or, 2) the earth took the energy—the earth has to have this energy in order for it to ascend, cause it is an entity, this is the whole 2012 thing, the earth is growing and it is time, it wants to shift, 50 years ago the earth couldn't shift cause it only had two levels of frequency. It couldn't go anywhere, right? It needs those frequencies, so I come along, I give the earth the frequencies, well if I don't have the frequencies, it has obviously taken them because that was the plan.

The vision of the vortex and the understanding that SL received from this experience may have been given through his spirit guides that appeared through his connection with vibrational energies outside of the holotropic realm. The twenty year span from SL's first understanding that he may be Osiris to the vision in his early forties may represent a spiritual void. Perhaps during this time accessing the spirit guides was too overwhelming and out of reach of SL's own consciousness? The intrinsic trusting aspects of self that had been physically and emotionally beaten from his own essence and core, may have created a false sense of self for SL that was temporarily restricted, split off, and out of his own awareness of consciousness and self. Those aspects of him that were terrified and intimidated may have kept him from connecting to his own intuitive energies until later years.

Willow and Lynn both experienced more than one past-life recall and they also experienced guidance through the wisdom of a Shaman. For Willow and Lynn experiences of their respective past lives emerges in a literal cause and effect context, which exists or existed within both their current and past lives. Their holotropic experiences involve a past-life self where there has been great wounding, pain and suffering. This created an ego that successfully structured itself, lifetime after lifetime, repeating the same life scenarios as it defended against the pain and misery.

Prior to Willow's experiences of any past-life recollections, she consulted a Shaman who helped her to understand that "my life journey in this lifetime is about overcoming painful relationships and that I bring painful relationships into my life"

Willow described her three past-life recalls:

[I] was around 18 and killed myself [by hanging] because my love died in battle. The time frame is unclear to me; however I know that it was long ago. The Shaman, who led me to this realization, told me that I left a royal lineage for the love of this man who was a commoner. After he died, I could not go back to my family, so I killed myself. For life recall two, I am a 16 year old girl in what I believe to be, World War Two. It is France and I am running from an air strike of bombs. The building I run into for shelter gets hit, crumbles and I die. In the third recall, I am beheaded because my husband is jealous that the people we rule over love me, more than him. He rules by fear, and I rule with care.

Lynn recalled two past-life experiences. Both experiences are surrounded by the themes of loneliness and containment within self. Lynn explicitly recalled her first past-life experience:

I went back into a period where I was in the grasslands and I was a woman. And the vision that I saw was me in this field with nothing around, I was on this long journey by myself. Then the next scene that popped into my mind I was inside a

cabin, and it wasn't mine. It was a place where there was one of my relatives there; it was an uncle I believe and a group of his friends. What I was seeing is there is this big map on the table and they are all excited about their plans. And their plans aren't terribly clear except for their all excited about their adventure and they are going to, I think build a community somewhere and they are all leaving together. And I felt a real cinch of fondness and closeness with this one person and I knew he was a relative. And so anyways they had this plan to build a community somewhere and this was their trail map and this was how their community was going to be. And they were to leave that night. All of a sudden I'm in the cabin, at a different age and I'm married. I'm in the same cabin that I was originally at. Everybody had left, and it was me alone with my two children and they were a boy and a girl, they were very very young, about two or three or four years old. I was extremely unhappy, quite depressed and my husband that I had married in that lifetime was always gone. Hunting, gone, I don't know where he was, always gone. That's the sense I had gotten from it. There was a huge storm, I was putting the laundry out on the line and I see this row, like I could visualize my house, I could see the community I lived in because I had gone outside the cabin. I saw the grounds, I saw my community and there was a long line of houses there and every body's doors were closed and I knew I wasn't allowed at anybody's house. I was a total outsider and that brought up a lot of pain for me in the past life. When I was going through it, I could feel the pain of being outcast. And I was a really bitter, mean woman, I didn't like my children. Then by the time I'm an old woman there's cars. And the next vision I see is my hands on top of a blue faded Volkswagen car. I was like okay....And I just felt, just standing there hunched over, and I just felt myself being old. So I'm standing there, and I can feel like the brittleness and the frailty of my body and all of a sudden I collapse and hit my head on the windowsill and that's how I die. Alone.

Lynn's second past-life experience is accessed through the help of a Shaman. For Lynn this experience is validated by the Shaman's knowledge of a dream that Lynn remembered from the night before. Lynn recalled the words of the Shaman: "I see that

last night you had a dream that you're in a house, a stranger's house and there is intruders and you don't know what, how, what to do about this." She confirmed his vision: "That's the exact dream that I had, that night. Like holy crap he just described the dream I had last night."

Lynn described her experience with the Shaman as her guide through another past life:

He said, "You were a geisha girl and you were in the process of getting your feet bound." And he said, "That's all I'm getting that you were a geisha, you were getting prepared," he said, "You really wish that you were a man." He says: "You are about twelve years old you're getting prepared, your feet are getting bound and you look out the window and you are watching a young boy your age being trained to be a warrior and you really want to be that instead. See the freedom, and have that freedom."

Sally's first past-life recall occurred when she went to a hypnotherapy session in search of clarity about some issues in the childhood part of this life when she dropped into a past life. Given that in this life Sally is a visionary healer; this spontaneous experience may be one of mystic insight. Sally described:

I was a very magically powerful medicine man named Namo and experienced myself as him within the room in the present day. I could see the life as Namo simultaneously as being this woman in this life.

Sally's second past-life recall is not spontaneous, but intentional. In this session her goal was to achieve through a past-life recall experience, an understanding of, or to bring harmony to her current life. Sally described:

In the regression, I saw how the souls came to be connected in another life time. I could see how it was repeating itself—different details but similar intense feelings. Then an elephant appeared in a vision. This somehow led me to

imagine the person in the past life taking a trip to India and being killed by an elephant which released the woman [Sally] in the past life into contentment. And then I could see myself in that past life and I went and lived with my sister's family, myself and my children, and even though it was really hard, it was still, we were not wealthy people and, you know, I had to work and cook and everything, it was, it was fabulous. I was totally content, and we were free, myself and my children.

Sally's experiences with past-life events seem to expose themselves as two types of experiences. Her spontaneous past life may be a manifestation of her current-life truth, while her intentional past-life experience may have provided some nurturing and elements of healing.

All of the participants' holotropic past-life experiences are organized around intense dramatic episodes that unquestionably demonstrate a sense that something happened before to the same soul or consciousness. According to Grof (1988) the person often feels that their consciousness became like that of a Karmic stamp from the scene in which they were suffering intense emotional pain, murdered or killed by themselves or somebody else. These experiences are then transcended into their current lives and show up as emotional suffering, abandonment and relationship issues, fear, hatred, anxiety, agony, and physical crippling or pain (Grof, 1988).

The next theme explores other holotropic experiences or other dimensions of consciousness that occur outside of the realm of linear time of past-life experiences. While each of the participants individual experiences are unique, all participants have in common other levels of holotropic experiences in consciousness outside of the context of past-life experiences. These other dimensions may or may not be connected to the

transformation of trauma and pain, and their own personal healing journey in this current-life plane.

**Theme 9: Transcendence: Other dimensions of consciousness.** Understanding experiences that occur within other dimensions of consciousness is important. Each experience provides a window through which more information and understanding of the deep structures of consciousness is understood. These transpersonal experiences that are inclusive of the transcendence of spatial boundaries, to include planetary consciousness, and those experiences beyond consensus reality and space-time, such as channeling, or those of a psychoid nature such as rebirth, may be the very pathways or part of the roadmap to both non-dual existence and the healing of childhood wounding (Grof, 1988). With individuals who have childhood developmental trauma, it may be a mistake to assume or claim that the path to healing and the non-dual path are singularly achieved through the isolated experience(s) of past-life recall. Given this understanding, it becomes impossible to separate or ignore the experiences of other dimensions of consciousness.

SL, Lynn and Sally all have experiences that either advances them into the realms of planetary consciousness or there is a personal identification with the entire universe. According to Grof (1988): “Transpersonal experiences which involve transcendence of spatial barriers suggest that the boundaries between the individual and the rest of the universe are not fixed and absolute” (p. 45).

In his forties, SL experienced cosmic awareness, he recalled:

[My] expansion goes outside of the earth and I get a visual of the earth—I have even done it once where it went to, uh, the universe—the center of our galaxy,

there is a black spot, I know this because I saw it at night. I took perspective from that point.

Lynn's experience of planetary consciousness evolves from an experience of rebirth, which is a transpersonal experience of the psychoid nature (Grof, 1988). Prior to Lynn's past-life experiences she had sought support from a therapist who was working with her on letting go of victimhood when she spontaneously experienced a rebirthing.

Lynn recalled her therapist instructing her:

[He] said I want you to take your right hand, circle your belly clockwise and I want you to touch your belly button and I want you to repeat after me, this is not my burden to carry. Over and over and over again he wants me to touch my belly button and I said no way....I'm not going to touch my fear of death, I'm terrified of dying. You know? And so, I'm hyperventilating, I'm sobbing, and I said I can't do it. I'm just terrified, I don't know why but I feel like if I do it I'll die. I feel like I'll explode, I'll die. It's just the...The feeling I have, I know I'm going to die if I do this. He got me reassured; he got me breathing again....He got me to the point where I touched my belly button and the same thing I thought would happen happened, but in reverse. I was totally reborn. I felt my whole body just burst, into a million, zillion molecules, just burst open. And I had a dream about this prior. So, I have this experience where honestly I felt shattered and then nothing was there but pure bliss. I mean I've never ever experienced such incredible happiness.

It is from this place of bliss and happiness that over the course of six months that Lynn begins to move into planetary consciousness. Lynn recalled: "I was having lots of amazing experiences—ahh, energy, out of body experiences, telepathy. Everything started arriving for me and that lasted for years."

Lynn referred to her rebirth as her awakening and as she further recalled her planetary consciousness experiences she described:

[Even] after I had the awakening, I had such freaky spiritual experiences after that. One of them I went to the psych ward because of it. I just didn't know how else to deal with it. I had never heard of out of body experiences before, yet I was having one. I had no body control; I was going into spontaneous trance, going into another realm. Thinking I'm, I don't think I'm crazy, I know this is spiritual but how do I control this and how do I manage this?

Sally also described her experiences of planetary consciousness:

[It] was scary when I started to navigate between other planets and other worlds, like through working as a medium or whatever; um that's when it was sort of more the unknown. Not how I see like other people and energies within peoples bodies or being able to feel what other people feel. I mean, certainly when I before I understood what was actually going on, often I, I'd be quite overwhelmed by whatever I felt because I wouldn't understand where it was coming from, because I'd often feel stuff and I wouldn't really know in particular that it wasn't just me—and at other times, we go intergalactically, depending on whoever I am connecting with.

All four participants have transpersonal experiences beyond consensus reality and space and time. Sally is also able to see and feel energy in contained fields of colour called auras. Although presented differently, Willow and SL are able to feel energy move through them and Lynn experienced accessing energy that felt godlike. All four talk about access to the Akashic records of knowledge as their source of this energy.

SL recalled a time during his foster care years when he was approximately thirteen years of age where he became very afraid of the energy he had access too. He recalled:

[When] I, when I was in there I was, I would, I would practice my ESP. My telekinesis and stuff like that—when I was in this foster home, I would practice rolling a pencil. And I would try and try and one day it moved. I'm like, whoa,

and I got this flush of energy in my body. I'm like, holy crap, this really worked, I am right. This is, this really does work. So I tried in bed, in bed one day. I put a pencil on my chest and I just, you know, not moved my chest and breathed and I got that same flush of energy, uh, of energy and the pencil moved. Right? I'm like, oh, ok. I gotta stop this. This is not gonna be good if anybody finds out. Anybody finds this out, I am toast.

Willow described how she could feel energy moving through her, she recalled two situations where the energy she was channeling was from a source that was added to her own:

[I] remember as a young child—if I was writing for example, I would just.. I would be typing or writing something down but it wouldn't even feel like it was me doing it. Right so that's one example. I remember when one of my articles got published in elementary school it was in grade six, and it went into the newsletter. And my mom read the newsletter and of course read the article waited for me to come home from school. I came home from school and it was oh I read your article! I can't believe you wrote that, it was so well written—you know and I got a little award from it at school because it was for this well written article and I read it and thought, 'I don't even remember writing it'. This doesn't even sound like me. It was just so phenomenal.

Another event occurs during Willow's early thirties. She recalled a situation where a person was strapped with C-4 explosives and as the 9-11 dispatch she was able to follow her intuition and locate the identity of this individual by accessing the energy pools of existence. Her intuitive energies connected to the larger universal energies and she understood that if she contacted social services that they would know the identity of this man, she described:

[We] had a description of him and he had a mole on the side of his face, so something very distinct about him. And turns out they just did child apprehension

that morning with that family and the step dad had a big mole on his face—it just happened so fast. And when people ask me well how do you do that? It's really difficult to explain, it just comes to me.

After Lynn's re-birthing and subsequent shifting of awareness and states of consciousness she recalled having total access to the Akashic records and the result of this experience was a sense of peace and acceptance. Lynn described:

The total information of the universe was accessible to me so I was like okay, this is the perfect time to ask, is there a god? Right? To really be sure and when I was in that trance and I couldn't move my arms, I couldn't move anything except opening and closing my eyes. And, I could talk. And I just said is there a—, I couldn't get the word out of my mouth and so I said well then I believe in the truth—that was a moment where, I stopped depending on again, something outside of myself, for wellness.

Sally spoke of two experiences where she was able to channel. She described her first experience as being a bit scary because in this experience she connects with an individual from the other side who is still present in this life. She also commented on even after her awakening in 1993, how it was difficult to share these experiences with family or friends as they were often 'the experience'. Sally described:

[A] little bit, yeah [scary]. Yeah, because, because some of it included them. Like the first person who actually connected with me from what you would call the other side was my ex-husband's mother. So it was scary until I opened up to it, um, and then it was just extremely beautiful and loving.

Sally also described that her experiences never gave her reason to push them away in fear, rather she stated that:

[I] couldn't change myself—maybe I didn't think I could, You know, I was more trying to navigate life—so, so you know, I was focused on, ok, how to, how to

navigate whatever the scenario was and, and watching different energies and what people, you know, I couldn't see life how anybody else did so I couldn't, I couldn't actually deny myself—so there was contact with people who had passed over—like my grandmother, who I knew when she died when I , I was in Spain, and, uh, woke up in the night and she was actually in the mirror and it wasn't scary or anything—but I knew that's when she let go, I just knew it, the I called home, I asked if she had, if she had died and she had.

This theme has explored other dimensions of consciousness which may be significant flagships in each of the participant's journey as they move through the pain and manifestations of childhood developmental trauma towards integration of self and wholeness. However, these experiences of the participant's worldliness of other dimensions of consciousness are not included in the next section as the researcher was unaware that this information would surface, and while all participants share this commonality of consciousness, the impact of these experiences towards healing, growth and change was not explored.

Theme X will explore the healing effects of the deep self-exploration of past-life experiences and seek to understand how each participant has integrated and transformed their experiences into a healed fully individuated and whole self.

**Theme 10: Transformation and integration.** As persons approach individuation through past-life work and become closer to their own essence and individual truths, three phases of healing usually transpire. According to Woolger (1988), these three distinct phases are: 1) the realistic-cathartic stage: In this stage, stories and past-life characters are discussed and thought of as though they are absolutely true. 2) the symbolic-archetypal stage: During this stage of healing, there is a symbolic association between the events of the past life and those of the current life. This stage is

often associated with an overall separation from the characters of the past life as insights and spiritual meanings begin to arise. 3) the integral-mystical stage: Within this level of consciousness, all past lives become fundamental to the Self and all the characters and personalities are part of the Self. At this stage, nothing is absolute; insights and understandings are deeply woven and become integrated in such a way that there is no verbal description, no logic. This final stage of deep knowing as the person moves through the evolution of healing is crucial. It lends itself to an understanding of the nonconceptual elements of purpose, motive, and meaning, which are all essential elements in the journey towards the wholeness and oneness of the non-dual, the focus of “Part 5” of this chapter. However, the journey towards wholeness is inclusive of meaning, integration, and understanding of self, which is the focus of this section.

According to Almaas (2004):

Only when we have integrated the nonconceptual can we say we do not need meaning, purpose, or motive. Otherwise we will be stuck in the meaningless and purposelessness that are the opposite of meaning and purpose. Here there is no transcendence, only disconnection. (p. 341)

It is the intent of Theme 10 to provide a backdrop that links the participants’ past-life experiences to the healing of childhood wounds that have manifested in their adult lives as barriers to the full experience of their true essence and self. It is through the integration of the meanings associated to the past-life experiences into their current life that appears to transcend the barriers to self and heal lifelong trauma and pain.

SL sees the harmony and coincidence between his experiences here on this earth plane and that of the mythic Egyptian God, Osiris.

As a baby, SL brought twelve frequencies to the earth to either share with the earth or give to the earth. When he chose the physical world from the world of entities, he separated from the entities and could no longer access the left side; this was the turning point in his life, when his situation started to deteriorate and he felt morally destroyed. SL states: "I was destroyed; things weren't working the way I had planned." SL further explains what he believes the plan was:

[Here's] what I think the plan was. I think the plan was simply for me to be, just go, just go, that's all you have to do is just be in this planet. The reason why is up until the 1950s there was only two levels of vibrations that the earth was allowed to have because of all the degenerative things that humans have done. Right, we only have two active strands of DNA right. Everything was war, everything was kill, everything was either the root chakra which was survival of the species, survival on a bigger scale money, eating, what else do you need, well, you need the rest of it, I was born with the rest of it, but I need to understand these two. Now that I am looking back and seeing with all my research and stuff like that and my studies all I had to do was come here because I brought the twelve frequencies with me.

Perhaps SL's soul was too young to understand his purpose regardless of how the frequencies were delivered; given, stolen or scattered; his life journey was such that he had to learn more and he could not yet simply exist in wholeness here?

Perhaps there is a link between the death of Osiris at his brother's hand, Seth and the scattering of his body and the loss of SL's energy and connection to the entities and subsequent understanding that he too was blown apart and scattered, perhaps by his deceased twin or counterpart Seth, Osiris' brother? SL further describes his understanding of the meaning attached to being 'blown apart and scattered across 15 dimensions':

[I] was the guardian for the Akashic records to prevent negative energy from coming in, and I was the guardian, I was like, I was like a very powerful guardian, right? And I was destroyed by this person I know very well and then all of that energy that the earth had was taken. This is why we have two stands of DNA that are wrapped in two, two levels of consciousness.

Much like Osiris who was the popular and loved King who guarded and protected the people of Egypt, SL was the guardian of the Akashic records; timeless pieces of information that are energetic records of all time that exist in a nonphysical plane. When SL was blown apart and sent across 15 dimensions perhaps it is here that the negative energy surrounding him gained access and he began to experience abuse.

SL sees this current time in his life as “the final connection to bring all the pieces of me back together.” As SL did research and began to search for the meanings in his experiences he describes himself as the vastness or the empty space:

[I'm] the one that doesn't fit—I'm the hole/whole in the plan—I started to deliberately change how it works—everybody thought that everything worked on the consciousness levels, and it's not anymore. It's working in between spaces, right? But that's only happened within the last 10 years. And now, oh, you have a look and now people, in the last 10 years Right? Before that, everybody thought that it was, the chakras were being activated by the dragons, or the snake, or the kundalini, right? And now, oh, you have a look and now people, in the last 10 years, are saying that mmm, you know, maybe it's all in here. Well, that's my creation, that's my, you know, and it's starting to manifest because other people are starting to see it, right?

Even for SL this concept of him being the vastness of the universe seems to be somewhat unbelievable and mystical, closely representing the third stage of Woolger's (1988) model of healing; the integral-mystical stage.

[It's] strange, I mean, and I, I even have a hard time grasping on it sometimes, you know, and I, I say this stuff and, and somewhere deep inside I know it to be true, but I'm still having an issue, you know, do I really believe this? You know what I mean? Like, it's, it's a hard bite, even for me, right? No matter how illogical and out of this world it seems, if everything points to it, it must be true. I'm in great shape, I'm very powerful, the puzzle is putting together, all the 15 little pieces are now where they're supposed to be.

While SL sees his purpose to bring the missing frequencies of vibrational energy to the earth and increase the earth's energy, he also sees his purpose to raise the vibrational energy of individuals as well. SL described: "I'm bringing your vibration level up. I'm bringing your consciousness level up, because that's what I do." It was true, I could feel my own energy rise, I could feel it at the very core of my own being and in that moment I bathed in a beautiful vibrational connection with SL. Much like Osiris giving life to the underworld, the plants and vegetation to nourish the people, was SL connecting to and nourishing my soul?

Through the looking glass of all the void spaces of being "everywhere and nowhere at the same time," SL developed an art form of movement he calls "Dances of Dragons". The Dances of Dragons is a complicated mathematically based martial art type of movement that directs one towards the darkness, holes or wounds and through bringing loving energy up to the heart one can then push the loving energy into that void or space from oneself. The void or space becomes full of love from oneself, or a healing of oneself through the recognition of the spaces or vast emptiness that is transcended and transformed into lovely love energy. SL stated:

[When] you see a black spot it is your resistance—when you heal that, you fill it full, then you've healed the source of the problems so then all the psychological

damage, all the physical damage, and all the emotional trauma goes away because you have healed the source of the problem

SL's experience of Osiris as a part of his own consciousness and the unfolding of Osiris consciousness into his own appears to be fundamentally essential to his understanding of his own transformation, healing and wholeness.

Willow recalls feeling sorry for herself and sad with her life and sought some direction through a session that suggested to her that: "you chose this, so it was a reminder that oh, yes, that's right, I chose this—this existence because there is some big work I need to do in this lifetime." The *big work* that Willow clearly understood as her life purpose was: "This lifetime is about dealing with painful relationship—for me it's about the path of painful relationships."

However, Willow also understood that even after her purpose was shown to her by a Shaman and her spirit guides in 2006, she found she was on the wrong path. She had misinterpreted the Shaman's message that she must resolve all the stressful relationships in this life, Willow explained:

Yeah, so that's what I thought at that moment. Getting back into contact with my dad and work things out with my sister and going through all this thinking this is how I'm moving forward and working though these painful relationships and I'm a trooper, I can do this—So this leads me to this 80th birthday party. Because here's another big example because now I've got everybody in the whole room, everyone that I need to fix things with and get through my painful relationships with all in one room and its roughly about 4 hours before the event. Before the birthday party—(Snaps) Bam! This happens to me, I go into full physiological stress response—from a conscience level what I make from it is that's my body protecting me from going down the wrong path—the wrong path being, that I got the message wrong—I heard it but I didn't. I listened to it but I didn't hear it or

what's that one saying about listening and understanding? Yeah. I got my wires crossed—I ended up going to the birthday party, pulling myself together and going to this birthday party but with a clearer direction that it didn't matter if anyone was going to talk to me or not. I'm not there to mend relationships, I'm just there because it's my grandmother's birthday—my reasons for being there are more out of support and more out of presence than any agency. The agenda was gone.

From this physiological body response, Willow understands that her unconscious mind was attempting to reach her and tell her what the goal for this life is. From this experience Willow learned:

[I'm] here to learn, to learn to let go of this family because it's in letting go that I'll be able to accomplish more of what I'm supposed to be accomplishing—it's not about getting or receiving but its more about giving.

This event that preceded her grandmothers' birthday party was the catalyst that led Willow to seek more self-inquiry and she contacted a past-life therapist for a session. The meanings that Willow understood from her past-life sessions help her make sense of the issues that are present in her current life.

In Willow's first, past life, as an 18 year old, she hangs herself after her love dies in a battle. From this past-life experience Willow learned; "that I have a strong maternal line that watches over me." Willow explained more about this past life:

[After] he died, I could not go back to my family, so I killed myself. When I went to see her (past-life therapist), I was in a complicated relationship with a man who was recently separated from his wife—this was the man that I was with during that previous lifetime—my guides [great great, great, grandmothers, four of them] said that this man was someone whom I should travel with [as he is a protector] but not one that I should be with. We broke up eventually and he went back to his wife.

Willow recalled her second past life and the teachings that were presented to her as an understanding of why she would hide under desks and in closets as a young girl.

Willow explained:

[During] the 1940's, that lifetime, I was 18 and there was war planes over head and I was in France and I ran into a building for cover—and the building got hit, and it was coming down all around me. The hiding was really just a—something on a soul level, that that lifetime was imprinted. That soul took that memory with it and held onto it, in between lives and when I was born into this one, it was still there. The soul tells the mind what to remember and whenever there's danger its (snaps) go hide. And so that's what it was linked to—running away from conflict, hiding and fear to achieve my goals are identified as themes my soul is working on.

In Willows' third life recall she is murdered by a jealous husband who is a Lord and who rules by fear. Willow is kind to the commoners and this intimidates her husband who beheads her. In this current life, Willow has experienced back and neck problems.

Willow described:

Past-life regression healed the locked neck instantly with no reoccurrence—I haven't had any neck lock ups after that and I just felt very powered and very strengthened—I learned that my style of leadership is not popular, but effective for others. The sacrifice was worth it, as lasting change occurred for the people after my death—my death had a purpose—it brought the people together, it made the people stronger. This is being paralleled currently, as I have stepped down from a leadership position and am now having greater impact than I did before. Sometimes you have to let go of some things in order to receive other things.

Willow summarized her past-life experiences, "Each time I go through one of these experiences [past lives] I feel connected to that spirit, I can take the spirit of that person, that person experiences with me, the good stuff without physically experiencing."

Willow also believes that the meaning and purpose of all her past-life experiences is:

[To] erase the brokenness. And then to share it with others—I know I have one (story)—I have not told my story yet so this to me even here today is a journey, at least I get an opportunity to experience it all again and experience it from a different angle, from a stronger angle. And with purpose, that's it, it's to further research into transformation and that sort of stuff as well too—I feel like I have power and ability to encourage people. The gift of encouragement, to encourage people along, I have a sense, a clear sense of whatever it is that they might need in order to help them along in their journey, whatever they are moving towards.

Lynn's understandings, insights and meanings given to her through past-life exploration surround the pain of bondage and isolation. Her past life as a geisha girl represents a repeated pattern in this life of victimhood through violence and to giving up on her own goals, thoughts and ideas to follow a man's dreams and visions. Lynn explained:

[A] repetitive lifetime cycle that I've been trying to break which is being a victim and seeing myself as a victim and being subjected to violence. This one [past life] had, for me; the main behind that one had a lot to do with my decisions of investing my happiness into a man instead of understanding my own needs and my individuality. And just following this one image of what I think happiness looked like, which was family. And that's what my grandmother did, my mom did, I did. I've done it over and over again in this lifetime and so have my grandmother and my mother.

As a single woman Lynn brings this understanding and knowledge into her current-life situation. She described what she considers when she is involved in an online conversation with a potential life partner:

[Just] like being aware, even when I'm skyping. I instantly think about the past life. It's like okay; I don't want to repeat that. I'm not going to just run off with a man and go live here and forget everything about who I am and what I care about and what I'm going to lose—thinking this will be the ideal happiness because I already know what my ideal happiness is. I just want the addition.

Lynn then shares a deeper understanding of her past-life experience with the Shaman and the revelation of her former life of a geisha girl and how it affected her view and thoughts on this life:

[Two] nights prior, I just watched a movie of a geisha getting her feet bound. And they were bleeding and when I was watching the movie it had a really profound effect on me and I didn't know why. I was just mesmerized and soaked into this movie with everything I had and then he is describing this when I just watched this. And he goes, he said um. That's all I'm getting that you were a geisha, you were getting prepared, he said you really wish that you were a man. So this has been huge for me, in the last couple of months because a couple of years ago I realized I wanted to be a man for many lifetimes. Especially this lifetime, because of my own inability (to conceive children), my own, level of self-protection and assertiveness, I've always been a victim of something. So when he is explaining this, he says you are about twelve years old you're getting prepared, your feet are getting bound and you look out the window and watching a young boy your age being trained to be a warrior and you really want to be that instead. See the freedom, and have that freedom. And when he said that word freedom, I was like, yeah, that's the key link and that's my big experience this summer is the freedom, and that was kind of like the missing piece I always felt bound in some way, and it was bound to misery, sadness, suffering and pain. I was physically bound.

Lynn connects the deep feelings of pain and wisdom learned from the past life as a lonely, isolated, old woman, without family and the bondage and victimhood of the geisha girl into a common understanding in this life:

[And] the pain reminds me, it's like having a physical scar, it is a reminder of how to not choose that path—there's an awareness that I had before the past-life regression, but it didn't hit me to the core to my soul until I actually felt that I'd been doing this lifetime, after lifetime. And going oh my god, it's time to stop it, it's time to really end that cycle—and you're going oh my god, I just wasted my entire frickin life—oh my god, to actually be in that body. And you get to, that's the significant part about doing past life. Is when you get to actually be that person again, and come within knowledge and the understanding and feelings of what has happened has such a more of an impact than to know it logically.

Both Willow and Lynn appear to be working through their past-life experiences from the perspectives of stage one and stage two. There appears to be a shared understanding that the events they have experienced in their past lives are absolutely true. There is also an awareness of symbolism which is characteristic of stage two; those aspects of spirituality and insights that are seen in their current understandings of relationships, family, misery, sadness, suffering, pain and freedom are guiding them. I wonder if the nonconceptual elements of purpose, motive and meaning of stage three are in part evolving and perhaps linked and intertwined with their other dimensions of consciousness?

Sally had felt stifled, restless and disconnected in her current relationship in this life, she explained:

[I] had attempted to leave a number of times but then my heart would turn me around. I would start walking away and I wouldn't be able to even get into a car

and my heart would already say, no, that's not right for you. So love picked him for me.

Sally found release from the insights she gained from her past-life as a missionary's wife in the United Kingdom. The loss of her husband through the rage of an elephant in her past life provided her with freedom in this life to release herself from containment in her past life. Sally described:

[I] don't know that he, I don't know that he actually died in the past life until I actually went back into the past life and sort of said it out loud that that's how I could be released, the he die—so it almost seemed a little bit like I made a decision now to have myself released then.

Sally reflected further on her motive to seek clarity and meaning through past-life regressive work:

[My] current husband you know, although he professes an interest, doesn't really have an interest, like doesn't actually follow through—love put us together—all sorts of wonderful things, but there was a part of me that was still really wishing that I could be with somebody who was totally, you know, mutually interested in who I was showing up to be inside and out. And you know we get to explore that together, like that's the sort of relating I wanted to be in and so I was looking at ok, well is there some sort of past life, um connection that keeps me with him because I haven't gotten it or understood what I am doing in this lifetime in regards to him and our souls, because it's definitely a soul connection. So that's what prompted me to, that was my questioning the past-life regression, is there some sort of link that I can look at that has to do with my current life?

What Sally found in her past life was a husband who was not interested in her as a person with a soul but rather he saw her as a means to sexual gratification and subsequently she bore his children without a deep love connection to him. Before Sally

began to look at her past lives, she felt, “there was something through a past life that hadn’t been balanced.” However, after this past-life experience, Sally’s perspective on her current life shifted. Sally explained:

[Well] the whole part of me that, that it mattered whether he was interested or not sort of disappeared and I just became content—and when I say that, okay that’s really true, that statement. That’s because I could feel it in my whole body when I just said that—I think what happened is I guess I felt a little trapped in this relationship sort of because I was trapped in the past life. I was trapped with him. I couldn’t have gotten divorced.

Sally reflected on her first past-life experience as a healer named Namo which occurred spontaneously during a hypnotherapy session in 1995. Sally recalled that the past-life experience “slid into me in the room.” During this experience Sally saw that Namo:

[Was] completely relaxed and at one with the cosmos. So people would come to him for his vision, what was happening for them—he could just reach into the Akashic records and find the answers from the cosmos—whether it be sort of earth derived or star view, whatever, from the sky to the earth he was very comfortable and completely adept at all of that and so, because I had at that time only just been sort of beginning to explore multiple dimensions –it came my way that I didn’t know that I was adept at in this lifetime and I’ve been more comfortable with it all, and a heck of a lot more comfortable when I saw that in the past life I’d already explored all this stuff and was competent with it, in unison with the cosmos and what the cosmos had to offer.

Previous to this experience Sally felt:

[I] was fooling around with stuff I didn’t know anything about and it was kind of scary, and you know, was it okay? I was basically not confident. Some of the stuff that came through, you know, it was kind of scary until I opened up to it, and

then gradually as I opened up to stuff—and I would say that probably would have happened but it would have taken a heck of a lot longer had I not met Namo.

For Sally the purpose of the experience was to help guide her with her own abilities and to have confidence in the gifts she was given. Sally believed that the message from this past life was:

[To] include those abilities, but also to include an adaptive healing connection—so I wasn't timid or afraid about the inter-dimensional way I could be—and being with somebody who needs me to whatever, go with them wherever they need to go.

Sally transcends her past-life experiences into a deeper understanding of knowing self and capacity for helping others. Her experiences appear to be conformational as well as directive on a deep spiritual level of knowing.

This theme has explored the healing aspects of integrating understandings and insights from past-life experiences from the perspective of the three stages of healing: the realistic-cathartic stage, 2) the symbolic-archetypal stage, and 3) the integral-mystical stage. All participants found their experiences with past-life work to provide clarity, purpose, and meaning. These transformative insights were catalysts that helped shift their world view, creating a rich playground for healing, growth, and further exploration and integration of self.

“Part 4: Healing the Fragmented Self” has focused on three themes: 1) Transcendence: The fringes of linear time, 2) Transcendence: Other dimensions of consciousness, and 3) Transformation and Integration. In summary, all participants’ experiences of past lives appear to be quintessential to understanding of self, the

reintegration of wounds or split of parts of self and the reconciliation of current-life trauma and pain.

### **Part 5: The Non-Dual Path: Trusting the Cosmos**

*Tat tvam asi (thou art that)  
in your deepest nature you are identical with the Divine  
—Indian Upanishads*

So far, this chapter has presented the lived experiences of four research participants who have re-integrated aspects of self that had become split off and dissociated due to abuse and inaccurate mirroring during early childhood development. This inaccurate mirroring and lack of attunement with a primary caregiver and the resulting wounding fogged the lenses of each participant's internal and external understanding of the world. Hence, their view of how to relate in a relational world was blurred and misinformed. These wounds forged by inadequate caregiving resulted in overwhelming suffering and absence of their own Being, or a narcissistic emptiness that each participant attempted to fill with other object relations or relationships (Almaas, 1996). Through past-life therapy and inquiry, each participant re-lived the real pain of their past lives and through this experience was able to symbolically and metaphorically explore the content of their past lives which lead them to productive insight and healing of their current-life issues (Lucas, 2007). During this time of healing and re-integration of self all participants were embraced by the non-dual path. This process of reintegration of self seems to be a profound journey of consciousness that brings our fields of energy into harmony and balance with the universe and expresses the existence and receptiveness of a deep spiritual wisdom and basic trust that may be within each of us.

The focus of “Part 5” is to discuss the non-dual path through the experiences of each participant and their own processes of acceptance and letting go to the awakening of unity and wholeness of self. Two themes pursue this endeavour: 1) re-establishing basic trust and 2) opening up to the Divine.

**Theme 11: Re-establishing basic trust.** Where do deep spiritual wisdom, freedom and liberation come from? One suggestion offered is that it is the re-integration or perhaps re-acquaintance of soul or Being and the relinquishment of ego; which suggests enlightenment or the non-dual path (Almaas, 1988). According to Almaas (1998):

[Enlightenment] is not seen as a specific experience, but rather as an experience and understanding of how things are. This includes basic trust, that is, the condition of the soul when it is in contact with Being in its various dimensions.  
(p. 59)

The various dimensions of Being include different aspects of personality such as love, truth, wisdom, harmony, strength, omniscience, origin, perfection, and will that are discretely perceived when basic trust exists (Almaas, 1998). While an in depth discussion of each of these dimensions is beyond the scope of this theme, it is important that there is an understanding that the ego distorts reality through the various dimensions of Being, preventing the soul from existing in its natural state, which is abiding in what is, or basic trust. Enlightenment then or embracing the non-dual path is the soul experiencing how things really are without the commentary of the ego.

As has been thoroughly discussed, all research participants’ experiences seemed to have eroded faith and trust not only in others but in their own capacities to make decisions, relate with others and nurture self. However, basic trust is somewhat different

from the psychological trust. To deepen the understanding of basic trust, it appears that it is the nonconceptual condition of the breathing and living soul without the overpowering, limiting and shadowing defenses of the ego. Almaas (1998) stated:

[Basic] trust is the nonconceptual confidence in the goodness of the universe, and unquestioned implicit trust that there is something about the universe and human nature and life that is inherently and fundamentally good, loving, and wishing us the best. This innate and unformulated trust in life and reality manifests as a willingness to take that plunge into the abyss. (pp. 22–23)

Basic trust provides a life of understanding that the universe does provide everything that is needed. There is no fear or need to grasp on to material items, people, beliefs, no need to try and be fake or someone else, rather there is an innate felt sense through all situations in life; times of fear or sadness that solutions will be found and everything will be fine (Almaas, 1998).

It is the egos strength that arises out of the missing or distorted pieces of basic trust. The ego may be the creator of fear, terror, pain and paranoia that preys on and infects wounds that ultimately fester into a black hole that is full of excruciating pain and the demons of hell. It is the letting go of the ego and acceptance of what is, or surrendering to the moment and trusting that the universe will provide that leads one back towards the soul, wholeness and the non-dual journey.

Fear was a huge barrier for SL, eroding basic trust and paralyzing him through most of his life. Through his past-life experiences as or with Osiris and his insights into his purpose in life, SL began to conceptualize fear differently. When discussing SL's current perceptions, SL spoke about the acceptance and the letting go and relinquishments of fear, SL stated:

[Fear] is just resistance—and what is it resisting? It is resisting love. And what is love? Love is the flow of knowledge and light—the minute you accept it, the fear goes away and then the energy rushes through the body—so, if you do not resist, you are not fearing. If you are fearing you are resisting something.

SL's current experiences, awareness of self and understanding of the cosmic structures that support him were easily shared. Throughout the interview if I asked questions that could have been interpreted as ego building or related to ego distortions, SL would often reply “um, I have a truck.” This was established as meaning “whatever, it is, what it is.” These responses were authentic and were not flavored out of cynicism or bitterness; they became humorous and enjoyable for both of us as we worked through the interview. There was an energy that we both understood and connected to; SL had an acceptance of what is and that the way things are is just the way things are. More so, there was no grabbing to objects, people or situations, it just was. Most often I could answer my own question, with “I have a truck.” This was a lovely, relaxing and enjoyable experience for me. For example, when discussing SL's current state of health, SL's acceptance of what is, is captured by his understanding that “his wellbeing is right where it should be,” or “I have a truck,” which is a deep understanding that everything is one and the same. SL was not looking behind or forward, he stayed in the moment, enjoying this experience with a basic trust and understanding that the universe was providing for him.

One of Willow's biggest moments of learning to let go occurred when she realized she had misunderstood or misinterpreted the message from the Shaman. Willow thought she was to repair all her family relationships, the teachings that replaced this message were to, let go. Willow recalled:

[Let] go. And so that was the next piece in this whole transformation thing was just that I need to reconcile or what I need to do, it isn't that I need to go out there and make all my family relationship good—that is not what it is about at all, it is about letting go and moving on—just let go of my personal attachment, my ego, in all of it—that this has nothing to do with me, that it is their stuff.

As Willow spoke of this, she became teary and emotional. As I sat with her I felt an energy shift that brought a huge tidal wave of gratitude. Carefully, I inquired about her experiences and feelings in the moment. She replied, "Stable. I feel very secure, very stable, almost like I am outside of myself." In this moment of connectedness, Willow was experiencing basic trust, that the universe was cradling her through all the toughness of letting her family go and accepting what is. I felt blessed to be with her.

Willow spoke of another situation where she felt connected to the universe and allowed herself to be in the moment and relinquish herself to the energy that was offered. She referred to a situation where she was a youth counsellor with a group of children discussing God and being connected to what she referred to as a 'highly suggestible state'. What this meant for Willow is that "It is like you are outside of yourself again and there is energy working through you to touch this other person."

Willow's experiences of wholeness seem transparent, she appears to have an understanding that there are no boundaries between herself and her existence in the universe, that she is not separate.

Lynn referred to her spiritual awakenings as giving her understandings of what it is like to be safe within her, to have the freedom to listen to her energy and explore aspects of herself and to follow her intuition, to have basic trust. Following her own

instincts or instructions from the wisdom of the universe is a path that Lynn did not comprehend before. Lynn explained:

[I] would not have been able to do that, had I not gone through those spiritual awakenings and understood what it was like to feel, spiritually safe—and to feel that deep sense of faith, and trust in the universe. The universe is so remarkable and loving.

Lynn feels as though her entire being has shifted as a result of her surrendering, acceptance and subsequent spiritual experiences, “Something has totally shifted, permanently shifted; there is no going back because at the core level it has shifted—when you are in that state of oneness nothing goes on in your mind.” To give further insight into surrendering ego, inviting in basic trust and basking in the non-dual journey, Lynn described:

[I] give up who I am, and love appears. I do not do anything for it, but after such a time, I am filled. It is never taken from me, it just fills me and that is how I know I am in alignment—because there is so much happiness—I believe I finally arrived into my own authenticity.

Lynn discussed the behaviour of perfectionism and how her ego managed her into misery by guarding against potential threats of criticism or judgment. Once Lynn accepted what is and let go of her ego, she reflected that historically she would spend hours worrying about what others would think; spending copious amounts of time trying to present a perfect container. During this discussion I asked Lynn how it would have been different for her before as she prepared to meet with myself. She responded:

[Oh,] I would have probably done extra homework, had it all written out, what I was going to say, make sure it was all logical. I would have been anxious to talk to you, but instead—you know a couple days ago I looked through the questions,

gave it some thought and went you know what, okay that feels good. And feeling totally relaxed that you came over—It does not matter how I come across, it does not matter what I say. And so I do not feel that nervousness anymore.

I could sense Lynn's ease and open hearted energy and felt connected to her throughout our time together. I felt I knew her; the interview was very easy because of her relaxed nature and basic trust that all is as it should be.

Sally described acceptance and letting go from the perspective of herself personally and from her experiences as a Satsung facilitator. Sally's past-life experience as a woman whose husband perished under the power of an elephant, releasing her from subsequently being trapped in her past life as well as this life taught her to accept her current husband as he is and to let go of her expectations of him. Sally had some misgivings around the notion that she orchestrated the experience and hence the elephant showed up and her husband perished; however, upon sharing this experience with her current husband, his reaction of ambivalence was enough for her to accept the scenario and to let go of the guilt and enjoy the gifts of the experience. His ambivalence in this scenario was the exact reason why Sally had been grieving her relationship with him. However, through this experience, she realized that she cannot sort out some aspects of him. In acceptance of who he is and who she is in relationship to him, Sally described acceptance and letting go:

[It] is actually quite good because I cannot figure him out—he had not seemed to be interested in how I like to relate with human beings, that kind of kept that tie to the past life alive and now that got released, it is like I do not really mind that he is not interested because I am interested. I am here with myself all the time, and there are other people who are totally interested in what is happening with me and it just does not matter anymore.

From the perspective of helping others accept what is and surrender to the vastness of existence, Sally described her way of understanding wholeness and the basic trust that is within her and how she is with others:

[When] I speak with people about letting go of how they look and who they show up to be—that is just a gift from life—the way the molecules dance together. It is a complete gift, so to turn around and look at it and say, “oh well, it is young or it is old or it is fat or it is skinny or you know, whatever the hair is not some way that they want it to be,” I mean it is just sort of funny because, to me, you know, I am often surprised if I pass a mirror that suddenly I see that there is a woman in the mirror and I go oh, right, you know, that is me—I feel like it is nothing—it does not have a masculine or a feminine, it is just me, I guess it is awareness.

Sally may be experiencing what is described as *objective reality*. This is a concept of living, perceiving and acting without the distortions of the ego, and includes an objective witnessing of the dimensions of Being or living with basic trust (Almaas, 1998). Almaas describes objective reality:

[To] look at reality with unobstructed eyes, to experience and live and act without distortion. To experience in this undistorted way means understanding what it is to be a human being, and what life and the universe are all about. It means finding out what the natural condition of a human being living a life in this world is—to see reality as it objectively is—a reality independent of your experience of it. (pp. 60–61)

This theme has explored some of the research participants’ experiences of acceptance and surrendering to what is and their subsequent felt sense of basic trust. The next theme discusses the research participants’ wholeness, oneness and connection to the universe through the conceptual understanding of the vastness of pure consciousness.

**Theme 12: Opening up to the divine.** The *state of consciousness* or the *Divine*, the *Absolute* or *God*, the *Living Daylight* or *Loving Light* or whatever label we use to describe ‘it’ seems to be the energy of the cosmos. Perhaps this universal energy or consciousness is best defined by Lawton (2011), “It is the ultimate energy or force that underlies the entire universe, both seen and unseen, and the origin or source of everything in it” (p. 232). This approach to God seems to be similar with the Eastern philosophies which suggest that God is within each of us and therefore we are all the Divine or God; or we are unified and connected as one. It appears that each participant has arrived at this place of understanding.

SL described his understanding of this ultimate energy:

[You] look at the clouds and you see the clouds. I look at the clouds and I don’t know how to explain it. There is something more than clouds there, right? Same with trees and whatnot, right? So, there has been more and more and more over the last years, right? Like now I can’t look at the clouds without seeing it. But nobody else sees it. Everybody I have talked to, everybody sees you standing there. Like, I mean, I know, I know there is a difference because I didn’t always see it like this, and then one day, at night I am looking at the clouds, I’m going, “Oh, there is something there,” and I talked to a guy—and I told him, “You know there is something in the clouds. I see it now man and I don’t know what it is”—he comes back to me a couple of days later and he says, “I know what it is,” I’m like, “what”? He says, “That’s God showing you himself”—that’s a good perspective.

When discussing this in greater detail with added meaning and understanding of SL’s energy and connection to the life source, SL added:

[It] means I’m living in a higher level of vibration. I’m at a higher level of consciousness—because I’m at that higher level of consciousness, I’m seeing

those things at a higher level of consciousness—it's like part of my presence is there [in the clouds] —myself has expanded outwards and it is part of me.

Willow's Christian beliefs weave into her perceptions of the vastness of energy of the divine power that lies within. With the chaos that surrounded her as a young child Willow recalled experiencing at a very young age the feeling of being connected to a universal energy. Willow described what is known as *the eye of God*.

[I] could feel presence—even at a young age I could feel it. I remember being six years old and driving—there was this big rain storm that had just come through and the clouds looked so funky—I remember looking up into the sky, and just the way the clouds had broken a little bit and the rays of sunshine streaming through onto the ground, I was convinced that was heaven. Like it was just, it was inside my heart. Not just visually seeing it. It was like being transported into heaven and I was there, I was there. I could see all the stuff and it was beautiful.

This part of the interview was very moving for Willow as she recalled her ability to connect with a greater power throughout all the abusive experiences of her childhood. Willow offered this understanding of her experience as a young child and the feelings of connectedness to the universe and disconnect from her family, “Very interesting being in the family car knowing this is my family, but it was like every day In my life was an out of body experience—I’m not from here.” When I asked Willow to provide me with an understanding of what she meant she replied:

[I] am here but I’m not from here, would mean that I belong to a much higher celestial place—and I choose to have some good thing to come with me here (referring to her connection with God). And that was because I knew this was going to be a tough one.

Lynn's first experience and connection to the inner Divine occurred during her spiritual awakening. Prior to this experience Lynn had subscribed to those beliefs aligned with atheism. Lynn described in detail her experience of finding God:

[I] had to learn a lot of things about God too. That spiritual awakening made me believe in God, for some reason it did—I had this firm belief in God all of a sudden. And then when I had the schizophrenic experience, I went into these other realms. And in one of my states of trance, I asked, because I wanted to know more about God, I knew I was accessing that energy—the total information of the universe was accessible to me so I was like okay, this is the perfect time to ask, is there a god? To really be sure and when I was in that trance and I couldn't move my arms, I couldn't move anything except opening and closing my eyes. And, I could talk. And I just said is there a—, I couldn't get the word out of my mouth and so I said well then I believe in the truth—then I knew how to integrate them to access love and joy, peace and harmony.

As Lynn attempted to answer the question if there was a God, she realized the vibrational energies of love, joy, peace and harmony was God and it was within her. Lynn described the energies she experienced during her spiritual awakening and her deep understanding that God was within:

[I] got to experience all those energies separately, by the way, during those two, three year periods. I had energies, basically I had a name. It goes straight through my body, and I go “wow, that's peace, that's satisfaction, that's joy”—so having that—because we are all made of it—and so we have the ability to access it.

Lynn further described her experiences of Divine love:

[I] would be driving down the road, and I felt it literally come from outside the trees and just came through me. This is love; it had nothing to do with human love. It was like “oh my god, that's love”? It was just like “wow”! “Wow”!

That's not human love, that's just not the same thing. And I don't know how to describe that—it's so different, then anything I've [experienced], it's just there.

Sally spoke of awareness and energies of love from the perspective of the condition of the consciousness of all humanness, through years of her own experiences. Sally's conception of the energy of divine love is shared through an understanding that human beings are particles that are put together in 'form' but when viewed from the perspective of vibrational energy and love, that humans do not have any borders or edges. This means that everything is available and within us. According to Sally "we can be connected in all ways—the soul as well as the humanness." Sally believes that love and the divine are available within and it is only through our socialization process, our cultural norms and teaching of what reality is, that we begin to look for love outside of ourselves. Sally trusts that we actually have access to divine love in each moment within ourselves and if we stay aware in each moment we will be able to see that awareness and love are a team and provide a path for us to indulge in the offerings of what is in each moment, which is pure awareness of love.

"Part 5" of this chapter has focused on two themes; 1) re-establishing basic trust and 2) opening up to the Divine. Each research participant appears to have a deep understanding and awareness that they are whole and one with the universe, that in fact they are the universe, which is inclusive of basic trust; or an innate knowing that they will be cared for, leaving them open to live joyfully in the moment without fear.

In summary, the fourth chapter has discussed and analyzed twelve common themes that emerged from this research study. These themes were offered within five distinct parts of this chapter: "Part 1: Primal Wounds," "Part 2: The Panorama of a

Broken Heart,” “Part 3: Manifestations of Narcissistic Wounds,” “Part 4: Healing the Fragmented Self,” and “Part 5: The Non-Dual Path: Trusting the Cosmos.”

A detailed summary of my viewpoint and conception of the results, the implications for healing and counselling, the limitations, and a final conclusion of this study will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

In review, the main research questions directing this study were: 1) What is the nature of the lived experiences of adults as they transformed past-life trauma into wholeness? 2) What are the meanings attached to these experiences? It is the endeavour of this chapter is to amalgamate and examine the themes in this study relative to the initial research questions.

Therefore, this chapter is articulated in eight distinct areas: 1) theoretical implications of themes; which includes a review of what is already known in the research and highlights the findings of this study relative to this existing knowledge; 2) implications of themes; which looks at particular elements that may be peculiar to this research; 3) the interplay of past life and non-duality looks very briefly at the experience of existence through the dual and non-dual lenses; 4) implications for mental health diagnosis and treatment notices the impact of mental health issues in this study; 5) implications for healing and counselling is a look at the meanings that are constructed from this study and how counsellors may use this knowledge when working with clients; 6) limitations of research; 7) suggestions for further research; and 8) final conclusion, which is a summary of the main tenets of this thesis.

## Theoretical Implications of Themes

In “Part 1: Primal Wounds,” two themes were explored: 1) the threat of annihilation, and 2) ruptures in attachment and belonging. During the childhood developmental years, all four research participants experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse which created mirroring and attachment issues, and resulted in deep physical wounds. These deep core wounds inhibited connection to self and self-object, annihilating and destroying the healthy emergence of ego. To protect against the pain of the deep wounds, each participant developed coping mechanisms to defend against the feelings of annihilation and belonging. These coping mechanisms, such as self-isolation and hiding, resulted in highly defended ego structures that created a false sense of self, which impeded connection to self. It is the research participants thoughts and feelings of such emotions as, “threats to existence itself, no voice, worthless, not connected, agony, anguish, fear, loneliness, sadness, loss, devastation, insignificance, neglected, isolated, rejected, and abandoned” that served to maintain their highly defended egos. Their defence mechanisms provided an illusionary wall of protection against the repeated exposure of pain and suffering, however their pain intensified with further wounding. The power of the highly defended ego was able to keep each research participant separate from their true sense of self, leaving their soul child or essence mourning for wholeness yet surrendering to the fear of the ice grip of the distorted ego.

Throughout “Part 1,” the work of developmental theorists, psychologists, and psychiatrists illuminated the importance of successful completion of the stages of childhood and human development, especially in the first three years of life. The theoretical constructs of object relations, ego psychology, separation-individuation, and

attachment and bonding provided a backdrop for interpreting significant childhood developmental milestones for healthy ego building.

“Part 2: The Panorama of a Broken Heart,” contained two themes: 1) Coercive internalization of rejection and abandonment, and 2) The abyss of disparity, hopelessness, and isolation. One of the main considerations of “Part 2” concerned the wounded parts of self that are split off and dissociated, are subsequently frozen at their respective developmental age, and resist maturity regardless of chronological age. In this theme, it was identified that all four research participants appeared to have unconscious coercive experiences of introjecting aspects of self-loathing, anger, hate, blame, and shame as expressed and mirrored by the abuse of their self-objects. These introjects are much like defence mechanisms and replace those aspects of self that are developmentally frozen and set aside. The internalization of the introjected other kept each participant in a place of not knowing who they were as they repeatedly replayed the internal critical voices or messages from the introjected other, further engaging in debilitating relational behaviours that were represented by their false core drivers and not of their true self or essence. Theme 1 of “Part 2” was supported by the theoretical construct of parental or perpetrator introjects as put forth by Putman (1989), Watkins and Watkins (1997), and Paulsen (2009).

The second theme, “The abyss of disparity, hopelessness and isolation” focused on trauma and the dissociating effects of abuse. This theme points to the work of Levine (2010) and Filman and Gila (1997) that provides the theoretical framework needed to understand how the coping mechanisms of tonic immobility and the family trance

seduced each of the research participants to a place of giving up and falling into the darkness of disparity and hopelessness.

“Part 3” of the fourth chapter provided an inquiry into the manifestations of childhood developmental wounding from the context of self-regulation and dissociation, maintaining healthy relationships and self-destructive behaviours. “Part 3: Manifestations of Narcissistic Wounds” contains three themes: 1) Self-regulation: Navigating the “Window of Tolerance”, 2) The Burden of Maintaining Relationships, and 3) The Dance of Destruction.

Theme 1, Self-Regulation: Navigating the “Window of Tolerance”, provides a theoretical schema that visually outlines the three areas of self-regulation and described each research participants’ experiences relative to self-regulation. All of the participants in this study experienced requirements of incredible amounts of energy in effort to self-regulate without a fundamental understanding of *Self*. Without this understanding of self or a connection to their own inner sources or the necessary mirroring of accurate empathic compassion, all participants endured harsh consequences as their inappropriate self-regulating behaviours created more upheaval or turmoil in the already present river of rapids of their lives. This theme pointed to the work of Levine (2010), Ogden et al. (2006) and van der Kolk et al. (1996). When children have experienced accurate mirroring from their caregivers they seem to function within the optimal zone of arousal of this model. If stressful or emotional circumstances trigger responses that push them into the hyper-or hypoarousal zone, they may experience these two zones but they are able to move out of these areas through corrective empathy and understanding. Individuals who have experienced intense abuse are more likely to either stay or fluctuate

between the two flanking zones subsequently experiencing life through lenses of anger, anxiety, depression, cognitive distortions and an overall lack of internal stability and inner guidance.

Theme 2: The Burden of Maintaining Relationships, discusses the research participants' experiences and issues with attempting to identify appropriately, both interpersonally and intrapersonally. They all found that relational obstacles due to lack of accurate mirroring and caregiving often stimulated an unconscious trigger. In an effort to attempt to maintain and stabilize relationships with others and control the unconscious triggers, each research participant experienced difficulties in regulating their emotions and consequently engaged in or was further abused in destructive relational behaviours. This theme refers to the writings of Almaas (1988, 1996), Kohut (1977), and Weinhold and Weinhold, (2008) as the backdrop to understanding fissures in development and the resulting ramifications on future relationship building both interpersonally and intrapersonally.

“Theme 3” came together as a result of all four of the research participants’ suicide attempts, suicide ideation, and dissociation. The negative merging or each of the research participants unsuccessful early childhood parental bonding, manifested in later years as they found a way to defend against the pain of inaccurate mirroring. Each research participant, either through dissociation, suicide attempts, or suicide ideation created situations to do further damage to their inner Being, essence or core self as they followed the deeply ingrained, introjected echoing messages of their childhood primary caregivers. As a premise for highlighting this theme, the academic writings of Almaas (1996, 1998) are applied.

Part 4 explores the details of each research participant's past-life experiences and the insights of how each participant applied their own personal understandings for healing in their current life. Although the research participants other states of consciousness or holotropic experiences are outside of their past-life experiences, and this area was not initially a part of this researcher's questions or intent to understand, each participant openly and freely shared their experiences. These experiences are included in this chapter because the researcher feels they may be extremely significant to the healing, growth, and change of each participant. While other states of consciousness may be out of the scope of this thesis, it may be difficult to discern a solid boundary and profoundly determine the sole impact of past-life experiences when other holotropic experiences are present. The themes included in "Part 4" are supported by the theoretical writings of Almaas (2004), Grof (1998), Lucas (2007), and Woolger (2001). The fourth part included three themes: 1) transcendence: the fringes of linear time or each of the research participants' past-life experiences, 2) transcendence: other dimensions of consciousness, and 3) transformation and integration.

"Transcendence: The fringes of linear time," explores each of the research participants' past-life experiences. From this theme, an understanding of pain and suffering from the research participants' past-life experiences appears to be combined or related to the experiences of the same consciousness in this life. This theme is conceptualized through the transpersonal and holotropic work of Grof and the past-life contributions of Lucas.

Theme 2, "Transcendence: Other Dimensions of Consciousness," peeks into the other aspects or other states of conscious that were experienced by all four research

participants. These other states of consciousness appear to transcend spatial boundaries and the barriers of space and time. This theme guides this chapter into further possibilities surrounding the healing benefits of other holotropic states and is understood through perspectives of consciousness as discussed by Grof.

Within the last theme of Part 4, “Transformation and Integration,” each research participant expressed their understanding of their non-dual journey towards healing and wholeness. This theme explored and is inclusive of each research participants interpreted meanings of current-life and past-life experiences and the subsequent integration and understanding of self. This theme points to the works of Woolger (1988) who outlines the stages of integration and Almaas (2004) who identifies the importance of meaning and purpose in life.

“Part 5: The Non-dual Path: Trusting the Cosmos”, the final part of “Chapter 4,” includes two themes: 1) Re-establishing basic trust, and 2) Opening up to the Divine. This last section discusses the origins of divine, spiritual wisdom; freedom and liberation; and seeks to connect the non-dual journey as the corridor to wholeness and oneness, which is the Divine within.

The first theme of “Part 5”, Re-establishing Basic Trust, identifies the difference between psychological trust and basic trust. Prior to the commencement of each research participants’ healing journey, it appeared as though they were not in tune with basic trust. This theme focused on basic trust, which is a perspective that the universe has an infinite abundance of all that is needed and by having a basic trust that all will be provided. When a person has basic trust they are more able to let go of the defending ego and move into befriending their soul and their own true essence or nature. All research participants’

experiences include surrender and acceptance of what is and accordingly a re-uniting with basic trust. The work of Almaas (1998) is referenced as the main source of understanding the contents of this theme.

Opening up to the Divine, is the last theme of “Chapter 4.” The concluding theme of this chapter provided the reader with an ultimate understanding that all the research participants in this study believe we are all one, connected to the same source or energetic field of universal love and energy. Therefore, this theme explored God as being within, and all things. The work of Lawton (2011) provides a framework for understanding the possible definitions and meanings attached to God within the spiritual non-dual realm.

For referral purposes, a summary of the themes within the parts is presented in the following table.

**Table 3**

*Summary of the twelve themes in five parts*

PART	THEME
1	1 The threat of annihilation.
Primal Wounds.	2 Ruptures in attachment and belonging.
2	3 Coercive internalization of rejection and abandonment.
The Panorama of a Broken Heart.	4 The abyss of disparity, hopelessness, and isolation.
3	5 Self-Regulation: Navigating the “Window of Tolerance”.
Manifestations of Narcissistic Wounds.	6 The burden of maintaining relationships.
	7 The dance of destruction.
4	8 Transcendence: The fringes of linear time.
Healing the Fragmented Self.	9 Transcendence: Other dimensions of consciousness.
	10 Transformation and integration.
5	11 Re-establishing basic trust.
The Non-Dual Path: Trusting the Cosmos.	12 Opening up to the divine.

### **Implications of Themes**

The themes that emerged through this study were surprising and have several implications. First, past-life-regression therapy may be viewed as a separate technique. However, it may not be easily framed as a separate technique but rather part of their entire healing process. Or it may all be interconnected to unraveling a lifetime process of trauma towards healing. Second, it is interesting and still presents several unanswered questions that three of the four participants had to go into past-life trauma and could not

talk about past-life in an isolated way. Third, past-life work seems to be part of an entire process. For, example Sally had already embraced the non-dual process but still looked towards past-life work to explore current-life, relationship issues. Fourth, there seems to be potential territory for hopelessness as all of the research participants felt they had nowhere to go but towards psychosis or suicide. Lastly, it seems that the objective truth cannot be established or verified, more important is the apparent subjective healing regardless of the theoretical constructs of Almaas; Firman and Gila; Grof; Jung; Kohut; Levine; Lucas; Ogden, Minton, and Pain; Weinhold and Weinhold; Woolger; and van der Kolk; that are used to understand the process.

### **Implications for Healing and Counselling**

Thoughts on implications for healing and counselling include the following: 1) past-life-regressive therapy, 2) informed trauma therapy, 3) the here and now, and 4) the interplay of past life and non-duality.

**Past-life-regression therapy.** A portion of the literature review of the second chapter includes knowledge-based information on the healing benefits of past-life-regressive therapy and the implications of trauma on the body and spirit. Further scrutiny of the implications for using past-life-regressive therapy as an intervention for healing and counselling is beyond the scope of this thesis and is left for the reader to explore. However, the experiential information gathered in this study may assist counsellors in thinking about past-life therapy as a potential intervention for clients who have been physically, emotionally and sexually abused.

**Informed trauma therapy.** In consideration of the vast amount of knowledge gained in this research study regarding the traumatic effects of physical, sexual and

emotional childhood developmental abuse, therapists may be wise to include trauma informed counselling in their practice. It is important to note that the foundation of trauma informed counselling is safety.

According to Rothschild (2011) there are 10 tenets for safe trauma therapy that may assist therapists as they approach work with clients who have experienced trauma. These tenets are not exclusive to the trauma of physical, emotional and sexual abuse but nonetheless may be foundational, and a piece of the counselling ‘toolbox’ and are included here to facilitate that end.

The ten foundations for safe trauma therapy are (Rothschild, 2011): 1) prior to working on traumatic memories, create a safe, secure, and stable environment for the client, both in and out of therapy; 2) it is mandatory to develop a solid therapeutic relationship; some trauma clients may take several months or years before trauma work may begin; 3) therapists must be able to contain situations that may be harmful to the process and healing of their clients; they must be able to slow down and re-establish safety when necessary; 4) identify and focus clients’ assets, coping, supports, and wellness, both internally and externally; 5) establish with the client that defences are and have been resources; build new resources and where needed, healthier coping mechanisms; 6) always use interventions to reduce pressure, never to increase; 7) therapists must be able to go with the flow of the client and they must increase their knowledge base on different types of interventions; 8) educate oneself on depth psychology, the physiology of PTSD, and trauma; 9) honour individuality within each client and recognize that each client has their own internal process that is unique from

others; and 10) be open to going with the flow and throwing out all prepared interventions and thoughts about a session and stay with the client.

Rothschild (2011) said it simple and straight:

[It] is so easy to get caught up in our methods and procedures that we sometimes forget the human being that is in the room with us. At times for every client, and all the time for a few clients, it will be the best strategy and the best therapy to be together talking or just sitting quietly (p. 16).

**The here and now.** Other implications for counselling and healing occur around understanding the value of experience and healing in the here and now. It is the research participants' experiential knowledge that has yielded the results of this study. This research cannot be replicated; if this work were done at a different time, a new and unique way of understanding may arise, thus contributing to different knowledge and ways about thinking about healing and counselling. It is important for the reader of this thesis to use this information carefully when thinking about counselling and healing others as it is no longer my researchers experience nor is it my experience either. Enough time has passed and with new experiences, acquired knowledge and insights there may be different understandings and interpretations by the research participants and me. Also, re-exploring the contents of this thesis may perhaps encourage the use of different theoretical paradigms resulting in different thoughts and ideas which may or may not shift or impact the reader's implications for healing and counselling.

**The interplay of past life and non-duality.** Other considerations for healing and counselling may rest in the very nature of existence and the duality/non-duality experience. In discussing the past, or in this case the experience of trauma in past lives, and to further attach meanings and understanding of what was and how it may have

impacted what is in this life, takes one out of the non-dual moment; the notion that existence is only here, right now. Staying within the deep resonating non-dual thinking that “nothing can be done,” “there is nowhere to get to,” or “to go,” all there really is “is this moment and nothing more,” becomes lost and overshadowed by the sheer nature of reflection of the past which is in itself duality. The person may believe they have come to a place of living a non-dual existence, but in reality may need to seek the past or dual existence in what may seem the service of the non-dual realm, which in itself becomes the paradox of existence.

It must be acknowledged that all four research participants viewed their transformation of current-life trauma and pain through the lens of past-life thematic work. As well, all of the research participants felt a connection to the universe that is descriptive of guidance of the non-dual path. However, looking from the perspective of the researcher it may be that not all research participants have completely arrived at the non-dual place. The Fecundity of the Individual Case is seen here in reference to Sally and SL. Sally and SL spoke from the non-dual perspective, although Sally had a deep, clear understanding of a non-dual existence and SL seemed to have pieces or parts that indicated alignment with a non-dual existence. This may leave one wondering if indeed some of the research participants are still moving through further unconscious spiritual transformation process towards non-duality without conscious awareness of doing so.

In conclusion, further implications for healing and counselling may suggest that counsellors become aware of some of the current models of past-life-regression therapy and trauma informed counselling. Staying in the here and now may also be significant as counsellors are able to hold space and meet the client where they are at with accurate

mirroring, empathy and unconditional positive regard. It also appears that counsellors may wish to remain open to other paradigms surrounding the interpretation of the human experience and other states of consciousness as an alternate avenue towards healing, growth and change for clients.

### **Limitations of Research**

There are five limitations to this research study. The first limitation of this research study and the phenomenological-hermeneutical method occurs in the focus on the experiences that are unique to the individuals and their particular environmental backdrop. The interpretive results or understandings organized by this research cannot be generalized to a larger population, or be a part of any theoretical paradigm.

The second limitation is that the researcher and research participant's interactions are not static or frozen in time, but rather there is a flow and dynamism to the interaction that keeps absolute thought from informing this work. All of the research in this study is collected by my lived experience of the research participants' recollections of their lived experience, as well as their moment to moment experience as they articulated life events. It is all captured in one, two to three hour window of time on one particular day and written over the course of several months. The descriptions and narratives throughout all of the themes given by myself and the research participants "is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p 27). It is a moment, a snapshot of time capturing another snapshot of time interpreted through gaps of time that are pervaded with more experience and perhaps a different understanding than the original moment of the experience or the conveying of that experience.

The third limitation to this study is the focus on the non-dual path may result in exclusion of others who have experienced physical, sexual and emotional childhood developmental abuse who have also healed through past-life recall. The four individuals that contributed their time and energy for this research study are isolated to a narrow window of space and of time, topic and experience. There may be a suggestion that healing trauma through past-life recall is beneficial to an understanding oneness and wholeness with the universe in this life. It cannot be said, nor was the intent of this work to say that past-life recall resolves trauma and leads one towards the non-dual, for all three of these aspects were inclusive in the criteria.

The fourth limitation of this work is that other aspects such as, other states of consciousness, spontaneous past-life recalls and spiritual emergencies are evident, substantial and perhaps significant in the research participants' experiential outcomes of healing. These are outliers that were discovered within the journey of interviewing the participants. From the perspective of this study, it is unknown if or how these experiences implicate healing or if perhaps they are part of the mechanism for healing or encouragers towards the non-dual landscape of oneness and wholeness with all things.

The final limitation is that all the research participants suffered in past lives and shared the common themes of abandonment, isolation, neglect and rejection that showed up in both current and past life, however, none of the research participants focused on experiences of intense physical, sexual or emotional abuse in their past-life recalls. It was interesting that the research participants did not focus on intense negative trauma experiences in their past lives. Other accounts in the literature explore this type of healing and focus on this perspective in great detail (Lucas, 2007).

Limitations aside, this research study has presented information that has deepened an understanding of certain aspects of the recalled experiences of physical, emotional and sexual childhood developmental abuse. Past-life recall was one avenue where each research participant sought reintegration of the split off aspects of self and hence moved towards a spiritual connection with the energy of the universe.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Through the analysis of this study eight potential areas of interest for further research have surfaced. 1) to investigate if there is a link between spontaneous past-life recall and other dimensions of consciousness; 2) if past-life recall and the non-dual path are somehow in relationship; 3) on a broader and more global level, it may also be worthwhile to understand the experiences of individuals who have endured childhood physical, sexual and emotional abuse and their journeys toward the non-dual path; 4) to gather information on individuals who have had past-life therapy and have had no results or impact in their current lives; 5) exploring if there needs to be an openness or religious or spiritual context, or if healing occurs through past-life work in a secular society; 6) the last one-hundred years has seen an enormous amount of research on near-death experiences, however there is a need for more empirical research on past-life-regression therapy; 7) research that explores if past-life memories are encountered in trauma, and 8) research to establish if past-life memories are actually occurring all the time in the form of *déjà vu*; visions; synchronicity; and familiarity of previous unknown events, things, and people.

## Conclusion

In summary, this thesis has employed information from empirical literature and research on psychological and theoretical frameworks and conceptualizations and has woven the research participants' experiences throughout these frameworks. Within these structured paradigms it appears that inaccurate caregiving and mirroring creates deep primal wounds which lay heavy on the health and emergence of the soul and ego. Behaviours manifest as the ego defends against the wounds and resulting relational issues and emergent dimensions of consciousness may create disharmony and fear. As perhaps a final attempt to reconcile both current-life and past-life pain and trauma, all research participants found healing through past-life exploration.

This thesis has explored the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced trauma in this life and reconciled their pain and suffering through past-life recall as they embraced the non-dual path. As I worked through the transcripts looking to answer the research questions that nourished this study, I noticed that within my own awareness I began to feel an intensely close connection to those experiences as told by my research participants. I also began to understand the complex and powerful psychic structures of mind. While I believe I have answered my research questions, I also feel this work has yielded a deeply rich and intense personal experience beyond my expectations. The gift of this research is the desire for further understanding and knowledge as I realize I have touched one particle of the vastness of this topic area. I am propelled forward into a miraculous and enchanting place of energy that seeks to further unpack another piece of the abundance of knowledge that is carried within all of us.

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## Appendix A

### Transpersonal Therapists in Victoria

- Step By Step Therapy

250-483-7097

- Stacey Campbell

250-891-7452

- Corrine Allyson

250-686-9601

- Linda Campbell

250-200-0519

- Marie-Jose Dhaese

250-248-1290

## Appendix B

### Selection of Research Participants

Posting letters of request in strategic locations will be the method of advertising the project and recruiting research participants. The letters of request include my e-mail address and will be posted at various centers within the transpersonal and spiritual communities. These locations will generate enough interest to come up with between four and eight research participants. A maximum of eight research participants is considered for this study.

To bring illumination, understanding, and meaning to the transformation of past-life trauma through the non-dual journey of wholeness, the following inclusion criteria will be used in the initial screening for participants of the study:

- Adults not younger than 18 years of age.
- Adults who have had an experience of trauma(s) from a past-life(s) that they have become aware of in this life.
- Adults who have had an awareness that past-life(s) trauma(s) had affected their current-life mental health.
- Adults who have resolved past-life(s) trauma(s) in this life.
- Adults who are capable of articulating and identifying their experiences
- Adults who are motivated to authentically share their experiences.
- Adults who are not in an emotional crisis and who have been transformed by their quest for wholeness in this life.

Sex, employment, race, ethnicity, exposure to the counselling process and career or student status are not considered as inclusion criteria in this research study.

## Appendix C

### The Initial Screening Process

The initial screening process will be done by phone contact. I will introduce myself and describe my interest in the long-term issues faced by individuals who experience pain and trauma in their current life as a continuum of trauma experienced in another life. I will describe the objective of the study and explain that I personally will interview the participant. I will also explain that the interview process will be one audiotaped two to three hour face to face interview which will occur after the initial screening interview is completed and the perspective participant has met all the inclusion criteria. This initial screening process will take approximately half an hour. It is important that potential research participants are able to articulate and describe their story; however, the following questions will be used to start the screening interview:

- How did you learn about your past-life(s) and past-life(s) trauma(s)?
- What was it like to carry past-life(s) trauma(s) forward into this life?
- Describe how these traumatic past-life(s) experiences have/had affected your mental health as an adult?
- Describe your current state of mental health.
- Describe how it is you understand that you have transformed past-life(s) trauma(s) into wholeness in this life as you embraced the non-dual journey?

Other questions will be added during the initial screening interview to probe for more information that would lead to better understanding of the issues and clarify the criteria.

The research participants will be selected based on whether their answers to the five questions during the initial screening interview meet the inclusion criteria.

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

The intent is to leave the interview semi-structured; giving room for the natural course of the research participants lived experiences to unfold in the context of their life stories. The entire process should take approximately two to three hours. The following areas will be explored and help guide the interview process, but are not exclusive to the information gathered.

- Family of origin history
- Childhood experiences (abusive and non-abusive)
- School
- Work
- Peers and social groups
- Important relationships and partners or marriage
- Religious or spiritual experiences
- Mental health issues (childhood, adolescent, adult)

The following questions will be included and are intended generate other information and other questions to enhance and explore the phenomenological-hermeneutic paradigms as described in this chapter:

- Tell me about your first recollections of issues or problems in this life and what that looked like for you?
- Describe the meaning that you attached to your experiences of trauma(s) in this life on your current mental health?

- What are some of the ways that current-life issues have impacted your life?
- What were your thoughts about the possibility of past-life(s) recollection prior to your own personal experiences of past-life(s) and past-life(s) trauma(s).
- Describe what it was like when you first realized your current-life issues were linked to past-life(s) trauma(s)?
- What choices have you made in your life (childhood and adulthood) as a result of your experiences with past-life(s) trauma(s) in your this life?
- Describe how embracing the non-dual path has impacted this life.
- What thoughts and feelings have been generated as a result of this experience?
- What events, situations or people are connected with past-life(s) experience(s)?
- How have these situations and or people impacted your current life?
- What thoughts and feelings did you associate with death prior to your experience(s)? How have those thoughts and feelings surrounding your own death changed?
- Tell me about any meditative, philosophical or spiritual paths that you follow.
- What are your religious beliefs?
- Do you believe in reincarnation?
- Tell me about the reactions of friends, family members, colleagues to your experience(s) of past-life(s) trauma(s) recall and the quest for resolution as you embraced the non-dual path.
- Have you shared all of the significant ingredients of your story?

## Appendix E

### Recruitment Poster

Research into the Lived Experience of Adults who have transformed wounds from the deep past as they embrace the non-dual journey.

#### VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Principal Researcher: Cindy Lou Gaetz, MEd (Student)

Research Supervisor: Dr. Gary Nixon Ph.D.

This research project is a Master's thesis conducted through the University of Lethbridge and involves one 2–3 hour interview with adults who have experienced transformation through healing the deep past while embracing the non-dual path.

Individuals selected for participation in this study will be adults who have experienced trauma in the context of the deep past and have healed wounds as they embrace the non-dual quest for wholeness.

If this illustrates your experiences and you are interested in participating as a co-researcher in this Master's thesis, please contact Cindy Lou Gaetz for more details.

EMAIL: [c.gaetz@uleth.ca](mailto:c.gaetz@uleth.ca)



## Appendix F

### Participant (Adult) Consent Form

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You are being invited to participate in a study entitled, “Transforming the deep past: A phenomenological-hermeneutic investigation of the journey through healing trauma and the quest for wholeness.”

Cindy L. Gaetz is a Graduate Student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact her if you have further questions by email: [c.gaetz@uleth.ca](mailto:c.gaetz@uleth.ca) or by phone: 403.330.8529.

As a Graduate student, I, Cindy L. Gaetz am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for Masters’ Degree in Counselling Psychology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Gary Nixon. You may contact my supervisor at 403.329.2644 or by email: [gary.nixon@uleth.ca](mailto:gary.nixon@uleth.ca)

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of adults who have transformed past-life trauma while simultaneously embracing a non-dualistic journey into wholeness. Through this exploration, particular themes will emerge and illuminate the meanings of the lived experiences of adults who have unlocked past-life trauma. This

research study positions itself from the theoretical perspective of phenomenology-hermeneutics with the purpose to understand the phenomena of past-life trauma and the lived experiences of adults who have transformed past-life trauma into oneness and wholeness, relieving them of pain and suffering in their current life.

Published research in the area of this study is minimal. In the last 30 years there has been several books which document the use of past-life therapy as a modality for healing current-life trauma and psychological pain. However, there is minimal phenomenological-hermeneutic contribution in the literature with respect to the insights and perceptions of the researcher. The goal of this study is to bring more awareness into the field of depth psychology of the lived experiences and the deep structures associated with the meanings of those lived experiences of adults who have transformed past-life trauma through the non-dual journey towards wholeness. Therefore, this process is inclusive of my insights, perceptions, reflections and the shared understanding that is interchanged between me and the research participants.

If mental health counsellors are aware of the psychological themes that impact this population, perhaps this information, alongside existing knowledge, will provide mental health practitioners with a new way of understanding and “being with the client” in the counselling session spawning further exploration of counselling techniques and interventions.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your situation has met the following criteria for this study: You are an:

Adult not younger than 18 years of age.

Adult who has had an experience of trauma(s) from a past-life(s) that you have become aware of in this life.

Adult who has had an awareness that past-life(s) trauma(s) had affected your current-life mental health.

Adult who have resolved past-life(s) trauma(s) in this life.

Adult who is capable of articulating and identifying your experiences

Adult who is motivated to authentically share your experiences.

Adult who is not in an emotional crisis and who has been transformed by your quest for wholeness in this life.

Sex, employment, race, ethnicity, exposure to the counselling process and career or student status are not considered as inclusion criteria in this research study.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one taped two-three hour face to face interview. The interview will take place in a non threatening private and mutually agreed upon location. You will be given copies of your personal transcribed interview and asked for feedback to ensure the content of the transcript is valid. If it is not, you may suggest appropriate clarifications or you may opt to withdraw from the study.

Participation in this study may cause some inconveniences and risks to you, including the triggering of psychological or emotional discomfort. While the researcher has been trained as a counsellor, it is important that you disclose any distress during or after the interview and that you contact other appropriate counselling. Counselling services referral numbers are attached to this consent.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If any time during the interview process or within the first two weeks after reading the transcribed interview, you may withdraw your information from the study. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be completely destroyed.

In terms of protecting your anonymity you will be identified with a pseudonym and your original name will be placed in a locked cabinet. Interviews will only be heard by me and my supervisor and you. You may delete any identifying information that is found in the transcripts.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by using secure passwords for electronic information; print data will be kept in a locked cabinet.

Other planned uses of this data may include the possibility that the results of the data be published in academic journals, and/or a book, and/or presented at conferences and/or University classes.

Data from this study will be disposed of once the study is complete and the results of the research are published.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with you, the participant, and my supervisor and with other academics in a thesis defense.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

---

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.