SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CLIENT ENCOUNTERS: REFLECTIONS OF SENIOR PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

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ABSTRACT

Psychotherapist development and spirituality are recognized as important factors in psychotherapy practice and outcomes. While the study of psychotherapist development has proliferated in the last decade, it has mainly focused on the professional aspect of development, to the exclusion of the broader whole of the therapist as a person. Research on therapist spirituality, on the other hand, remains limited to its application and relevance within the therapeutic context, with little attention beyond the realm of therapists' professional practice.

Moreover, the emphasis in both cases has remained on the psychotherapist as the one who affects the client, and on the client's process of change as a result. Although the role of client influence in the professional development of psychotherapists has been noted, little research exists. Even less is known about client impact on therapist's development as individuals, beyond psychotherapy practice. Since spirituality is an important dimension of many therapists' lives, a gap in knowledge exists on how this dimension is impacted by client work.

This qualitative study explored the spiritual development experienced by psychotherapists as a result of work with clients, as seen retrospectively over the course of their career, and the resulting changes in their way of being-in-the-world. Nine senior therapists, with 25 years or more of clinical experience, have taken part. Data were collected through a questionnaire, semi-structured interview and written reflection. Phenomenological Inquiry was used to describe and interpret the data. The results revealed a dynamic, and multi-faceted process of spiritual development with implications for therapists' practice and for their lives beyond the therapy room. Six themes (Deepening, Expansion, Enrichment, Integration, Breaking Through, and Outer Growth) captured participants' experience. These themes and their sub-themes have contributed to a deeper understanding of psychotherapist development, psychotherapist spirituality and spiritual development, and of the role of client encounters within this. A theoretical conceptualization of spiritual development in the form of a theoretical model was proposed in an effort to reflect the senior therapists' experience of spiritual development through client work. Furthermore, participants' reflections provided insights towards enriching, guiding, and supporting the younger generation of therapists in the beginning stages of their development, with implications for training, education, and practice.

Keywords: psychotherapist development, psychotherapist spirituality, spiritual development, client influence on psychotherapists

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Psychotherapy research to date has largely focused on the validation of theories and interventions, as well as on therapist factors that facilitate client change (Levitt, Butler, & Hill, 2006; Sperry & Carlson, 2014). Much less attention has historically been devoted to the process of change, growth, and development of psychotherapists themselves, although attention to therapist factors has involved looking at personality, values, characteristics, early development, and motivations which lead therapists to choose this field of work, as relevant to therapeutic success (Barnett, 2007; Farber, Manevich, Metzger, & Saypot, 2005; Kelly, 1995; Orlinsky, 2005).

The development of psychotherapists as practitioners, over the course of training and practice, emerged as a distinct area of study relatively recently, and has been receiving extensive attention over the last decade. From its early beginnings in the 1980's, the focus of this research has shifted from centering on the years of training, skill acquisition and competency, through to the life-long process of professional development spanning one's career (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). This focus has since broadened somewhat from an exclusive concern with the professional realm, to a recognition of the deeply personal nature of psychotherapy work, and thus to psychotherapists' personal experience and development as individuals (see for e.g. Klein Bernard, & Schermer, 2011; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Research does suggest that the therapist's own self, and one's evolution over time, plays a significant role in the therapeutic relationship, therapy interventions, and client outcomes (Klein et al., 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). The important implications of this for not only clients and the profession, but beyond, for society, have been noted in the literature (Grafanaki,

2010; Orlinski & Ronnestad, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), though remain to be investigated further.

Currently, more emphasis is being placed on the complexity of this process of psychotherapist development, increasingly recognized as being multi-faceted, with multiple sources of influence, and continuing over the course of one's career, as well as being inextricably intertwined with one's own personal development throughout the lifetime (Hatcher et al., 2012; Kissil, Carneiro, & Aponte, 2018; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Nevertheless, the therapist as a person (Aponte, 2016), recognized in the literature as being the instrument, and the tool of practice (Kissil et al., 2018; Klein, 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), within a larger context of their life and being, continues to be obscured by emphasis on the professional.

The current base of knowledge calls for more investigation of the impact of clients on therapists, and on their continued development (Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Skovholt, 2012; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2013). While client influence on the professional development of psychotherapists, i.e. skill and competency development through experience, has been noted extensively (Klein, 2011; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Orlinsky & Skovholt, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), it has been little investigated beyond this, and remains poorly understood. Existing findings in this area suggest that what clients bring to the therapeutic encounter affects therapists at a deep level, influencing the course of their development not only on the professional level, but on a much more profound, personal one as well (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). Although this impact is acknowledged, it is not addressed in any depth or detail. Only a handful of studies exist in this area (Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Hatcher et al., 2012; Pargament, Lomax, McGee, & Fang, 2014; Turner, Gibson, Bennetts, &

Hunt, 2008).

Additionally, this significance of client impact on therapists as individuals has been acknowledged by many practitioners anecdotally (Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Skovholt, 2012; Turner et al. 2008). Reflections and experiences of prominent researchers in the field, based on a lifetime of clinical work, point out that psychotherapy practice has a deep, and potentially extensive impact on psychotherapist change and development – as person (Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Orlinsky, 2005; Skovholt, 2012; Turner et al. 2008). Thus, despite of the relational nature and degree of involvement of one's whole self that therapeutic practice entails, research focus has remained on the impacts of this on clients, with little explicit attention to the impact of client work on the *person* of the therapist within this relationship (Cox, 1997; Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Klein, Bernard, & Schermer, 2011), and to *who* the therapist becomes as a result of their work (Carlson, Erickson, & Seewald-Marquardt, 2002; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Mackay, 2008; Skovholt, 2012).

One area where the psychotherapist as a person is being revealed beneath their professional role is in the emerging literature on spirituality in psychotherapy, and, on the spirituality of practitioners within this context. Recent research has shown that spirituality is highly meaningful for many psychotherapists, for their work with clients, and constitutes an inseparable part of their life and development – in relation to practice and beyond (Cashwell & al., 2007; Hoffman & Walach, 2011; Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007; Smith & Orlinsky, 2005; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Seustock, 2009). As such, this appears to be a potentially relevant factor in the aforementioned complexity of therapist development and its process, and is worthy of closer attention (Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008; Skovholt, 2012). As spirituality is a reality which touches the very core and essence of one's being, and permeates one's whole life

(Aponte, 1996; Cashwell et al., 2007; Cox, 1997), further examination of it and its development over the course of therapists' lives in practice may shed valuable light on our understanding of the developmental process of the therapist – as a whole person.

Given the prominent role played by experiences with clients for therapists' professional dimension, the question emerges also about the implications of this for other aspects of therapists' development – and for their overall development. Little has been said about how professional practice influences therapists' spirituality in turn, and *clients'* influence on therapist spirituality and development from this lens has received scarce attention to date. Here, as with the professional dimension of psychotherapist development, this impact has been noted in existing studies, but remains neglected and unexplored. Prominent researchers in the area of therapist development, such as Skovholt (2012) and Kottler and Carlson (2014), who have highlighted the importance of spirituality in their own life and work as therapists, have not addressed the impact of clients on this dimension in their research.

So far, the focus of both theory and research in this area has remained almost exclusively on the meaning and significance of spirituality as a resource for therapists in their practice, and its contribution to therapist effectiveness in the therapeutic relationship (Brady, Guy, Poelstra, & Fletcher-Brokaw, 1999; Cashwell et al., 2007; Pargament, 2007). Emphasis has been placed on spirituality as an important factor in therapist coping through the challenges of practice, especially in working with trauma, and in general personal wellness, as an aspect of self-care (Brady et al., 1999; Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008). In other words, spirituality has been understood as a resource to enhance the life, self, and work of therapists, with a view towards positively affecting client outcomes.

While the focus here has remained on the self of the therapist and its enhancement, again

in relation to therapeutic work, attention to the broader implications of this – for therapists, for the profession, and for society as a whole, is lacking. There is a need to progress beyond the current narrow, individualistic understanding of psychotherapists in a professional vacuum, and of spirituality as a means of self-enhancement, to further stages of spiritual and psycho-social development, marked by self-transcendence and focus beyond one's usual scope of concern (Matteson, 2008; Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000). More attention also needs to be given to the understanding of spirituality as a way of life, lived and expressed in actions (Cashwell et al., 2007; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007), rather than inner experience and theoretical construct, when examining this phenomenon in psychotherapists.

The population of senior psychotherapists – those at the final stage of professional development as described in existing literature (Goldberg, 1992; Kottler & Carlson, 2012; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010) has received additional attention in recent years (Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Rabu, Moltu, Binder, & McLeod, 2016). The cumulative effect of professional development in this cohort has been recognized as being of considerable value in contributing to our understanding of the experience and impacts of the developmental process, for both the profession and for society (Goldberg, 1992; Kottler & Carlson, 2014, Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Rabu et al., 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001).

Within the existing literature on this population and stage of development, the emphasis on spirituality, and its importance for practitioners in their senior years, has also been highlighted (Goldberg, 1992; Kottler & Carlson, 2014). Furthermore, much overlap appears to exist between the experiences and effects of senior practitioners' development, as outlined in the literature, and the characteristics of spirituality and spiritual development described elsewhere (Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). Yet a lack of integration of these

dimensions exists in current research, despite of the potential it holds to advance our knowledge in each of those areas.

In light of the above, the aim of this study was to explore the impact of clients on therapist spirituality, and how this impact in turn affects therapist relationships beyond psychotherapy – relationships to and with others, in society and the greater Earth community, on a practical, day-to-day level. As such, the research sought to contribute to a wider understanding of therapist development beyond the confines of the therapy room and the prevailing individualistic focus.

This study has brought together the existing literature in the areas of psychotherapist development, client impact on psychotherapist development, and psychotherapist spirituality. Specifically, it has attempted to connect these areas by filling the gaps and contribute to further knowledge of client impacts on the person of the therapist. The study has further provided the empirical evidence as a connecting thread between these areas which, according to the available literature are interrelated within the lived experience of many therapists, and shape their development as individuals – as persons, on multiple levels.

Study Rationale

With the growing attention to the nature and process of psychotherapist development, and the extensive body of research already conducted in this area, the focus has remained primarily on the professional aspect of development, as relevant for practice, competency, and client outcomes. While existing studies acknowledge the complexity of this developmental process and its inseparability from the rest of the therapist's self, life, and experience, the therapist as a person, beyond their professional role, and their development as such, remains obscured.

At the same time, the literature is unanimous in noting the key role played by clients, and

work with them, on not only the professional development of practitioners, but on a deeper, more personal level as well. While this influence has been noted and referred to extensively in the literature, it remains unexplored to any greater depth, and our understanding of it remains limited. With the limited research on psychotherapists and their development beyond an exclusive focus on practice, and of client influence therein, there is also increasing attention being devoted to the complexity of this developmental process, as well as to the area of psychotherapist spirituality, as an important aspect of psychotherapists' work and lives. Although there has been shift in the literature towards a greater integration of the role of the therapist with their whole self, and the larger reality of their life, the focus continues to be placed mainly on spirituality as a resource for therapists' work, with little expansion of its impact beyond the therapeutic context, and its place in the development of practitioners. More exploration and integration is needed to better understand the nature and process of psychotherapists' development through their work – as persons. Senior practitioners, with their lifetime of development in practice, can provide a unique and rich perspective on the nature of this process, and on its fruits – in therapy practice and beyond, in life and society.

This study has sought to explore senior practitioners' experience of spiritual development, as influenced by encounters with clients, seen retrospectively over the course of their professional lives. It sought to shed some light at the broader implications and effects of spiritual development – in the lives of therapists beyond the therapy room, and in their relationships to, and with, the greater whole - of community, society, and the Earth.

The core concepts and terms used for the purposes of this investigation are presented and defined in what follows and will be further discussed and elaborated upon in the literature review.

Core Concepts

In this study, **spirituality** has been defined as "a profoundly relational and moral way of being" (Carlson et al., p.218), and as a "quest to embody and to live that which flows from the Source of All Good" (p.219), which centers around our relationship with the Transcendent and through it, with all of Creation, in a spirit of "respect, mutuality, accountability, compassion, and love" (p. 218). This definition encompasses the three elements of spirituality most commonly found in the literature: the presence or existence of a sacred or transcendent reality, connection with/to this reality (whether or not conceived of within a theist, or non-theist, humanistic worldview), and, an element of purpose and meaning as a fundamental value (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). Furthermore, spirituality is understood here as being "a strictly human reality" (Helminiak, 1997, p.35), inherent in human nature. As such, it is independent of theological understandings (Helminiak, 1987), although very often also tied to and embedded within structured, collective systems of religious belief, which constitute a container or framework for spiritual expression (Helminiak, 1987; Pace, 2012; Sheridan, 1986).

Development is understood as a process of change over time (Green, 1989; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005). It is characterized by *temporality*, meaning that change occurs over a period of time, *cumulativity* – the change which occurs is cumulative and involves progressive accumulations between points in time (continuous or discontinuous), *directionality* – the change occurs in a certain direction at any point in time, *new modes of organization* – the alteration or reorganization of previous patterns, and/or emergence of new patterns, characteristics, and ways of being of an individual, and, lastly, *increased capacity* for self-regulation and awareness (Green, 1989). Thus, it involves both differentiation and integration (Geller & Farber, 2015). Furthermore, the process of psychotherapists' development in practice involves the degree of

experienced growth versus depletion, and improvement versus decline (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005).

Spiritual development is regarded as an inseparable aspect of human development, or, simply human development as seen through a spiritual perspective (Helminiak, 1987; Hull, 2002), which transcends the biological (Hull, 2002). It represents "the growth in authentic self-transcendence that results from the individual's taking responsibility for her- or himself" (Helminiak, 1987, p.77), and the continuous integration of the self in response and in openness to this principle of authentic self-transcendence (Helminiak, 1987). It is inseparable from human personhood and identity development, and is characterized by four main criteria: authenticity, openness to authentic self-transcendence, involvement of the whole person, and; conscious choice (Helminiak, 1997; Hull, 2002; Poll & Smith, 2003).

In discussing spirituality and spiritual development, the concept of **transcendence** is used as derived from the Latin "transcendo" (Morgan, 2013, p.5), meaning a passing over, a moving beyond or rising above. It further implies a passing over or rising above the boundaries of the known, the comfortable, and the familiar, and suggests the presence, mystery and power of a greater reality/world existing beyond those boundaries (Morgan, 2013).

The term "**encounter**" in this study is used to refer to the direct experience of therapists' interactions and work with their clients, and the impact this has had on them. It stresses the nature of psychotherapy work as based on a shared meeting between persons, a coming face to face with the being and reality of another in an interdependency, and the lived experience of all this between therapist and client (Willis, 1994). Furthermore, as the term 'encounter' implies challenge, confrontation, struggle, tension, intimacy, and responsibility, it further carries the potential for one's self-transcendence through relationship (Willis, 1994).

Thesis Overview

The research presented in this thesis is an exploration of the influence of clients on the spiritual development of psychotherapists, as experienced and seen by practitioners retrospectively, over their lifetime in practice, and the tangible effects of this development both in and beyond the therapy room. The thesis begins with defining the key concepts used in the study, and establishing the theoretical context and grounding for the study through a detailed review of the relevant literature (Chapter 2). Then, the methodology used to carry out the study is presented, along with the rationale, design, and procedures of the research, in Chapter 3. The findings, as revealed through participant accounts are presented and elaborated upon in detail in Chapter 4, and integrated into a proposed conceptual framework which elucidates the nature and the "essence" of the phenomenon investigated in Chapter 5. Lastly, these findings, and the proposed model, are discussed in Chapter 6, with implications for psychotherapy practice, training and education, and for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The cornerstone of this chapter is the existing literature on psychotherapist development, which has itself evolved from its early focus on trainee learning and skill acquisition (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), to a broader perspective of life-long professional development (Bernard, Schermer, & Klein, 2011; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Most recently, this evolution of the literature has led to a more wholistic recognition and integration of the professional and personal dimensions of the therapist's development, and attention to the person of the therapist (Aponte, 2016; Baldwin, 2013; Kissil et al., 2018; Rabu et al., 2016).

This trend parallels with another area in which research has been proliferating – that of spirituality in psychotherapy practice, which also includes a recognition of the importance of spirituality for psychotherapists themselves – as professionals and as individuals (Matteson, 2008; Pack, 2014; Psaila, 2014; Smith & Orlinsky, 2014; Sperry, 2012). This area, thus adds another layer to our current understanding of psychotherapists and their "person", and provides a deeper context upon which the current study draws.

In both the literature on psychotherapist development and psychotherapist spirituality, the significant role of clients, and their influence on therapists and their development (Kottler & Carlston, 2014; Mackay, 2008; Ronnestad, 2013; Klein, Bernard, & Schermer, 2011) is woven throughout as a common yet hidden, and so far largely unexplored underlying thread. This will also be highlighted throughout the chapter.

Lastly, as current evidence seems to show, the population of senior psychotherapists – i.e. those at the final stage of their professional developmental process (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015; Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013;), provides a rich resource for exploration

of therapists' lived experience, as well as its fruits gained over a lifetime of clinical practice. This literature review will address in more detail what is currently emerging in the study of this population, as a group in which the elements of research in the above three areas can be seen converging.

Reviewing and examining these areas more closely will be important in providing a better understanding of the context from which this study emerged.

Psychotherapist Development

The development of the person of the therapist, both as a professional and an individual, has been increasingly recognized as having significant impact on the therapeutic relationship, therapeutic outcomes and client well-being (Corey, 2010; Kottler & Carlston, 2014; Kissil et al., 2018; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012). Furthermore, the quality of therapists' personal lives has been noted as a significant factor in their effectiveness and capacity to meet client needs as practitioners (Nissen-Lie, Havik, Hoglend, Monsen, & Ronnestad, 2013). Nevertheless, most of the research so far has focused on the professional dimension of development, with the personal aspect remaining in the background, mentioned only insofar as it relates directly to an aspect of the professional and of therapy practice, despite assertions about the inseparability of the two (Kottler & Carlston, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). Deepening our awareness of the interrelationship between practitioners' personal and professional lives, between their personhood and practice, is essential for a complete understanding of psychotherapy practice itself (Goldberg, 1992).

Models of Psychotherapist Development

Early literature in this area began to emerge in the 1950's and 60's with attempts to incorporate the then-existing theories of human psychological development, career development,

and theories of learning, as applied to the profession of psychotherapy and psychotherapy training (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Much of this knowledge was then used to create theories and models for the training and supervision of psychotherapy and counselling students, such as those of Loganbill, Hardy, and Delworth (1982), and of Hill, Charles, and Reed (1981), focusing on therapists in training. One of the first models of life-long psychotherapist development was proposed by Hogan (1964), also as a guideline for the supervision of developing practitioners. It consisted of four stages and a cyclical pattern in which development occurs, with the developing practitioner moving back and forth between the stages, and repeating the process many times over through the course of their career, each time integrating and building on the previous cycles (Hogan, 1964). However, these models were limited and lacking empirical evidence.

In the 1990's, the most expansive, long-term and in-depth research in the area of therapist development to date was begun. It was the result of nearly three decades of collaboration of researchers from the Society for Psychotherapy Research, headed by Skovholt, Ronnestad, and Orlinsky (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Ronnestead & Skovholt, 2013), and continues to be the cornerstone for on-going studies in this area. More researchers have been expanding on this work, and new studies in this area have appeared (see for example Carlsson, 2012; Chow, Miller, Seidel, Kane, Thornton, & Andrews, 2015; Geller, 2013; Kumaria, Bhola, & Orlinsky, 2018; Rihacek, Danelova, & Cermak, 2012).

Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005) – Healing vs. stressful involvement model

The initial findings from this landmark research were reported in the International Study of the Development of Psychotherapists, conducted by Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005). In this quantitative study, looking at the developmental patterns over 5000 psychotherapists internationally, the researchers identified two distinct dimensions of professional development -

Healing Involvement and Stressful Involvement. These two dimensions were found to be present and in a constant dynamic tension with one another in the experience of all practitioners (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005).

The dimension of *Healing Involvement* was characterized as encompassing therapists' positive experiences in practice, with little difficulties, and a sense of competence and fulfillment. *Stressful Involvement*, on the other hand, was characterized by primarily negative and difficult experiences (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013). Within this dynamic process of intertwining both Healing Involvement and Stressful Involvement in participants' experience of practice, four general patterns were further identified: Effective Practice, Challenging Practice, Disengaged Practice, and Distressing Practice (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2013). These findings were later integrated into a Cyclical/Sequential Model of Psychotherapeutic Development (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013), which reflected the dynamic, non-linear, and never-ending nature of professional development. This model provided a more encompassing picture of the developmental pattern of therapists, as resulting from these positive, development-enhancing dimensions of practice, and the negative, depletion/stagnation-generating dimensions, together, over time, and as in turn impacting the overall development of practitioners.

According to this model, 'Healing Involvement' is associated with a sense of growth and development in the therapist's experience, which further feeds into itself, creating a positive cycle in the therapist's developmental process. Stressful Involvement, on the other hand, is associated with experienced depletion, which in turn further feeds Stressful Involvement, resulting in the continuation of a negative, downward cycle. Together, each cycle and its aspects are present at the same time in therapists' experience, in mutual influence on each other, creating the direction of the developmental trajectory (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005). Thus, according to

this model, the path and direction of therapists' development is dependent on the fine balance between the positive and the negative cycles, as experienced through time, and their overall cumulative effect over the period of their careers (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2013). Within this process, practitioners' experiences in the therapeutic relationship were specifically noted as playing a significant role – in other words, the impact on therapists of their involvement with clients was found to be an important determining factor in the course of this process (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2013).

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013) - Cyclical/Trajectories model

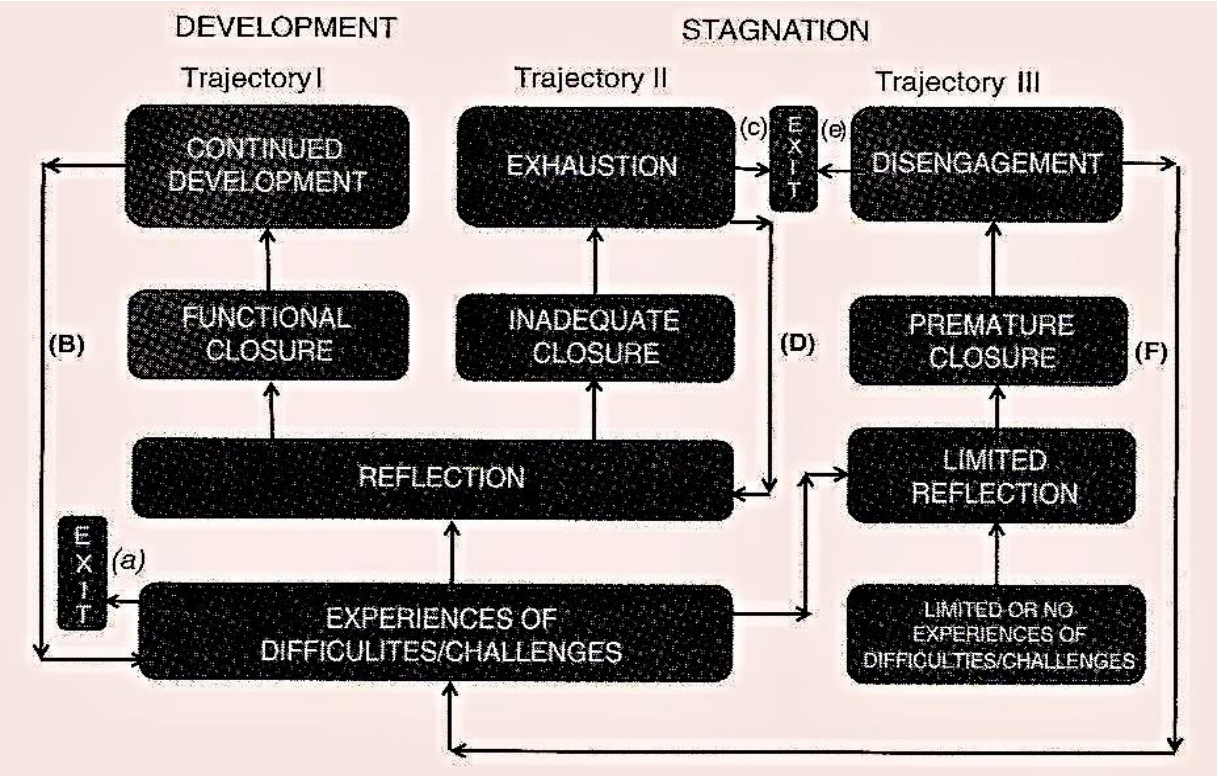
Qualitative research on practitioners' lived experience, has also revealed some patterns of how therapists change and grow throughout the course of their careers (Skovholt, 2012; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2013). Specifically, the Cyclical/Trajectories Model of Therapists' Professional Development (Figure 1) highlighted the importance of therapists' experiences of difficulties and/or challenges as initiating movement and shifts in the process of development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

The model consists of three distinct but interconnected trajectories, which begin at points of difficulty experienced by therapists in practice - points at which the developmental path tended to come to a crossroads for many therapists. The first, Trajectory 1 refers to optimal therapist development and growth, whereas the second, Trajectory 2 leads to developmental stagnation characterized by burnout and exhaustion, while the third, Trajectory 3, leads to developmental stagnation characterized by disengagement from practice (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Research behind this model revealed that optimal development is dependent to a large extent on therapists' self-reflection and coping abilities, leading to adequate resolution of the

challenges or difficulties, and thus to continued development (through subsequent engagement in the cycle) (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). At the same time, the model suggested that an optimal amount of challenge/difficulties is necessary to prevent therapist stagnation and disengagement from their work (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). The considerable influence of therapists' personal lives, and of factors outside of practice on these processes was noted, and the influence of clients was again found to be of key importance for optimal growth and development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Figure 1. A cyclical/trajectories model of practitioner development and stagnation. From "The Developing Practitioner: Growth and Stagnation of Therapists and Counsellors" by M.H. Skovholt and T.M. Ronnestad, 2013, p. 162. Copyright 2013 by Taylor & Francis. Reprinted with permission.



Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013) - Stages of development model

Further to the results of the above study, the researchers also identified five stages of therapist development, which integrated and devoted more focus to the qualitative nature of participants' lived experience and their understanding of it, shifting from discerning overall trajectories of development to a more in-depth look at the individual, subjective experiences underlying them. The five stages of development (Table 1) were named as: Beginning Student, Advanced Student, Novice Professional, Experienced Professional, and Senior Professional (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Each stage was characterized by certain themes, patterns, and changes in relation to therapists' work, to their clients, and to themselves (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2013). Common to all stages was the significance of *client* influence on the process and direction of development, as was again, the importance of therapist reflection. (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2013).

Table 1. Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2013) Stages of Psychotherapist Development.

STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT	CHARACTERISTICS
1. Beginning Student	Experiences of uncertainty, anxiety, doubt, enthusiasm and excitement of learning, high commitment to development and acquiring of basic knowledge and skills
2. Advanced Student	Shift away from basic skill development to recognition of subtleties and complexity in practice, recognition of own limitations, growth in self-awareness
3. Novice Professional	Confirming/challenging one's training and education in the "real world", sense of excitement and freedom, disillusionment and disappointment, integrating hopes and expectations with realities of independent practice
4. Experienced Practitioner	Building on experience, deeper reflexivity, re-assessment of values, practice orientation, interests and commitments, sense of appreciation, integration of personal/professional life
5. Senior Practitioner	Recognizing eventual reality of ending one's professional work, critical evaluation of own life and contributions, experiences of regret and fulfillment, gratitude and sense of loss, high reliance on lifetime of experience in one's work

The *Beginning Student stage*, defined as being within the first two years of a graduate training program, was characterized by the highest levels of anxiety, uncertainty, and doubt. At the same time the levels of experienced excitement were high among trainees, with positive reactions to intellectual stimulation while in training, as well as positive expectations about their training and future work (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). The importance of an open and curious attitude, of willingness to learn, and of commitment was highlighted as crucial at this stage for building professional competence and future success. Equally important was the capacity and openness of trainees to endure difficulty and to reflect on the struggles experienced (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

In the *Advanced Student stage*, the focus in learning shifted from acquiring the basic knowledge necessary for psychotherapy practice to recognizing and evaluating the specific contexts, subtleties and individual differences of clients, as well as the complexity of therapeutic practice as a whole. Towards the end of their training, interns developed a more realistic view of their limitations, of their responsibility for others, and of what is possible, adjusting their expectations accordingly (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

The *Novice Professional stage* encompassed the first two to five years of practice following graduation (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). These were described as intense years, filled with complexity, numerous challenges and decisions. This stage was divided into three sub-phases: Confirmation, Disillusionment, and Exploration. In the Confirmation sub-phase, confirming and validating the education and training recently received took place, along with a sense of accomplishment and freedom in having become a graduate and new professional.
In the Disillusionment sub-phase, experienced by a significant proportion of graduates, a sense of disappointment and disillusionment, due to a myriad of factors, resulted after the first few

years of independent professional practice. Discrepancies between one's training and educational experience compared to the realities of work and the outside world, one's own expectations of oneself and/or others, the recognition of the reality and complexity of human nature, as well as of society, played an important role. Feelings of "disheartening doubt" (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013, p.85), "anger, turmoil, uncertainty and anxiety" (p.87) were common, as was profound questioning of oneself, one's abilities, training, education, and the profession. Leaving the profession was one way to deal with this for some, while others were able to continue to search out their path, and gradually integrate their experience. The Exploration sub-phase involved a deeper move inward to discern one's own professional and personal identity, attempts to create congruence between the two, and an opening towards opportunities in the broader professional world.

This stage was most influential in whether or not practitioners would continue to develop in practice, or to disengage and decline in their professional development. Therapists' ability to cope and their style of coping with the difficulties encountered was the single most important determinant for practitioner development. Reflexivity, defined as the capacity for reflection, and reflection as a stance and as an activity were developed and deepened in this phase especially (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). According to the findings of the study on which this model was built upon, a relatively easy transition into the work role following graduation was not necessarily ideal from a developmental perspective. Instead, the experience of being faced with difficulties and the need to overcome them proved to be more favourable for robust development, provided these were accompanied by on-going reflective practice (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

The *Experienced Professional Stage* was characterized by practitioners having

accumulated a wide range of experience in various practice settings, roles, and client populations. It brought with it deeper reflection and reassessment of values, interests, theoretical orientation, competencies and limits, as well as experiences of gratitude and recognition of the "deeply meaningful work" (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013, p.101) of psychotherapy. It was marked by authenticity, relational sensitivity, and a deepened, more multi-dimensional understanding of humanity. Practitioners continued to be significantly impacted by their clients, although more so by out-of-the-ordinary cases. They also reflected to a greater extent on the influence of their personal life on the professional. This was a shift from earlier stages in which reflection emphasized the influence of professional life on the personal. At the same time, boredom and declining enthusiasm for the work, reduced sense of meaning and purpose, and burnout, was experienced by some therapists at this stage (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

In the final stage of Ronnestad and Skovholt's model, the *Senior Professional stage*, therapists have been in practice for at least 25 years following graduation. The transition from an Experienced Professional to a Senior Professional was seen as continuous, with many of the characteristics of the former being carried over into the Senior Professional Stage. At the same time, data collected from this group showed greater variability in participants' reports. On the one hand, high levels of enthusiasm, commitment, and continued interest in on-going learning and growth predominated in the results obtained. Experiences of satisfaction, a sense of fulfillment, deep appreciation and gratitude for having been in the profession, along with acceptance and high morale marked the end of most practitioners' careers. On the other, the reality of retirement, eventual loss of work and physical decline became an additional factor. Feelings of sadness, distress, regret, grief and anxiety about eventual ending of practice, failing health and concerns for loved ones emerged, as well as declining energy and motivation. Some

senior practitioners expressed frustration over new developments in the profession that appeared new and improved, but in reality were not. Most notably however, the findings pointed to the heavy reliance of senior practitioners on their own lifetime of clinical experience and learning in their work with clients (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Klein, Bernard and Schermer (2011) - Phase model of therapist development

In contrast to the previous models, the Phase model of psychotherapist development focuses more on the therapist as a person, completing developmental tasks and overcoming challenges, rather than focusing on the stage of development they are in. The Phase Models of Gans (2011) and Klein, Bernard, and Schermer (2011) conceive of professional development as being marked by certain "tasks" which need to be completed, and challenges that need to be overcome for therapists to evolve throughout their time in practice.

Gans (2011) delineated six basic functions which beginning therapists must learn to master as the foundation of competent practice. These included: 1) attending to the structure of therapy, 2) developing a realistic ideal of one's professional self, 3) exploring vs. doing and solving, 4) containing and processing intense emotion, 5) reconsidering and revising psychological dogma, 6) maintaining boundaries and working with differences. These functions emphasize the necessity of challenges and difficulties in clinical practice for the evolution of novices to senior professionals. They also imply that their mastery of these tasks occurs in relation to and in relationship with clients, others, and one's environment - also requiring inner development of character, and of the capacity for relating to others.

In the model of Klein and colleagues (2011), summarized in Table 3, these developmental tasks and challenges are distributed into five phases: the Pre-Professional, Mastering the Basics, Consolidating/ Augmenting/ Refining, Finding One's Voice, and,

Retrenchment/Winding Down. These are briefly summarized in Table 2, and discussed in more detail below.

Table 2. Klein, Bernard, and Schermer's (2011) Developmental Phases

DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE	CHARACTERISTICS
1. Pre-Professional Phase	Development of basic relational skills for engaging others
2. Mastering the Basics	Development of basic psychotherapy skills and initial formation of one's professional identity
3. Consolidating, Augmenting, Refining	Refining, deepening, enriching psychotherapeutic skills and capacity, integrating and enhancing effective use of self
4. Finding One's Voice	Integration and differentiation on professional and personal level, greater self-reflection, focus on creativity and making one's own unique contribution to the profession
5. Retrenchment, Winding Down	Ending one's career, leaving a legacy to the profession, re-visioning of priorities, overcoming the challenge to sustain passion and commitment to new learning

More explicit emphasis appears to be placed by Klein and colleagues (2011) on the interconnectedness and integration of the professional aspects of development with the overall development of individuals, their character, their inner resources, as one whole - the practitioner as a person.

While the first phases focus on the development of the basic skills of therapy practice, they also emphasize the relational dimension of these skills, namely, one's capacity to engage empathically with another person and with their experience. Furthermore, the "capacity for resilience" (Klein et al., 2011, p. 273), a dimension of character development, is also noted as a key aspect of these phases. According to Klein and colleagues (2011), these are characteristics that begin developing early on in therapists' lives, long before they decide to enter the field. This highlights the inseparability of one's individual development as a person, and the development of

one's character, as laying the groundwork for future professional development.

Along with learning, mastering and developing the basic skills, capacities, knowledge, and norms of psychotherapeutic practice which are characteristic of the second phase, therapists begin to establish an initial professional identity (Klein & al., 2011). This involves learning to set boundaries, form a therapeutic relationship with clients, and developing self-awareness, especially around one's strengths and weaknesses. Klein and colleagues (2011) also include the importance of values in this process, emphasizing that "achieving a strong sense of professional identity and values rests upon the therapist's capacity to engage in and to maintain ongoing introspection and self-monitoring capacities" (p.279) that goes beyond what can be taught in training.

As practitioners accumulate and integrate new knowledge in the third phase, they also continue to grow and develop on a personal level, to reflect on the quality of their work, and on their fundamental values and congruence (Klein et al., 2011). They also continue to develop the capacity for effective use of self, a key task which continues throughout the course of one's professional life, and impacts therapist's work with issues of transference/countertransference (Klein et al., 2011). This provides the basis for "increased differentiation, autonomy, and authenticity of the therapist" (Klein et al., 2011, p.280) professionally, and as a mature human being. The challenge of finding a balance between one's personal and professional life, managing stress and the demands of both, avoiding stagnation and burnout, and maintaining a sense of passion and meaning emerge as key tasks in this phase (Klein et al., 2011). This involves the on-going building of resilience, self-awareness and effective coping that are paramount for continued practice (Klein et al., 2011), and requires drawing on one's own inner resources.

The fourth phase involves the central task of advancing one's differentiation and integration as a practitioner – professionally and personally (Klein et al., 2011), highlighting again the inseparability of the personal and professional in development, and the importance of both. Along with continuing to refine one's skills, re-assessing one's own limits and developmental process, practitioners broaden and deepen their learning in the field and beyond. Discovery and creative use of one's unique gifts in therapeutic and other capacities is also a major theme here, highlighting the whole person as a being, rather than as 'a therapist', with a focus on individuation, along with the desire to give back by engaging in work with the younger generation of therapists and/or trainees (Klein et al., 2011). At the same time, the achievements, successes, increased prominence and position of expertise and experience for many therapists in this phase brings with it the risk of using these for "personal narcissistic gratification" (Klein et al., 2011, p.287).

The last phase of Klein and colleagues' (2011) model focuses on the challenges in the final years of therapists' career, while largely omitting the positive aspects/experiences. Although a re-visioning of priorities/ responsibilities is still mentioned as in the other phases, the focus is on eventual loss. Thus, sustaining one's passion, commitment, and openness to new learning becomes more difficult (Klein et al., 2011). At the same time the tasks of this phase also involve reflection upon what one will leave behind for the next generation, a focus on one's legacy to others and to the profession, and on "facilitating a good termination" (p.288). This leaves some unanswered questions about the source of sustenance (or lack thereof) for therapists in this phase, and about their understanding of the legacy they seek to leave behind – questions which would require a closer look at the deeper, personal nature of their experience. It also

invites a closer look at the broader experience and understanding of themselves, beneath and beyond their professional identity.

The Nature and Experience of Psychotherapist Development

The models of psychotherapist development discussed so far suggest the complexity and multi-faceted nature of this process. They reveal that beneath the development of skills and competence, as well as the accumulation of clinical experience and its integration, a shifting and growing understanding of therapists' own self, of their identity, as professionals and as individuals, also occurs, within a more integrated context of their life and lived experience of development. They also suggest that a more seamless interconnection exists between the "professional" realm of practice and of the "personal" dimensions of development than they explicitly present.

Psychotherapist development is a *life-long* process that changes and develops therapists as individuals – emotionally, relationally, psychologically, morally, and, spiritually (Hatcher et al. 2012; Klein et al., 2011; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). It also does not occur in a vacuum, in isolation from the individual's context, life, history, and other relationships (Aponte, 2016; Klein et al. 2011) nor is it linear or uniform process (Klein, Bernard, & Schermer, 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), but a dynamic one that is influenced by, and influencing all other dimensions of the therapist's life. Such an understanding of psychotherapist development is consistent with a more integrated conceptualization of human development (Martinez de Pison, 2018). Moreover, it has been noted that optimal psychotherapist development necessitates the successful integration of one's 'personal' self into a coherent 'professional' self (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) into one whole – the person.

The literature so far suggests that therapists' professional and personal lives are intertwined together and inseparable in their growth and development, and both engender a deeper understanding of self (Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). Moreover, as the process of development progresses, the more therapists rely on this integrated self, on their own inner experience, sense of inner guidance, and their own process of discernment, rather than outside frames of reference (i.e. professional sources of authority) (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). As they gain professional experience, their experience of development, and of their work, becomes more deeply personal, and more unique to each individual (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Many practitioners' accounts have revealed the intimately personal aspect of being a therapist (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010).

Gans (2011) mentions "embracing complexity" (p. 112) as being one of the central tasks for therapists in their development. Issues of transference and countertransference, boundaries, ego strength, reflexivity, unrealistic expectations, disillusionment, and feelings of insecurity must all be recognized, acknowledged, struggled through, and learned from (Gans, 2011). All these require development on a deeper, and broader level - an inner development of the person as a being, beyond what professional training, and practice can provide. Furthermore, increasing professional experience in the course of therapists' development has been noted as resulting in the development of qualities such as an increasing sense of grounding, self-confidence, authenticity, as well as greater humility, acceptance of limitations, and a decrease in perceiving oneself as powerful in relation to clients, while recognizing clients' own power to change (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) – changes which, again, point to a deeper, and broader change within the person themselves.

The importance and the interplay of both positive, supportive, encouraging, and

empowering experiences, as well as hardships and challenges are also necessary for therapist development (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). They point to an inner process of integration, which needs to take place within the individual. The challenging, painful and difficult experiences, in retrospect are seen by many therapists paradoxically in a positive light as "blessings in disguise" (Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010, p.50-52) and as being equally important and catalyzing for development as the obvious blessings (Klein, et al., 2011; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010).

The degree to which therapists are able to cope with and integrate these experiences and contradictions, is itself a complex process that can determine the course of further development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). While recognized as key for further development, the inner workings of this process, within the individual's experience and understanding, has yet to be explored. Professional development has been broadly conceptualized as "repeated cycles with sequences of hope, experienced hardship, self-doubt, anxiety, dejection, exploration/processing, and integration" (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013, p.150). It consists of repeatedly returning to earlier developmental tasks over the course of the therapist's career, each time as a more developed, mature, experienced and seasoned practitioner (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). These tasks are never fully completed, particularly those at the meeting point between professional and personal growth (Klein et al., 2011; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). This, however, enables practitioners to approach them each time from a new and different perspective, deepening and expanding their understanding with ever-increasing integration and mastery of this inherent complexity (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005).

Key to this cyclical process are the significant "defining moments" (Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010, p. ix), which mark therapist development and attest to the all-encompassing nature of this process. As research has shown, these moments have the potential to be, and often are, life-changing, deeply meaningful, transformative, unforgettable, and define the future course of development for many therapists - as persons and as professionals (Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). Furthermore, these moments most often involve clients, and are experienced by therapists in and through the therapeutic relationship (Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010).

Importance of reflexivity

The literature is unanimous in stating that the manner in which therapists' experiences throughout the process of development are ultimately integrated and used by the therapist over time depends, to a great extent on their capacity to reflect (Klein et al., 2011; Kottler & Carlston, 2014; Rice, 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012). It appears that the distinguishing element of "good therapists is their willingness, and even desire, to acknowledge their scars, to understand them as well as they can, and to live with them in a self-aware fashion" (Klein et al., 2011, p.21). This, in turn, requires a deeper, and more wholistic integration of their inner experience, their life, and their being.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013) distinguish between reflexivity, reflective stance, and reflective activity or reflective practice. While reflexivity refers to the cognitive and affective capacity to reflect, reflective activity or practice encompasses a broad range of thinking about all aspects of one's life sphere, as well as metacognition about these aspects (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). The attitude of inquisitiveness, eagerness, and openness to explore and to understand phenomena and experience in one's life is the reflective stance (Ronnestad &

Skovholt, 2013), and reaches beyond just the realm of practice.

Reflexivity and reflective practice in psychotherapists' work was found to be crucial for optimal development and to positively influence therapists' Healing Involvement and Currently Experienced Development (Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). The capacity for reflexivity has been especially considered as one of the main factors in therapists' learning, leading and contributing to overall long-term professional development (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; 2013). Research suggests that this awareness and willingness of therapists to struggle with their own difficulties positively impacts their work and its effectiveness, and results in benefitting clients in turn (Rice, 2011). It also creates the space and possibility for healing to occur in both the client and the therapist, thus contributing to both professional and personal development of the therapist, as well as to client wellbeing (Rice, 2011). This implies that the encounter with clients plays an important, although still unclear, role in the therapist's own inner development and integration.

Reflexivity is what enables therapists to move more easily between the conscious and the unconscious, increasing their awareness and capacity to facilitate healing (Rice, 2011). One of the dangers of insufficient reflection, and thus resulting lack of awareness, is the disillusionment and loss of enthusiasm that many practitioners experience, especially as they move into their senior years (Rice, 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). In this light, it would appear, more research attention to this population might be warranted. Therapists are also not immune to the potential damage from clients' woundedness, making reflection and awareness, and that willingness to struggle with one's own pain, all the more important (Rice, 2011). This also suggests the powerful influence that clients may have on therapists and their lives, and the

unique perspective of senior therapists on client's impact, accumulated over a lifetime of clinical practice. Both warrant further research attention.

Capacity for relationality as a necessary condition for development

The nature of practitioners' involvement with clients, and thus the nature of their relationship to and with clients, was found to be the single most important determinant of the course of direction of therapists' professional development (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013). Who therapists become in relation to their clients is also the outcome of both personal and professional development (Klein et al., 2011). As the existing literature has shown, much of the focus of therapists' professional development over the course of their careers centres around the relational nature of psychotherapy, and the importance of therapists' capacity for relationality (Klein et al., 2011; Kottler & Carlston, 2014; Skovholt, 2012). Increasing interpersonal sensitivity and authenticity in relating to clients has been one of the key characteristics of optimal therapist development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), and the cornerstone of therapeutic practice (Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000).

The concept of meaning and meaningful experiences also appeared as significant in this process, specifically in reference to interpersonal relationships and the importance of connection with others, as catalysts for growth in the developing therapist (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). This too suggests a deeper and more personal dimension of therapists' 'professional' development – one that could touch the core of their being, identity, and existence, and do so *through* an encounter with another. The nature and course of this process, and the development of this relational capacity and sensitivity within the therapist remains to be explored, as does the actual lived experience of its development in therapists throughout the course of their professional practice.

It appears that lifelong clinical practice is an opportunity for, and a lifelong gift of continuing education and growth on many levels (Gans, 2011). As clinical practice is based in therapist relationships with clients, this gift is thus necessarily given, at least in part, through their influence, and, as such, also seems worthy of further examination.

Client Influence on Psychotherapist Development

The influence of clients as the main contributing factor to the processes and dynamics of therapists' professional development has been highlighted in all major studies in this area (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012; Trottier-Mathison, et al., 2010). Furthermore, the influence of challenging clients has been found to impact therapists' understanding of therapy and therapy practice more than any other factor (Kottler & Hunt, 2018). However, this influence has not been elaborated much, and the focus has remained instead on therapist experience of their work and professional life. Although scarce, the few existing studies in this area suggest that clients have positive influence on the development of therapists as persons, and have the potential to change therapists deeply, in addition to the negative impacts of countertransference reactions, work-related stress, and burnout, most often discussed so far (Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Hunt, 2010; Rabu et al., 2016; Turner et al., 2008).

The lasting influence of clients on therapists as individuals, and on their personal development has been described as "life lessons" learned from clients (Hatcher et al., 2012), experienced as both "enriching and burdening" (Rabu et al., 2016, p. 741). The extent of learning and resulting change was found to encompass many areas of therapists' lives (Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Hunter, 2010; Rabu et al., 2016; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). These included relationships, family, ethics and morality, coping strategies, development of courage,

understanding of one's personality, culture, life stages and history, therapeutic alliance, capacity for resilience, wisdom gained, and the meaning of their work and life (Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Hunter, 2010; Rabu et al., 2016; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). Variations in the type and degree of client impact have also been influenced by practitioners' career stage, economic conditions, professional status and/or workplace, with trainee and senior therapists noting the greatest degree of client impact on their development (Rabu et al., 2016).

The changes therapists reported as resulting specifically from client encounters included an increase in patience, tolerance, flexibility, humility, personal growth, insight, spiritual well-being, work motivation and satisfaction, gratitude, and the sense of being inspired (Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Goldberg, 1992; Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Hunter, 2010; Pargament et al., 2014; Rabu et al., 2016). In addition, clients' influence through these lessons rippled out into therapists' own relationships and lives outside of practice, changing how they live, with both the positive and negative consequences of their professional practice (Hatcher et al. 2012; Rabu et al., 2016). Furthermore, the inspiration and wisdom received from clients often became a source of guidance for therapists' own lives (Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Hunter, 2010).

For some therapists, the important, meaningful moments with clients also contained a sacred or spiritual quality in the experience (Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Pargament et al., 2014). As the defining moments of therapists' professional development (Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010), these "sacred" experiences with clients had the potential to be, and were perceived as, transformative, pivotal points in therapists' work and lives beyond practice (Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Hunt, 2010; Pargament et al., 2014). Some alluded to the sense of privilege and awe at being inspired by their clients and given the opportunity to know them on an intimate level, as if

touching the very essence of life itself (Rabu et al., 2016). The experience of the "human connectedness" (Kottler & Hunt, 2010, p. 6) with clients in the therapeutic encounter was particularly impactful, as was the discovery and/or development of an existential sense of purpose and meaning (Rabu et al., 2016). For many therapists, work with clients contributed to greater integration and wholeness (Rabu et al., 2016).

The mutual influence of therapist and client as part of the therapeutic relationship has also been described as both parties being "co-contributors to maturation and integrity" (Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000, p. 34), and as transformational for client and therapist alike (Kottler & Hunt, 2010). It has been noted that is not possible for the therapist to exert influence on a client without also in some way being influenced by the client (Miller, 2000). The discovery of oneself in relationship, as understood by Martin Buber (Buber, 1947), is also true for the therapist as it is for the client (Miller, 2000). When working with clients therefore, the therapist "must be prepared to change as well" (Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000, p.44). The discovery and recognition of having changed, and of how much of who they are and who they have become is the result of psychotherapy work and client influence, for many therapists comes only in retrospect, and often only in their senior years, when faced with eventual retirement (Rabu et al., 2016). A closer look at this experience and retrospective understanding of it from the perspective of senior therapists seems relevant, due to the cumulative effect of client impact over a lifetime of clinical practice.

Psychotherapist Spirituality

Attention to the subject of spirituality in psychotherapy has proliferated in the last decade (Aten & Leach, 2009; Cummings, Ivan, Carson, Stanley, & Pargament, 2014; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Smith & Orlinsky, 2014; Sperry, 2012). A large majority of this attention has

been devoted to the integration of spirituality into the practice of psychotherapy and training programs. Trainee therapists have been a major force behind the need to integrate and implement spirituality into therapist education and training (Carlson et al., 2002; West, 2000). Much less focus has been given to therapist spirituality, and to the person of the psychotherapist as viewed from within this dimension (Aponte, 1996; Carlson et al., 2002; Cashwell et al., 2007; Cox, 1997; Matteson, 2008; Mackay, 2008; Smith & Orlinsky, 2014).

Psychotherapist' spirituality has so far been mainly examined as a coping and meaning-making resource in relation to clinical work, and its therapeutic use in practice (Aten & Leach, 2009; Barnett & Johnson, 2011; Cummings, Ivan, Carson, Stanley, & Pargament, 2014; Mackay, 2008; Plante, 2009; Psaila, 2014; Sperry, 2012). There is scarcity of studies focused on practitioners' understanding and experience of spirituality (see Psaila, 2014). It appears that therapist spirituality and spiritual development, as well as the implications of such for therapists' lives outside of practice, remain rather elusive as subjects of research. While the therapist's "way of being" (Psaila, 2014, p. 198) was noted as key and as a manifestation of their spirituality, little is known about this "way of being" outside of the therapy room. Given that spirituality is experienced and manifested in one's way of life, ways of thinking, feeling, behaving, and relating to others (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007), this is a potentially important area of focus (Cummings et al., 2014; Mackay, 2008; Psaila, 2014).

Relevance of Spirituality in Psychotherapists' Lives and Practice

Numerous authors so far have pointed out the importance of spirituality in the lives of mental health professionals, and studies suggest that a substantial number of them describe themselves as spiritual (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Aponte, 1996; Cashwell et al., 2007; Cornish et al., 2012; Cox, 1997; Cummings et al., 2014; Hickson, Housely, & Wages, 2000;

Hofmann & Walach, 2011; Smith & Orlinsky, 2014; Walket et al., 2004; West, 2000; West 2009). For many, the choice of psychotherapy as a career also involves a spiritual dimension (Goldberg, 1992; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Orlinsky, 2005; Psaila, 2014). Furthermore, psychotherapists are encouraged more and more to reflect on how their spirituality and beliefs influence their work with clients, implicitly pointing to the fact that the spiritual dimension is indeed relevant to many professionals - to the point of being taken for granted (Carlson et al., 2002).

Despite the increased openness to the spiritual realm in client's lives within psychotherapy, the opposite seems to be the case when it comes to the spirituality or spiritual development of the therapist, which has often been dismissed as contrary to the established profession of psychotherapeutic practice (Carlson et al., 2002). This tendency can be contrasted to the training and education of pastoral counsellors, where focus on the person of the therapist and their spiritual development is paramount (Driskill, 2006). It also runs counter to the historical understanding of psychology and psychotherapeutic practice, which were seen as concerning the study and care of the human soul (Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007). However, as the literature suggests, ignoring the importance of the person of the therapist, as well as their inner resources in the therapeutic relationship may also shortchange therapeutic effectiveness (Aponte, 2016; Carlson et al., 2002; Cashwell et al., 2007; Kottler & Carlston, 2014; Skovholt, 2012).

Spirituality has been described as central to human wellness, and as such an essential element of therapist wellness, development, the therapeutic process and therapists' ability to work with clients (Cashwell et al., 2007; Psaila, 2014). It is not separate from the other dimensions of life, of therapists and clients alike, but "fully embedded" (Pargament, 2007, p. 21)

in its fabric. Thus, spiritual development and decline occur simultaneously with the same in other areas of one's life, and must not be ignored by therapists themselves (Pargament, 2007). It would seem therefore important not to ignore it in research either. As an integral and essential part of one's being (Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007; Psaila, 2014), spirituality is very often what enables therapists to care about others, to reach out, and to form meaningful relationships (Carlston et al., 2002; Mackay, 2008; Psaila, 2014). Cox (1997) refers to this "responding essence" (p. 419) of the person of the therapist as being spiritual in nature.

Spirituality has furthermore been viewed as a window through which therapists see and make sense of their work and their world (Carlston et al., 2002). While it is also often what brings them to work in the field in the first place, and what sustains and guides their practice, as well as their life in society (Carlston et al., 2002; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Seustock, 2009), little is known about its development through the course of therapists' lifetime in practice. Further questions emerge also about the influence of practice itself on this development, and about its specific implications for therapists' social lives, outside of the therapy room.

Spirituality as a Resource for Psychotherapists

Therapist spirituality has been considered to be an important resource in psychotherapy work and in the therapeutic relationship, and its role been examined by a number of researchers so far (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Brady et al., 1999; Cashwell et al., 2007; Cornish et al., 2012; Pack, 2014; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Senstock, 2009). Empirical findings have shown that therapists' spiritual beliefs (or lack thereof) may significantly influence the choice of, or approach to, treatment used (Psaila, 2014; Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Senstock, 2009). Therapists with a spiritual orientation tended to focus more on and seek

the presence of spiritual themes/elements in working with a client, used spiritually-oriented interventions, and chose theoretical orientations which were more amenable to integration with their respective spirituality/belief systems (Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Senstock, 2009). This is consistent with other findings which have shown therapists' individual belief systems, personal epistemology and worldview to influence their practice modality and orientation (Fear & Woolfe, 1999). Furthermore, research also suggests that the more spiritually-aware the therapist, the more likely they might be to recognize a client's spiritual concerns (Psaila, 2104; Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Seustock, 2009).

Psychotherapists' spirituality has been identified as a protective factor in highly stressful client work, including trauma and vicarious trauma, thus leading to potentially better client outcomes (Brady et al., 1999; Dombo & Gray, 2013; Pack, 2014). A positive correlation has been found between the degree of spirituality and spiritual well-being of the therapist and their capacity to work with trauma victims/survivors, as well as their capacity to rebound back to psychological/emotional equilibrium (Brady et al., 1999; Dombo & Gray, 2013; Pack, 2014). Evidence suggests that trauma can impact one's spirituality on a deep level, putting into question one's worldview, belief systems, sense of self, security, and personal integrity (Brady et al., 1999; Dombo & Gray, 2013; Mackay, 2008; Pack, 2014; Pargament, 2007). In one study, therapists who scored higher on measures of spiritual wellbeing, and self-identified as having a strong sense of spirituality, were found to carry a higher caseload, to work with a higher number of traumatized clients, and show greater resilience, while showing no signs of the negative long-term effects usually associated with trauma and vicarious trauma, such as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of meaning, and cognitive schema or belief system

disruption/decompensation (Brady et al., 1999). In contrast, these negative effects have been found to exist in those therapists who considered themselves as non-spiritual (Brady et al., 1999). Given the complexity, and subjectivity of the topic, this warrants further investigation.

Dealing with trauma, conflict, and difficulty challenges one's own belief system, sense of faith, hope and meaning in life, but also provides the opportunity to question and re-examine one's beliefs and values, and to transcend limited worldviews and capacities (Brady et al., 1999; Mackay, 2008; Pack, 2014; Pargament, 2007). This is equally true for therapists exposed to clients' difficulties, trauma and suffering, who are no less likely to be challenged and stretched spiritually as a result (Brady et al., 1999; Mackay, 2008; Pack, 2014), with implications for their overall spiritual development and therapeutic effectiveness.

Thus, the cyclical patterns of integration and growth, with the highs and lows of therapist experience, appear similar to those that mark spiritual development (Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007), as will be discussed in more detail below. Here, experiences of emptiness, questioning, loss of hope, meaning, purpose, and one's way, as well as of struggle are seen as pointing to the reality and existence of the spiritual dimension in the human experience – as simply another dimension of it (Helminiak, 1987; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007). The spiritual dimension, however, brings these experiences to another level, enabling integration to occur through a broader, transcendent perspective, where deeper truths can be discerned from the ordinary, and where "timeless values (…) offer grounding and direction in shifting times and circumstances" (Pargament, 2007, p. 12), offering the possibility of new and deeper meaning.

Reflexivity and Psychotherapist Spirituality

The intentional and committed reflective practice of examining, integrating, and developing the

spiritual dimension of the psychotherapist has been said to be as important in the practice of the profession as in any other issue of possible countertransference (Carlson et al., 2002). It has also been noted as important to the capacity of therapists for meaning-making and identity formation, central to spirituality and spiritual development (Mackay, 2008). The importance of therapist self-reflection, reflexivity and self-awareness, as well the capacity for relating to others in meaningful ways in the process of professional growth (Klein et al., 2011; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013; Rice, 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) is also consistent with the literature on spiritual development (Carlson et al., 2002; Cashwell et al., 2007; Helminiak, 1987; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007), as will be elaborated on further in the next section. Here too the capacity for reflection and self-awareness, and for being in relationship with the other, plays a crucial role.

The necessary process of on-going, disciplined reflection is what enables therapists to recognize the "'stirrings of the soul' expressed between the lines of client complaints" (Anderson & Worthen, 1997, p.8), and to respond to them effectively (Anderson & Worthen, 1997). It therefore also must be seen as a positive, and important aspect of therapists' development as professionals (Carlson et al., 2002). Since spirituality is "ultimately about transforming one's life" (Cashwell et al., 2007, p.67), and since authentic spiritual development involves observable effects in terms of one's way of living and being (Cashwell et al., 2007; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007), the implications of attending to this in the person, life and work of the psychotherapist through reflective practice can be far-reaching (Cashwell et al., 2007). Similarly, greater attention to these implications through more extensive research into these areas is called for.

Passion and Calling

In addition to reflexivity, research in the area of psychotherapist spirituality has identified two other important themes, namely, a sense of calling and of passion (Mackay, 2008). In one qualitative study, the underlying, interconnecting metaphor in therapists' stories of their spirituality was that of "The Passion Narrative" (Mackay, 2008, p.58), to which they related their sense of spirituality most strongly, especially in relation to their work (Mackay, 2008). This metaphor was reflective of and spoke to the deep and sacred character of psychotherapy work, as seen and experienced by these practitioners. This dimension of sacredness and its depth has also been emphasized the literature elsewhere (Cashwell et al., 2007; Carlson et al., 2002; Mackay, 2008; Pargament et al., 2014). Therapists' passion for their work, and in their work, and their passionate commitment to what it entailed – the healing and transformation of individuals and society, restoration, justice, and the marginalized, has been described as a function and expression of their spirituality (Dlugos & Friedlander, 2001; Mackay, 2008; Marsella, 2006).

The element of suffering and the sharing of pain with clients, and the creative, life-giving and redeeming energies within it were also present, as well as the connection of passion and compassion in therapists' experience – a "holding and allowing themselves to be held in the process" (Mackay, 2008, p.61). Themes of death and resurrection, of deconstructing and restructuring of life narratives, permeated the experience and understanding therapists' spirituality (Mackay, 2008), reflecting the integrated cycles of positive and painful experiences inherent in both spiritual and professional development (Matteson, 2008; Orlinsky & Ronnestad; Pargament, 2007; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Joining these two realities together within the person of the therapist, the metaphor of the 'wounded healer' has also been emphasized in the literature and woven into practitioners' experiences of vulnerability and pain in the inter-

relational healing dynamic of their work with clients (Brady et al., 1999; Mackay, 2008; Rice, 2011).

The theme of psychotherapy practice as a calling has also received considerable attention in the literature on therapist spirituality and therapist development (Brady et al., 1999; Carlson et al., 2002; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Mackay, 2008; Orlinsky, 2005; Pargament et al., 2014; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). Research suggests that many practitioners have a sense of calling in their work, and/or of being called to it, whether through life experiences, an "Other" calling them through those experiences, or of destiny, purpose and belonging in the greater reality (Carlson et al., 2002; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Mackay, 2008). Therapists' feelings of being called by the spiritual and by their work "to connect with others in a spirit of mutuality, compassion, love and community" (Carlson et al., 2002, p. 219) appear to reflect also their sense of passion and commitment, and of the deeply relational nature of therapeutic work alluded to earlier.

Spiritual Development

Spiritual development, like spirituality, is a difficult and elusive phenomenon to define and to examine (Augustyn, Hall, Wang, & Hill, 2017; Helminiak, 1987; Gross, 2006; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). Most definitions and models of spiritual development have been put forth primarily within specific religious and philosophical traditions, reflective of the assumptions, beliefs and philosophies of particular faiths (Augustyn et al., 2017; Helminiak, 1987). There is a lack of adequate theoretical models which would integrate both the spiritual and psychological dimensions of spiritual development as a universal human phenomenon, and inherent capacity within human nature and psychology (Augustyn et al., 2017; Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

Models attempting to provide broader, more encompassing descriptions which integrate developmental theory research from the field of psychology are scarce and limited in scope, and until recently have been largely derived from Fowler's Stages of Faith model (Fowler, 1981) and Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development (Augustyn et al., 2017; Gross, 2006; Helminiak, 1987; Weiss Ogden & Sias, 2011). They tend to have a more narrow focus, drawing on a theistic and religious frame of reference, without explicitly addressing spiritual development as encompassing a broader reality of human experience and understanding, as distinct from (albeit overlapping with and encompassing) both morality and religious faith (Augustyn et al., 2017; Gross, 2006; Helminiak, 1987).

Furthermore, as stage or structural theories, they present an "invariant and culturally-universal sequence of meaning-making across the lifespan" (McNamara Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014, p.26), limiting generalizability, and problematic when applied to spiritual development as a dynamic process (Martinez de Pison, 2018; Matteson, 2008). At the same time, the use of culturally-defined and determined moral norms in each particular culture or spiritual tradition, i.e. cultural and moral relativism, leaves no basis for evaluating the nature of the spirituality and spiritual development in question (Matteson, 2008). As Matteson (2008) points out, judging the authenticity of spiritual development by how well it is adapted to a particular society (or spiritual tradition) "avoids the issue of evaluating the society" (p.16) itself and its potential dysfunction, and may be risking complicity with unjust structures and ideologies, secular or religious. Nevertheless, these models have contributed to our understanding the complex whole of human development, and interest in this area of study is presently growing (Augustyn et al., 2017) due to the recognition of spirituality as being an important dimension of personality and identity development, as well as social change (Chae, Kelly, Brown, & Bolden, 2004; McNamara Barry

& Abo-Zena, 2014; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

Characteristics of Spiritual Development – Descriptive Models

Despite these challenges, there seems to be agreement among various writers as to what characterises and constitutes spiritual development, and descriptive models have been proposed as more reflective of the complexity and intangibility of this process (Augustyn et al., 2017, Helminiak, 1987; Mayleless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Poll & Smith, 2003). Spiritual development has been described as an adult phenomenon, dependent on the capacity for abstract thought, self-reflection, and personal autonomy and agency enabling self-determination, choice, and self-responsibility (Helminiak, 1987; McNamara Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Matteson, 2008). It can be understood from a strictly psychological perspective, or through an integration of both psychological developmental theory and religious or theological understanding (Augustyn et al., 2017; Gross, 2006; Helminiak, 1987).

It has also been described as an on-going, never-ending, non-linear and dynamic process, a winding path involving, at times, "getting lost" (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017, p. 178), intertwined with and inseparable from all other aspects of human development (Emmett, 2008; Helminiak, 1987; McNamara Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). Helminiak (1987) referred to it as simply human development seen through the lens of particular criteria – factors which differentiate it from other aspects of human development – centering on authenticity, openness to self-transcendence, integrity, wholeness, self-responsibility, and conscious choice.

Mayseless and Russo-Netzer (2017) have integrated many of these characteristics into their proposed a three-dimensional spatial metaphor for the process of spiritual development, reflective of its multi-dimensional and dynamic nature. They characterize the three primary

dimensions of it as directed towards and reaching inwards of oneself, outward and upwards beyond - towards the Transcendent, and outward across - towards interconnection with others and all that exists (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). These are consistent also with the concept of "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of spirituality and spiritual development often referred to in the literature, representing the upward human striving towards the ideal of the Transcendent, and the reaching across beyond oneself towards one's fellow beings (Helminiak, 1987; Maysleless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

Inherent in these aspects are the processes of self-purification and the shedding of all that stands in the way of authenticity and selflessness, a "rising above" (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017, p. 180) ourselves and our lived reality, and aspiring towards an ideal and ultimate good, while also reaching beyond and across towards an interconnection with and responsibility for all that exists (Carlson, 2002; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). The process of spiritual development is a difficult one, requiring courage and intentionality, involving both sacrifice and acceptance and integration of the dark and disturbing aspects of oneself (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). It is ultimately expressed and manifest in one's actions and everyday way of live (Carlson, 2002; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007).

The principle of transcendence and self-transcendence has been found to characterize descriptions of spiritual development across the existing literature (Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000). The universal presence of a human desire towards wholeness and bettering oneself as a person seem to imply and point to a principle of self-transcendence inherent in our nature, along with the element of freedom to act upon it, which remains to be recognized and actively engaged through conscious choice and effort

(Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). It also requires an openness to experience and to being acted-upon by this process, and by that which is outside of our control, in an inter-relationship of interdependence with internal and external, active and passive, dimensions of our existence (Maylseless & Russo-Netzer, 2107; Matteson, 2008; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000). According to Helminiak (1987), a heightened sensitivity and attunement to this drive or desire is reflective of spiritual maturing and a condition for further and on-going spiritual development. Furthermore, the ultimate purpose and goal of this principle is "absolute self-transcendence unto all that is true and good" (Helminiak, 1987, p. 23), a movement of extending ourselves "beyond our self and our close circle" (Mayseless & Russo-Metzer, 2017, p. 186). According to Pargament (2007), it is one's relationship with, and relation to, what one considers as 'sacred' or transcendent, which determines the course of spiritual growth, development, or decline. Thus, it would appear that a parallel process with professional development trajectories also exists here, and that development in both spheres may be seen as a relational process.

As we choose to follow this desire towards self-transcendence and to act upon it, we create change in both the outside world, and in our inner reality – on ourselves (Helminiak, 1987). Resulting from this process of authentic self-transcendence is an increasing sense of wholeness and integrity of the person, a spontaneity from within this integrated self, with sensitivity to and regard for the needs of the greater whole within which one lives, with humility, and shedding of self-interest (Beebe, 2000; Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000). This resulting inner wholeness has the capacity to create wholeness outwardly and inter-relationally, among individuals, in society, and the larger world (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

Differing in focus and approach, Pargament's (2007) model of spiritual development and

understanding of spirituality and transcendence focuses primarily on one's relationship to "the sacred", however conceptualized. Here, the emphasis remains on one's understanding and experience of The Sacred or Transcendent, and on one's process of development as an outcome of this. Pargament (2007) outlines three elements of this process: the recognizing or discovering a transcendent reality (Discovery), efforts and seeking to maintain or preserve it as understood and experienced (Conservation), and of changing/transforming it (Transformation) when no longer congruent with or sufficient for one's experience of reality (Pargament, 2007). While the idea of going beyond oneself is present, it appears primarily as transcendence of one's prior understanding of The Sacred, with the individual remaining in control of it.

Spiritual Development as a Way of Life

As suggested above, spiritual development has been referred to as being a way of life (Cashwell et al., 2007; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Poll & Smith, 2003), embodied and reflected in one's very being in the world, involving the taking on of responsibility for one's life and for what one makes of it, as well as for the lives of others, as part of the whole (Emmett, 2008; McNamara Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). It is a relational process of "becoming a better person" (Emmett, 2008, p. 45) and of transforming oneself and one's life towards this end (Cashwell, Bentley, & Bigbee, 2007; Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). The transcending of one's self is a transcending at once *beyond* the self and *towards* that which lies beyond, implying the capacity to connect and be connected with that which is beyond it (Matteson, 2008).

This outward-growing dimension is complemented by an inward, depth-oriented "grounding (or stabilizing or rooted dimension)" (Matteson, 2008, p. 74; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). Spiritual development requires intentional engagement in life – with oneself, with

others, with the cosmos, and with the transcendent reality towards which one reaches and aspires, however defined or understood (Augustyn et al., 2017; Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000). As such, it also carries social and environmental implications and is inseparable from the care for others, involving values, meaning, ethics and morality, and a relationship of responsibility with the world within which one lives, works, and acts (Emmett, 2008; Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000).

Spiritual Development of Psychotherapists

Spiritual development as concerning psychotherapists specifically has been discussed within existing literature on psychotherapist spirituality, where spirituality itself is also seen as *a developmental process*, and as inherently developmental in nature (Cashwell et al., 2007; Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000; Pargament, 2007). Growth, transcending of self-interest, questioning, searching and change are also seen as its essential aspects (Cashwell et al., 2007; Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000; Pargament, 2007), as is assuming responsibility for our own as well as for others' lives (Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000). In this process, which often involves difficulty and struggle, the grounding and integration of therapists' beliefs, practices, and experiences results in enhanced awareness, compassion, love, and connectedness beyond one's self (Cashwell et al., 2007).

Psychotherapists' understanding and living out of spirituality has been acknowledged as being the outcome of years of accumulated wisdom and experience, including that gained in practice (Carlson et al., 2002; Goldberg, 1992), which cannot be reduced to practices within a session or to therapeutic interventions. Research in this area is lacking however, and little is known about exactly what, and how, therapists' spirituality changes, develops, and manifests as

a way of life, and the role that work with clients plays in this process.

The intertwining of spiritual and professional development, and the mutual influence of both these dimensions is reflected in the literature on both accounts. As with professional development, described in the cyclical and trajectories models (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005), spiritual development is not limited to time or space – it continues to evolve, unfold, develop, and be integrated more and more deeply and broadly into an individual's life, both shaping and being shaped by the outer and inner forces, and by the process itself (Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007). Furthermore, the importance and the potential of difficult and challenging experiences for optimal professional development alluded to by Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013) and others (Gans, 2011; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013) appears to hold true for spiritual development as well. Such experiences of being "purified by fire" (Brady et al., 1999, p.392) attest to the potential which suffering, crisis, conflict, and dissonance holds for spiritual development, which, when struggled and worked through, can result in a stronger and healthier spirituality (Brady et al., 1999; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007).

Sufficient integration of such difficult experiences appears to be key for both professional and spiritual dimensions of development, and will determine the degree to which spirituality can be a resource or liability for therapists in their work (Pargament, 2007; Psaila, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Regardless of the spiritual trajectories individuals follow, whether or not these lead to growth, stagnation or decline, is largely dependent on the extent to which one's spirituality is integrated within the whole of the individual and their experience (Pargament, 2007), echoing the findings on professional development (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005, 2013; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Developmental trajectories, whether spiritual or professional,

must be consistent with the destinations, with the individual, the social context, and must contain the tension and flow between the positive and the negative, the need for change, for grounding/rootedness, and for continuity (Matteson, 2008; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Pargament, 2007).

Whereas the positive connection between difficult experiences, struggle and greater spiritual growth has been supported by research (Brady & al., 1999; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Pack, 2014; Pargament, 2007), spiritual disengagement and decline, whether temporary or permanent, can occur with insufficient coping and inner resources (Brady et al., 1999; Pargament, 2007). Similar patterns within the spiritual dimension of development have been noted to those seen in trajectories of professional development (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Pargament, 2007; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Spiritual coping in times of significant hardship may involve attempts to "protect and preserve" (Pargament, 2007, p. 93) one's spirituality and understanding of what one holds as sacred, or to transform it when it can no longer be maintained congruently with one's experience (Pargament, 2007). Thus, given the degree of client influence on therapists' noted so far in the literature, client impact on this process in therapists' lives is worthy of closer attention.

At the same time, through enriching and strengthening key dimensions of psychotherapists' spiritual health, such as the capacity for love, mindfulness, and for connection with the reality beyond themselves and their own interests (Cashwell et al., 2007; Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007), psychotherapists' work and contribution to client healing and wellness can also be enriched and strengthened (Cashwell et al., 2007). While this remains to be verified empirically, existing anecdotal accounts based on many therapists' experience suggest that the most direct impact of therapists' spiritual wellness and development on their work and on clients

might not be so much from incorporating spirituality explicitly into the therapeutic dynamic, but from the therapists' integration of it in their own life and way of being (Cashwell et al., 2007; Psaila, 2014).

The possible fruits of this integration, such as increased mindfulness and awareness, increased ability to reflect and to relate, greater sensitivity, insight, compassion, humility, as well as a heightened sense of the meaning, value, and sacredness of each life (Cashwell et al., 2007), have been recognized as relevant to therapeutic effectiveness (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Cashwell et al., 2007; Psaila, 2014). It has also been proposed that this may have the potential to affect clients and their lives on a deeper, more pervasive, and more integrated level than any theory, intervention, or therapeutic practice combined (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Cashwell et al., 2007; Fridley, 2010). Many of these capacities have been included as characteristic of optimal professional and personal growth of therapists, of accumulated years of experience and reflection, peaking only in the later stages of development, and playing a key role in therapeutic effectiveness (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012). Some of them have also been described already as resulting directly from the influence of clients on therapists themselves. And, while they have been observed from the perspective of professional development and growth, as pertaining to practice, the apparent underlying process of spiritual development, from which they arise, remains to be explored. Furthermore, while client influence has been noted and integrated in studying psychotherapist development overall, it remains absent in our current, and so far very limited, understanding and conceptualization of psychotherapist spiritual development, with gaps in the literature remaining.

It appears that at the intersection of spirituality and practice, and perhaps most especially here, it is the therapist's own self, and the quality of this self in relationship, as a product of on-

going, cumulative development, that emerges as the instrument of healing and change for others (Carlson et al., 2002; Fridley, 2010; Matteson, 2008). In the final stages of this cumulative process of development are senior therapists – a population whose experiences and perspectives are also now beginning to receive increased attention in the literature, and to which we now turn in greater detail.

Senior Psychotherapists

Within the existing research on senior practitioners, the strong tendency towards optimal development having occurred in members of this cohort (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) invites a deeper exploration of this phenomenon, and what may be contributing to it, beyond the professional lens. Given the influence of clients in the overall developmental process alluded to in the literature, their contribution to this remains obscure. Early research by Goldberg (1992) suggests most senior practitioners feel overall satisfaction with their work at this stage, while more recent studies corroborate those findings, further revealing that the older the practitioners are, the higher the rates of both work and life satisfaction, sense of fulfillment, gratitude, and enthusiasm reported (Geller & Farber, 2015; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015). At the same time, many experience the work as a "constant struggle" (Goldberg, 1992, p.32) in its complexity, where no amount of experience seems adequate for the challenges encountered. Some senior practitioners also do leave practice (Goldberg, 1992; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), and many more consider leaving, due to burn out, increasing stagnation, isolation, and an "existential malaise and disillusionment" (Goldberg, 1992, p.134) regarding their work and their life.

Along with the increased appreciation of human complexity and the workings of human psychology characteristic of senior therapists, comes the challenge of grappling with it without

the earlier illusions of knowing, tending to be present in the early stages (Fridley, 2010; Goldberg, 1992; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). For some therapists, this may bring new possibilities, hope and fulfillment into their work, whereas others may despair of human nature, lose faith in the human potential to change, and in the potential for psychotherapy to lead to change (Fridley, 2010; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Skovholt, 2015; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Thus, beneath these general findings, and beneath their professional dimension, there appear to exist deeper, underlying realities of these senior practitioners' personal experience, which emerge as uniquely salient to this population, to which research is only now beginning to give voice. The role of therapists' encounters with clients, and of client influence in this underlying experience remains unclear, though generally recognized as being present (Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Skovholt, 2015; Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013;).

Retrospective Meaning-making and Reflexivity

The tendency to reflect on and evaluate one's own life and the events within it appears to be intrinsic to human nature as "meaning-oriented beings" (Goldberg, 1992, p. 58). This is certainly salient in the case of psychotherapists, whose profession requires and provides them with an ongoing opportunity for self-examination and reflection, and the inner work required to function in their roles (Goldberg, 1992).

Given that the nature of doing psychotherapy allows one to remain in practice well into the senior years (Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015), the results of this self-examination and inner work, reflected in various trajectories of therapist development, culminate therein, with practitioners reaping the fruits of a lifetime's worth of reflective practice, inner change, integration, and meaning-making (Geller & Farber, 2015; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015;

Rice, 2011; Rihacek, Danelova, & Cermak, 2012; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001). So far however, these fruits as such have not received much detailed attention, nor have their consequences for senior therapists' lives outside of practice. Their potential to enrich, and to contribute to our understanding of other dimensions of human development, including spiritual development, with implications for the broader reality and world we live in, has yet to be examined in greater depth.

From what the literature does suggest so far, senior practitioners tend to develop a greater sensitivity and openness to others, greater awareness of social barriers, and experience a greater sense of interconnection with, and responsibility for, their communities and the greater society (Fridley, 2010; Goldberg, 1992). This leaves much room for further investigation, as this is also related with spiritual development. In the final analysis, the ability to successfully reconcile, integrate and continue to grow through both the positive and difficult experiences in the final stage of their professional and life development, is what led many of the senior practitioners studied to the deep sense of fulfillment reported (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015).

As parallels appear to exist here with the process and dynamic of spiritual development described in the literature reviewed above, the question of spirituality and spiritual development of senior practitioners as a group also emerges. So far, research has done little to explicitly integrate this dimension of psychotherapists' experience and development in the senior years. The potential of the fruits of a lifetime of development alluded to above, to enrich our understanding of human development as a whole, including spiritual development, has yet to be tapped into, beyond the realm of professional practice.

On-going Growth and Wisdom

The process of growth and maturation is on-going throughout the lifespan, and never truly achieved, with each new stage bringing new challenges and perspectives from the re-examining of one's past choices and experiences (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001, 2013). The recognition and deeper experience of this reality was a theme common to senior practitioners' reports across all the studies reviewed (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001, 2013). Many come to an understanding of their successful development as being the result of the hard work of self-formation, and self-examination, required to be fully present and responsive to their clients and their shared humanity with them in the therapeutic relationship, rather than on clinical learning per se (Fridley, 2010; Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992).

While the opportunity for psychological growth and self-examination afforded them by virtue of their training and practice in the profession was acknowledged as a benefit in retrospect, senior practitioners also recognized this to be an illusion and many found themselves no farther ahead than those ordinary people outside of the profession, whose lives appeared to be largely unexamined (Goldberg, 1992). Given the existing knowledge on psychotherapist spirituality described above, it would appear that the question of senior therapists' spirituality in particular, and of their spiritual development, might be relevant here in shedding more light on what underlies these findings.

The long-time accumulation and integration of both professional and life experience among senior therapists has also been associated with the development of wisdom, a characteristic most often attributed to older individuals (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001, 2013), and an element of spirituality and

spiritual development (Matteson, 2008; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000). Wisdom has been broadly defined by Rabu and McLeod (2016) as an understanding of life and the human condition, which involves pragmatic knowledge, an existential dimension of creating meaning, and "openness to complexity" (p.3). It is also a capacity "to reconcile oppositional forces in one's lifespace as a unique opportunity for authentic development and enriching human experience rather than as an unfortunate obligation of life" (Goldberg, 1992, p.141).

Wisdom has been seen as one major outcome of optimal therapist development and the valuable contribution of psychotherapists' aging process for psychotherapy practice (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015; Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001). It has also been described as the capacity for insight and awareness (Rosen & Crouse, 2000; Matteson, 2008; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000). Implicit in the development of wisdom is living and practicing "the examined life" (Goldberg, 1992, p.131). Given the necessity of reflexive practice in the psychotherapy profession, and the tendency for retrospective self-examination of practitioners in the senior stage of development, it would appear to provide an optimal opportunity for fostering wisdom and related qualities, though not its guarantee (Fridley, 2010; Goldberg, 1992). As with spiritual development itself, the development of wisdom also requires emotional involvement, courage, passion, initiative, and a "generosity of spirit" (Goldberg, 1992, p. 147).

While research does support the association of increased wisdom with senior practitioners of psychotherapy, this is largely limited to self-reports of therapists studied (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992, Orlinski & Ronnestad, 2015; Rabu & McLeod, 2016). This increase in wisdom, furthermore, has been reported as an outcome of development at the senior stage along with increased humility - another characteristic of spiritual development (Geller &

Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992, Matteson, 2008; Orlinski & Ronnestad, 2015; Rabu & McLeod, 2016). The two appear to be related as factors in therapist growth through the recognition of "different worlds" (Goldberg, 1992, p. 51) and different realities opened up by their clients, yet connected by the underlying shared human condition which senior therapists speak of recognizing more deeply in their later years.

In conclusion, the unique position of this group of therapists in relation to both life and professional experience has been recognized as having an important contribution to make to the profession and to our understanding of therapist development (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015; Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001). It would appear from the literature reviewed above, that equally important is the contribution senior therapists might have to make to our understanding of psychotherapist spiritual development, and of spirituality.

As the senior stage has been characterized particularly as bringing with it greater opportunities for reflection on, and for the grappling with the existential and spiritual questions in life, those regarding human nature and the human condition, morality, society, meaning, contributing to the world, and values (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Rabu & McLeod, 2016), more attention to the experiences and perspectives of senior therapists seems warranted in this regard, as well as to the role of client work in particular in contributing to this.

Concluding Remarks

The literature suggests that the psychotherapist's own self, and its development over time, plays a significant role in the quality of their work. This process of development culminates (though does not end) in the final stage of psychotherapists' life and work, with senior practitioners. Elements within the findings on psychotherapist development, especially so in the senior stage,

appear to intersect and overlap with elements of spiritual experience, growth and development as found in the literature. As the literature reviewed above suggests, common threads and parallels exist in therapists' professional, personal, and spiritual development, as between their spirituality and professional practice, but remain to be investigated and integrated into the available literature more fully. Thus, the literature reviewed here invites deeper exploration and further serves as a reminder of the need to expand our understanding beyond the artificial lines of separation created for research purposes. It also invites a closer look at the experiences of senior practitioners in this regard.

Moreover, as the research reviewed in this chapter implies, within the relational dynamic of psychotherapy practice, key for practitioner development, clients themselves do play a role in influencing therapists' development, as well as their spirituality. Yet the concrete learning and influence from clients is rarely made explicit. Moreover, client influence on therapists' spiritual development specifically constitutes a significant gap in our current knowledge. The practical effects of client impacts on therapists' lives outside of practice remain obscure, as does the experience of senior practitioners, in whom these effects have been noted to culminate. In light of this, the next chapter will focus on the missing pieces in our current understanding as the foundation for this research, and will describe the rationale and methodology used, grounded in and developed on the basis of literature presented here, and the gaps identified therein.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The literature review revealed gaps in our understanding about the impact of clients on therapist development. There seems to be little information about the process of change that therapists undergo as a result of their work and its impacts on their spirituality and ways of being in the world. The review also revealed some common threads and interconnecting elements among the topics of: psychotherapist development (and in particular its culmination in the experience of senior psychotherapists), psychotherapist spirituality/spiritual development, and clients' influence on practitioners. This study's aims were to further build on these common aspects and to address the gaps by bringing attention to the impact of clients on therapist spiritual development, as seen through the experience of senior practitioners. This chapter will focus on presenting the in-depth rationale for the study, the research questions investigated, and the methodology used.

Gaps in the Literature

Gaps exist in our understanding of psychotherapist development, given the almost exclusive focus on its professional dimension in the literature so far, as related to clinical practice and competency development. In particular, research on the spiritual dimension of this process – of therapists' spiritual development - is lacking, despite of the considerable attention which has been devoted in the literature so far to the area of psychotherapist development on the one hand, and to psychotherapist spirituality on the other. A lack of in-depth research also exists on the process, nature, and experience of therapists' development as a result of direct encounters with clients, and of the tangible, outward manifestations of this in their daily lives, outside of the therapy room.

Although studies have looked at psychotherapist development from a professional, and to a much lesser extent, personal perspective (Hatcher et al. 2012; Klein et al., 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Trottier-Matheson et al., 2010), creating an artificial separation between the two, and despite of the fact that the significance of client influence on this process has been noted (Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Trottier-Matheson et al., 2010), little has been done to integrate these dimensions in the literature. Furthermore, the experience of the developmental process as lived and as understood by therapists themselves – as individuals, as persons, and as spiritual beings (Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017), beyond their professional role and identity, has yet to be explored in depth. Moreover, as the handful of current research in the area of therapist spirituality shows, its focus has so far been almost exclusively on what the therapist brings into the therapeutic process, and how the spiritual dimension is relevant in their own coping and professional competence. More attention to, and further exploration of, client influence on this process is necessary, considering the very relational and interpersonal nature of both psychotherapy work and spirituality.

Additionally, given the richness of a lifetime of accumulated life and professional experience of therapists in the senior stages of development, relatively little is known about what this richness, and the process of its development, looks like. While emerging attention of research points to the wisdom, insight, and retrospective reflexivity characteristic of this population, a more in-depth look is needed to examine their experience of spirituality specifically, and their experience of spiritual development through a lifetime in practice.

Aims of the Study

The present research project sought to bridge the gap in the existing literature of psychotherapist development, spirituality, and client influence. Specifically, it aimed to explore psychotherapists'

experience of their spiritual development process resulting from their work with clients over a lifetime in practice, as seen retrospectively, and the practical implications of such development on their way of life. It was considered that such knowledge will contribute to furthering our understanding of the impact of clinical practice on psychotherapist spirituality, and on their development – as persons and as practitioners. It will also bring attention to the potential consequences of this development for the world in which they live. In doing so, the study aimed to increase our understanding of senior psychotherapists' experience in particular, given the increasing attention to this population in current research, and its potential not only to enrich our understanding of psychotherapy practice, but also that of the developmental process of practitioners – as persons, within the context of their whole lifetime of experience.

Research Questions

The study focused on senior psychotherapists' retrospective accounts of perceived change and growth over time (i.e. development), as a result of their encounters with clients over a lifetime of practice. The study was guided by four main research questions:

1) How has psychotherapy work contributed to the change and development of psychotherapists on the spiritual level and what has been their experience of this process?
2) What has been, in turn, the perceived impact of this spiritual development on their work with clients?
3) How has this perceived development influenced their way of being and living in the world, beyond the therapy room?
4) What have they learned through this process of spiritual development through client

work that they would like to impart to the younger generation of psychotherapists today?

Theoretical Basis and Justification of Chosen Methodology

Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study, as qualitative research is exploratory in nature and aims to attend to, and to describe participants' lived experience (Houser, 2015). Given the study's focus on the lived experience of therapists' spiritual development through the years in practice, and client's influence on this development, such a design was deemed to be most suitable. As a qualitative research design is most often employed in the initial explorations of an experience or phenomena, where little or no research has been done (Houser, 2015), its use in this study is warranted, given the scarcity of literature on the topic investigated.

Qualitative methods are especially useful in helping to investigate and gain an understanding of unique and more intangible, subjective, inwardly-experienced phenomena, which may be difficult to observe, describe and quantify (Creswell, 2014; West, 2009), as was the case in this study. Moreover, qualitative methodology allows for a finer attunement to the subtleties in the phenomena studied, as well as to the uniqueness of experience, and the "small elements of the context" (Houser, 2015, p. 79). The very basis of inquiry in qualitative research is the nature of phenomena and of experience, as seen and experienced through an individual's unique and context-specific perspective (Daher, Carre, Jaramillo, Olivares, & Tomicic, 2017; Houser, 2015; Levitt et al., 2017), which this study specifically aimed to investigate. Moreover, these characteristics make qualitative design particularly well suited to studying spiritual experience (West, 2009). Thus, the chosen methodology lends itself well to examining the phenomena investigated here - the spirituality and experience of spiritual development in the

lives of senior psychotherapists, as they have perceived these to be, retrospectively, within the context of their lifetime - in practice and beyond (Houser, 2015; McLeod, 2011).

Given that qualitative methods are used to study "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44) or phenomenon, a qualitative design has allowed to obtain a richer and more complete understanding of the meaning, and thus significance, of this experience for the population studied. The qualitative researcher is especially focused on understanding research participants' experience, its meaning in their particular context, and their view of that experience (Houser, 2015; Daher et al., 2017; Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). This paralleled the aims of the researcher in this study, who sought to understand the experience of psychotherapy practitioners, their own development within the profession and beyond, within the context of their practice and their lives outside of it, as seen from a spiritual lens.

Further to this end, an interpretative framework within qualitative methodology specifically was also chosen for this study (Creswell, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012). Such a framework rests on the assumption of individuals making sense of their experiences and creating their own meaning from these experiences, based on the world around them (Lapan et al., 2012). It was thus consistent with the focus of this study, which rested upon participants' self-reports about their subjective experience, and their subjective understanding and meaning-making of it in turn. The researcher was guided by the assumption of the uniqueness of experiences and worldviews of each individual (including herself as the researcher) in her role and responsibility to gain an inside perspective from participants (Lapan, et al., 2012). This reflected the primacy of giving voice to participant accounts and descriptions of experience, albeit via decisions made by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Houser, 2015; Lapan, et al., 2012).

Phenomenology

Phenomenological Inquiry was chosen to interpret the data gathered (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, Hanson, & Clark Plano, 2000; Houser, 2015; McLeod, 2001; van Manen, 1997, 2002, 2014). As an approach concerned with investigating and understanding the meanings and nature of one's lived experience, and one's subjective perspective on the phenomena studied (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, et al., 2000; Houser, 2015; Morrow, 2007; Shi, 2011; van Manen, 1997; West, 2013), it was considered most suited to the subject matter and goals of the study.

In Phenomenological Inquiry, the intent is to describe phenomena as experienced, recognizing their complexity and specificity, rather than explain or analyze them (Creswell, 2013; Houser, 2015). It is also to distill the essence of this phenomena, by isolating the common, underlying experience of a group of participants (Shi, 2011; Creswell, 2013). As a methodology which views research as a "caring act" (van Manen, 1997, p. 5) - an act of concern and interest into knowing and understanding a common human phenomenon, into participants' experience (Shi, 2011), and into making a contribution towards this end, it was also most consistent with the spirit and perspective of this investigation. Furthermore, as a methodology which seeks to describe that which lies beyond words (McLeod, 2001), and engages the researcher in a thoughtful process of consideration for participants' experience (Shi, 2011), it was particularly fitting for research seeking to describe experiences of a spiritual and transcendental nature.

The retrospective nature of the study, focusing on psychotherapists' accumulated experience over time, follows on the premise of the phenomenological school of thought in which "the notion of experience implies an immediate experience that is reported as an accumulated one, which is associated with reflective thinking about the former" (Daher et al., 2017, p.8). Phenomenological Inquiry lent itself well here in its underlying assumption that

studying the meaning of an experience does not rest on the actual experience per se, but on the way one's self understands past experience (Daher et al., 2017). Here, the role of the researcher is to "capture this process of interpretation" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 14) which participants engage in in relation to their own lived experience.

The particular approach to research design and interpretation of data used was guided by the assumptions of the Duquesne school of empirical phenomenology (Dowling, 2007; Houser, 2015), so named for the place where it had been developed (Cohen & Omery, 1994). The focus of this particular school of thought within phenomenology was to "elucidate the essence of the phenomenon being studied, as it exists in participants' concrete experience" (McLeod, 2001, p.41), and to describe the meaning of an experience, as seen and understood by the subject experiencing it (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Its focus on context, meaning, and meaning-making is most congruent with that of this study. It is also most congruent with the focus on the population studied – psychotherapists in the senior stage of professional development, for whom the meaning-making element of experience is particularly relevant (Rabu et al., 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Because of the complexity of the subject matter researched, and, as evidenced by the literature, the difficulty inherent in separating client impacts from other factors in one's experience, as well as of the spiritual dimension from the whole of the person, a phenomenological method of inquiry allowed for a broader consideration of it through imaginative variation (Giorgi, 2007; McLeod, 2001). Specifically, this technique involved imaginatively playing with different elements of participants' accounts, and of the phenomenon studied, so as to isolate those elements that are essential to its integrity – without which the phenomenon itself would cease to exist as such (Giorgi, 2007; McLeod, 2011). This facilitated

sifting through the contextual aspects of participants' experience and of the immediate assumptions related to this context, in order to enable the researcher to delve deeper and better extract "the essence" of the phenomenon itself, and to see it with new eyes (McLeod, 2001).

Ethical Considerations

Approval for carrying out the research study was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Board (Appendix A) prior to commencing of participant recruitment and data collection. Participant informed consent was obtained prior to data collection from all participants, according to the regulations of the university's Research Ethics Board. The level of potential risk in taking part in the study was determined to be low. Participants were informed of this in the consent form, and provided with information in the event of any distress experienced through the process.

Participant confidentiality and anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms instead of real names, and by keeping all data and participant information in a safe location. Participants were invited to choose a pseudonym which they would like to have used for their data, which was then entered instead of real names on all sources of data, which were kept separate from the consent forms containing real names. Any confidential or identifying information given in the interviews by participants was omitted, with explanation in parentheses, or replaced by an "X" by the researcher in the interview transcripts and direct quotations used in reporting of the findings.

Consent form

Participants were asked to review and sign a consent form (Appendix B) prior to engaging in the research process. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study and what taking part in it entailed for the participants, as well as the risks and benefits of participating. The voluntary

nature of their participation was emphasized. It also informed them of their rights and provided contact information for the researcher, her supervisor, as well as the university's Research Ethics Committee.

Participants

Inclusion Criteria

Recruitment for this study was focused on psychotherapists who have been in practice for at least 25 years, corresponding with the Senior Practitioner phase of psychotherapist development as put forth by Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013). Since reflecting back on a lifetime in practice is especially characteristic of therapists at this stage, and since development is a process of change which often is recognized only in retrospect (Klein et al., 2011; Rabu et al., 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), this population was chosen as the most suitable to provide a more expansive, and in-depth, description of the process of spiritual development over the course of therapists' career. The study involved nine participants, both male and female – near midpoint of the 5-25 suggested for phenomenological inquiry (Creswell et al., 2000). This was a large enough sample to provide adequate data, and provided enough variation and scope in the sample to ensure inclusion of multiple cultural, practice orientation, spiritual, and life backgrounds. Recruitment was limited to those fluent enough in the English language to participate, with no other exclusion criteria.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through advertising on: the online membership lists of the Society for Psychotherapy Research (SPR), Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA). The recruitment poster advertising the study which was prepared by the researcher for this purpose (Appendix C) was also forwarded via e-

mail to individuals within the researcher's academic and professional network, local community agencies, educational institutions and organizations, and professionals in private practice in the Ottawa area.

Characteristics

A total of nine participants took part in the study. Their demographic information is summarized in Table 3 below, with the names being pseudonyms – seven of which were selected by the participants themselves, and two by the researcher, due to an error in communication.

Table 3. Participants' demographic data at time of interview

Chosen Pseudonym	**Age**	**Years in practice**	**Location of practice**	**Country of origin / Culture**	**Therapeutic approach**	**Spirituality**
Claire	55	25	Ontario & Quebec, Canada	Canada / French-Canadian	Eclectic, Systems	Christian - Evangelical
Maria	64	30	Ontario, Canada	Argentina / Latin American	Relational Integrative	Christian - Roman Catholic
Dr. I.M.	70	44	New Jersey, USA	USA / Jewish American	Cognitive	Jewish
Amelia	51	25	Ontario, Canada	Canada / Canadian	Eclectic, Narrative	First Nations Teachings
Isabel	62	35	Uruguay	Uruguay / Latin American	Psychodynamic	Humanistic
Paul	58	27	Quebec, Canada	Canada / French-Canadian	Psychodynamic, Systemic	Christian - Protestant
France	62	38	Ontario, Canada	Canada / French-Canadian	Humanistic, Existential	None identified, "Open"
Pat	62	26	Alberta, Canada	Canada / Canadian	Eclectic, Existential	"Eclectic - Open"
Walter	67	25 (Retired)	England	England/ British	Spiritual-Humanistic	Quaker, "Post-Christian"

Six of the participants were women and three were men, between the ages of 51 and 70. The number of years in practice ranged from 25 to 44. Five participants reported being from and having practiced in Canada – two from the province of Ontario, two from Quebec, and one from Alberta. One participant was from the United States, one from England, and one from Uruguay. Another identified as being from Argentina, having received her education as well as experience in practice in Argentina, before immigrating to Canada where she currently resides and practices.

Theoretical orientations of the participants included one or more of the following: Cognitive-Behavioural, Relational, Psychodynamic, Integrative/Eclectic, Narrative, Solution-Focused, Humanistic/Existential, and Systemic. One also practices as an art therapist. All of the participants described their therapy practice as focusing on adults – individual, couple, and family, with four also working with adolescents, and one with children. One participant is currently retired, another has left formal practice and now focuses on teaching.

Five participants reported belonging to and practicing within an organized religious tradition. One identified himself as Jewish, and four identified themselves as Christians – one Protestant, one Quaker, one Evangelical, and one Roman Catholic. Of the remaining four, one described herself as particularly drawn to and following North American First Nations spiritual traditions and teachings, two were of no particular spiritual orientation, describing themselves as "open" and "eclectic", and one characterized her spirituality as "Humanistic", ascribing to "existential values" as well as a belief in and commitment to life on Earth.

Measures and Procedures

Data Collection

Data collection took place between early September of 2016 and mid-July of 2017. Interested participants who responded to the recruitment advertisements contacted the researcher. Data

collection consisted of using three sources of data, approved by the university's Research Ethics Board – demographic questionnaires, written reflections, and semi-structured interviews, and focused on answering the four main research questions of the study.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and written accounts, designed to gather descriptive information of both the "what" and the "how" (Creswell, 2013) of participant experience about the impact of clients on their spiritual development and ways of being in the world. Consistent with the Duquesne approach to Phenomenological Inquiry (McLeod, 2001), participants were asked to describe their experience in both the verbal and written accounts, and to provide concrete experiential examples. Such data collection measures facilitated a "direct exchange of experiences and meanings between participants and researcher[s]" (Daher et al., 2017, p. 11), requiring mutual respect and openness between them, as a cornerstone for understanding phenomena in qualitative research and phenomenology (Daher et al., 2017).

The semi-structured interview format was chosen to allow for a pre-determined set of open-ended questions to guide the direction of the interview, yet allow the flexibility and space to explore certain areas in more detail according to need and participant process (Creswell, 2013; Houser, 2015). This is consistent with the interpretative framework of the study in which researchers use open-ended questions and allow for participant experience of their reality to freely emerge through their own sharing and descriptions (Lapan et al., 2012) and "allow questions to emerge and change as a situation becomes familiar" (p.9). It also allows for addressing more specific dimensions of participants' accounts which hold particular and unique meaning for them , important in a phenomenological approach (Houser, 2017).

Participants were also asked to provide a written reflexive account of what has influenced their spiritual development the most over the course of their years in practice, and the lessons

learned about spirituality as a result. Written communication can have a unique advantage in adding richness and depth of meaning to the data collection process (Houser, 2015). A demographic questionnaire was used to collect and organize participant demographic and background information. These provided additional, varied sources of data which strengthened the study's fidelity through ensuring adequacy of data (Levitt et al., 2017), and increased internal validity (Creswell, 2013; Houser, 2015; Levitt et al., 2017). Such data collection measures enabled the researcher to "know people personally and to see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 4), a key aspect of all qualitative research.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire

A one-page demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) was developed by the researcher and given to all participants prior to the interviews. Participants were asked to complete and submit it to the researcher prior to the interview, either in person, via fax or via mail (regular or electronic). The questionnaire covered information in areas such as participant age, gender, number of years in practice, language, country of origin, current and past spiritual tradition(s), education, theoretical orientation of practice, area of specialization, populations worked with, and estimated number of client contact hours accumulated over the lifetime. It also invited participants to select a pseudonym that will be used for the purpose of the study to preserve their anonymity.

Written reflexive account

Participants were also asked to complete a one-page reflexive account (Appendix E) of the most (or one of the most) memorable experiences with a client which affected them deeply on the spiritual level, the lessons they learned from this experience, and how this has changed them and

their life in retrospect. They were asked to submit this to the researcher prior to the interviews, in person, via fax or via mail (regular or electronic), in order to provide a richer context and direction for the interview process.

Interview

A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix F) consisted of 16 open-ended questions, reflecting and elaborating on the four main research questions to be explored in the study. These were designed to explore in detail with participants how their work with clients has influenced and changed their spirituality, what this influence and change was, how their spiritual change and growth as a result of this influence has in turn affected their practice, and their life outside of it, and what were its perceived effects on their way of being and living.

Prior to starting the interviews, the researcher informed the participants about the approximate duration of the interview (60 to 90 minutes) and the nature of the questions which would be asked. The interviews were conducted by the researcher herself. They were held either in person at Saint Paul University or at the participants' workplace for those in the Ottawa area, depending on their preference, and scheduled at a time most convenient for them. For those participants living outside of the Ottawa area and overseas, telephone interviews were scheduled at a prearranged time, with costs covered by the researcher. This was to ensure what Creswell (2013) calls a sensitivity to "the people and places under study" (p. 44).

The interviews were audiotaped using a digital audio recorder, and fully transcribed by the researcher, which provided an additional opportunity for the researcher to become more immersed in the data for reflection and interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Houser, 2015). The researcher reviewed the recordings and asked participants for clarification and/or elaboration where necessary to ensure adequate reflection and understanding of their experience (Sousa,

2014). Additionally, the researcher was mindful throughout the interview process of the importance of paying critical attention to the use of experience and meaning in collecting and interpreting data (Daher et al., 2017), rather than losing this for the sake of a "mechanistic use of methodology" (p.2), by actively engaging with the participants, acknowledging, and validating their experience, as well as by checking-in with them as to their experience of the interview process itself.

Data Analysis

Data collection was stopped after the ninth participant had been interviewed. This was done as a level of thematic saturation (no new themes emerging) and data saturation (no new information) seemed to have been reached, making additional data collection redundant (Levitt et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2017). The information gathered appeared both comprehensive, variable, and sufficient enough to ensure both quality and adequacy of the data, and allow for an understanding of the variations within the phenomenon (Levitt et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2017). The nine interviews yielded 154 single-spaced pages of verbatim transcripts and 13 single-spaced pages of participant written reflection accounts. The steps involved in analysing and interpreting the data are presented in a simplified form in Table 4 and elaborated upon in detail in what follows.

Table 4. Steps of data analysis.

Steps in Data Analysis Process
1. Preliminary reading of each transcript and written reflection for general sense and "feel" of participants' experiences
2. Time allowed for reflection

3. Return to transcripts and written reflections for re-reading multiple times and deeper immersion in the text
4. Noting and highlighting significant statements in each text in relation to the major research questions
5. Isolating clusters of meaning from the significant statements into sub-themes
6. Grouping the sub-themes from each transcript and written reflection together according to underlying common meaning
7. Further distilling the broader sub-themes into larger, major themes
8. Major themes integrated into central themes in a final description and visual presentation of the essence of the phenomenon (i.e proposed model)
9. Review of the analysis process and content to ensure consistency, continuity and congruence
10. Triangulation of data/analysis with members of the research team and external researchers

As the analysis of data in qualitative research seeks to establish themes and/or patterns (Clarke & Brown, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Houser, 2015), the findings of the study were organized, presented and reflected upon using both thematic analysis and existentially-oriented systematic interpretation patterns as guides adapted from van Manen's (1997) descriptive and interpretative phenomenology (Dowling, 2007; van Manen, 1997). Specifically, the researcher used van Manen's concept of the "four existentials" of space, physical presence, time, and relationship, as dimensions or reference points of existence, present in participants' experience and in their accounts, to guide the phenomenological reflection on the data (Creswell, 2013; Dowling, 2007; van Manen, 1997). This was to reflect the study's focus on the experience of change over time, in relation to self and others, as well as to their larger context within the world. Given the depth, subjectivity, and degree of intangibility of the phenomenon studied, this enabled a construction of "successive or multiple layers of meaning, thus laying bare certain truths while retaining an essential sense of ambiguity" (van Manen, 1997, p.131) in determining the "universal or essential qualities" (p.107) of participant reflections.

Consistent with this phenomenological approach, interpretation involved a reflexive reading and re-reading of all the data collected, immersing the researcher in it for greater familiarity and a deeper feel for its sense (Houser, 2015). This was followed by organizing the data through a systematic progression from narrow units of analysis (Creswell, 2013; McLeod, 2001) such as significant statements made by participants, to broader "clusters of meaning" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82) and segments of data.

These clusters were then further reduced and organized into sub-themes and themes, in order to narrow down the two elements of what and how of the experience, and to identify the major, central themes and meanings of participants' experience (Creswell, 2013; McLeod, 2001). The themes thus distilled provided the backbone through which the essence of the phenomenon could be revealed and described, and allowed for an integration of these two elements of what and how (McLeod, 2001; Shi, 2011). The final result is what became the "single exhaustive description" (McLeod, 2001, p. 41) and discussion of the essence of the experience for participants, in a general statement of the findings reflecting the understanding gleaned from the interpretative process (Creswell, 2013; McLeod, 2001).

The researcher reviewed the data carefully, comparing and contrasting it to the sub-themes and themes developed, to verify congruency and continuity between them, and to ensure that they are adequately supported and represented in the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Daher et al., 2017; Levitt et al., 2017). This entailed revising, refining, and more closely defining the themes for clarity and representativeness of the data.

Throughout this process, the researcher consciously "attune[d] herself particularly to the meaning of objects and events as they are lived by the subject" (McLeod, 2001, p. 41), and to accessing the participants' subjectivity through focus "on capturing the person's point of view"

(Daher et al., 2017, p. 11). Emphasis was placed on seeing participant experience and meaning "as part of a larger whole: the participants' life-world" (Daher et al., 2017, p. 1).

Thus, the researcher sought to describe the common, underlying meaning (Creswell, 2013) of participants' lived experience of the phenomenon studied, by uncovering what was submerged beneath the details of participant accounts (Giorgi, 2007). This process enabled the reduction of the individual experiences to a description of the underlying essence of the phenomenon, and recovery of "the actual experiences and meanings of participants - just as they expressed them" (Daher et al., 2017, p. 3). As this was an exploratory study of a complex phenomenon, the analysis of themes and of the meaning they hold lent itself well to this approach which, according to van Manen (2014) is itself "a complex and creative process" (p. 320) involving "insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure" (p. 320).

The process of analyzing the data and organizing it into themes involved using various angles of perspective through which to consider participant accounts (McLeod, 2001). This, along with researcher reflection, allowed for an "explicit structure of meaning of the lived experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 195) to emerge. Creswell's (2013) method of identifying approximately five to seven different themes in the data was maintained, however, due to the distinct nature of the last research question, a separate set of themes was created.

The data collected was reduced to a total of seven main themes for the first three research questions – those concerning participants' experience of client influence and resulting change - and to four themes for the fourth research question, which was distinct in focus and scope, inviting participants to share their wisdom and advice for beginning therapists. The themes reflect individual participant experiences and contexts of these experiences, consistent with a phenomenological approach, as well as participant processes, borrowing from grounded theory

(Creswell, 2013). Finally, these themes were further considered together in a layering and interrelating process (Creswell, 2013; Houser, 2015), connecting them into "larger units of abstraction" (Creswell, 2013, p. 187) to isolate the broader, overarching meaning of the data, in light of the existing literature on therapist development and spirituality, and the researcher's own reflexivity on the obtained (Creswell, 2013). A theoretical model, or framework was developed from the analysis presenting the complex nature and process of the phenomenon investigated, in its essence, as it emerged from the findings.

Quality Control Measures

Triangulation

Triangulation of the data collection process and the themes which emerged was an important aspect of analysis, involving the corroboration of particular themes "through different sources" (Houser, 2015, p. 96). In this study, triangulation consisted of using different sources for reporting of similar data (i.e. accounts of different participants), as well as using different sources of data collection (i.e. interview transcripts and participant written reflections), as described by Houser (2015). It also involved peer review and debriefing (Creswell, 2013) with the research supervisor, her doctoral research team, and one outside researcher.

Peer review with the research team consisted of two colleagues and the research supervisor reviewing two of the interview transcripts, and individually noting significant statements, clusters of meaning, as well as themes and subthemes they recognized emerging. The researcher then met with the research supervisor and team to compare, discuss, and corroborate the interpretations. The researcher also did the same with one researcher outside of the research team, who was unfamiliar with the research, using four transcripts, different from those reviewed by the research team.

The importance of triangulation reflected the recognition that what is found and understood through the research process is not independent from the researcher, nor from the participant who interprets it (Daher et al., 2017; Shi, 2011; West, 2009). This was especially salient in this research study due to the researcher's own proximity to the subject matter, and to its highly subjective, personal, and meaning-laden nature for participants. A hermeneutic dialogue which "focuses on a conversation between researchers and participants that validates the understanding process built through the triangulation between them" (Daher et al., 2017, p.11), could thus be made possible and further enriched the results. The use of triangulation, was also essential in ensuring that the researcher not lose sight of the intent and purpose of the study (Houser, 2015).

Researcher Bias

The requirement for the researcher to establish where she stands in relation to the research, the phenomenon, and her experience of it (Creswell, 2013) was met through the keeping of a reflexive research journal and active, on-going reflection about the research as it progressed. This entailed on-going, consecutive re-visiting and re-checking of her interpretations throughout the research process, also shared and discussed with the research supervisor. Researcher bias was acknowledged and disclosure of researcher orientation, values, expectations and assumptions was discussed with the research supervisor, prior to data collection and analysis (Sousa, 2014), as well as throughout the process of analysis and the reporting of findings. A brief reflection on the research and the researcher's own process of change throughout was also prepared and included here (Appendix G).

Although bracketing has been mentioned extensively in qualitative research as a way to avoid researcher bias, its adequacy and usefulness has been questioned (Giorgi, 2007; Shi, 2011;

West, 2009), particularly in research involving spirituality (West, 2009). According to Daher et al. (2017), the process of data interpretation necessitates that the researcher acknowledges and reviews their own bias, and allows "the phenomenon to emerge from its particular cultural environment" (p. 6). At the same time, it must also be recognized that "hermeneutics does not seek to neglect the meaning-making of the person who is interpreting." (Daher et al., 2017, p. 6). The researcher, as the one interpreting, can only interpret results through their own eyes and experience, understanding reality from within existence, and not outside of it (Shi, 2011).

According to West (2009), the researcher's "countertransference reactions" (p. 192) to their own research can provide valuable insight and information. The researcher's own position was recognized and stated, fully acknowledging that as researchers who incorporate spirituality into their study, we must, and do "stand somewhere with some values and ethics" (West, 2009, p. 193). Not only is this not a detriment to the research if acknowledged (Clarke & Brown, 2006; Daher et al., 2017), it can further enrich the study, adding to its credibility and depth, and provide context for a more adequate understanding of the phenomenon studied and the results (West, 2009).

The researcher

The researcher herself was a 42 year-old woman psychotherapist of Polish origin, at the time of the research living and practicing in Canada (provinces of Alberta and Ontario). She described her spirituality as being embedded in the Roman Catholic faith tradition. She has been in practice for a total of 15 years, placing her in the "Experienced" stage of psychotherapist development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), with a two year period of leave prior to returning to complete her doctoral studies in the field. She practices from within a psychodynamic and relational/interpersonal orientation.

Bracketing assumptions

The researcher's own spirituality, worldview, and experience within the profession as well as outside of it prior to data collection contributed to her assumption that clients will have a significant impact on practitioners' spirituality and spiritual growth, both positive and negative. Moreover, the researcher expected to find that the inner changes resulting from this influence will be directly, and transparently, reflected in changing one's way of life, according to the view of spirituality as being manifested in actions. Furthermore, there was an expectation based on her own observations in practice that therapists' reported change will tend to be within the accepted norms and status quo of their social, professional, and cultural milieu. At the same time, given the findings of Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013) concerning practitioners' later stages of professional development, the researcher also expected that therapists at the senior stage would have a more in-depth understanding of humanity, of the world, and of the greater reality beyond their own private and professional lives, being informed by learning from other fields. This understanding would then be integrated further with their spiritual development, and lead to more extensive changes in other aspects of their lives.

Fidelity and Utility of the Research

A number of measures were taken to ensure the methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2017) of the study. Methodological integrity is reflected in the continuity and congruence between research design and procedures, aims of the research, the researcher's approach to the research, and the appropriate and adequate adaptation of these in relation to the subject matter investigated and the investigators themselves (Levitt et al., 2017). Attention was to both the fidelity and utility of the research, so as to adequately reflect and encompass the salient experiences and processes relevant to its subject matter. Methodological fidelity, described by Levitt et al. (2017)

as the "intimate connection that researchers can obtain with the phenomenon under study" (p. 10), rather than as the degree of adherence to any one epistemological approach or worldview, was addressed through measures to ensure adequacy of data, and perspective management in both data collection and interpretation (Levitt et al., 2017).

The requirement for adequacy of data (Levitt et al., 2017) was met by obtaining data from various sources and regions (nine individual participants, variation in cultural, national, religious and spiritual backgrounds, levels of life experience, gender and age, as well as orientation of therapeutic practice) and reaching a point of data saturation which reflected the patterns, repetitions, and variations within the phenomenon. The different types of data collected (verbal interviews, written reflections, questionnaires) further strengthened provided additional measures to ensure adequacy (Levitt et al., 2017).

Perspective management (Levitt et al., 2017) – in other words consideration of and transparency with the ways in which researcher perspectives inform and influence their research - in data collection and interpretation improved the study's fidelity through the researcher's reflexive practice, transparency of bias, using open, non-leading language in interviews with participants, triangulation, asking participants to add to the researcher's questions what they considered as important to share, thorough documentation of all responses, using different sources of data, and checking information and researcher understanding with participants throughout the interview process. Perspective management was further achieved by grounding the study's findings in the data collected so as to support its understanding and interpretation – e.g., incorporating relevant quotes from participants, and making explicit, relevant and clear connections between the data collected, its interpretation, and the results reported (Levitt et al., 2017).

Study utility, understood as "the effectiveness of the research design and methods, and their synergistic relationship, in achieving study goals – answering questions and/or resolving problems" (Levitt et al., 2017, p. 10), was ensured by tailoring and focusing the methods used to answer the research questions, rather than adhering to "decontextualized procedures" (p. 10) within the research process. The researcher made a conscious effort to be guided by the need of responding to and addressing the specific aims of the study (Houser, 2015) throughout the process of data collection, interpretation, and reporting of the findings, so as to prevent falling into a mechanistic following of procedure (McLeod, 2001).

Data was collected in order to stimulate insight into the phenomenon studied (Levitt et al., 2017). This entailed selecting and utilizing methods and procedures in such a way so as to maximize the depth and richness of accounts obtained from participants, and to increase the potential for reflection and insight to be gleaned from the data collected (Levitt et al., 2017). The researcher, herself a psychotherapist with an interpersonal/relational orientation to practice, used her interviewing skills, knowledge and shared experience to maximize "relationality with participants" (Levitt et al., 2017, p. 15). This gave her an added advantage in the ability to engage research participants with sensitivity, clarify uncertainties, and elicit meaningful, relevant responses (Levitt et al., 2017), as appropriate for the nature of the study and subject matter. The data obtained was thus enriched and deepened, in turn increasing the potential for insight to be derived, and strengthening utility (Levitt et al., 2017).

Coherence of findings, or internal consistency, as the final guideline for ensuring research utility was addressed through describing the layering and interconnecting of themes, as well as developing a visual model representing the interrelationship between themes, and aspects thereof (Levitt et al., 2017; McLeod, 2001). This supported a continuity and alignment between data

collection, description, interpretation and validation within the research process, as embedded in and stemming from the literature (Sousa, 2014).

The findings of the study, as obtained through the process of data collection and interpretation described here, will be presented in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study investigated senior psychotherapists' experience of spiritual change and development as influenced by client encounters, seen retrospectively, over a lifetime in practice. The research questions which guided the study focused on exploring this process in relation to therapists' inner experience and understanding of this influence, as well as its effects. They examined participants' resulting change and growth, the effects of this in turn on their work with clients, and on their daily lives in the world - beyond the professional realm and therapy room. Participants' accounts revealed a richness of experiences and elucidated the nature of a complex, multi-faceted developmental process. They further revealed that clients play an important, integral, though not necessarily primary role in this process, and that change and growth occur through therapist reflection, conscious choice, and a more gradual, hidden process of cumulative change recognized only in retrospect.

The findings presented here will begin with an introduction of the participants and the salient elements of their experience as shared for the study, followed by an in-depth look at the themes which emerged from all of these experiences in relation to the specific research questions investigated. Lastly, the findings relating to the last research question - participants' sharing of their wisdom for the younger generation of therapists entering practice today, will be presented as a separate section. In the following chapter, these results will be integrated and presented in the form of a theoretical model, depicting the processes and the nature of the phenomenon investigated, as revealed through this study.

Overview of Participants and Their Experience

A brief case-by-case overview of the individual participants, their experience and their understanding of clients' impact on their spiritual development as shared with the researcher, will be presented in this section. The condensed summaries for each participant are presented by order of age and clinical experience. This will provide additional contextual information to help us see more of the person behind the findings.

Dr. I.M. – Being "Under a divine lesson plan"

A 70-year old Jewish-American man, Dr. I.M. had been in practice for 44 years. His work includes private practice, as well as teaching university-level psychology and psychotherapy courses in the United States. Dr. I.M. has identified with his Jewish faith and spirituality throughout his life, seeing his own work as a psychotherapist inseparable from his spiritual and religious identity, purpose and "divine calling". Dr. I.M. defined his spirituality as being "in touch with the peaceful aura of my being, which is the same as everybody's being", and in connection with God who, for him, is "a oneness of energy that is everything, pervades everything" and is "the true reality".

This understanding of "spiritual oneness", and his relationship to the divine within it, developed and changed substantially throughout Dr. I.M.'s time in practice. He moved away from "religious dogma" towards a recognition of the underlying, connecting essence of all spiritual paths - a change he ascribes to client influence, life experience, as well as his own searching and education. For Dr. I.M., experiences with clients are part of "the divine lesson plan" which he sees God teaching him through his life. This involves developing the capacity to "find meaning" in his experiences, to learn from his clients about spirituality and about God beyond his current understanding, and also "healing" himself through his work.

The primary influence of clients on Dr. I.M.'s spirituality had to do with showing him his own limitations in the face of challenges in practice, and providing opportunities for him to recognize his need for prayer, for God, for something greater than his own (and others') abilities. Clients were also instrumental in teaching him "the importance of compassion and forgiveness", and opening his eyes to people's capacity to change, to transform themselves and their lives towards the good, and towards benefitting society. Another form of influence came from the example of clients whose spirituality and faith enriched, deepened, and broadened his own, by challenging his limited and preconceived notions of certain traditions and the nature of the spirituality itself. Through this, Dr. I.M. came to recognize more explicitly the presence of God in his work and in all aspects of his life, and started to guide his life and his practice accordingly.

He changed his values over time, moving away from a materialist, competitive, ego-driven mindset to one focused on spiritual values of kindness, compassion, gratitude, mutuality, service, and patience. He became focused on "doing something useful with (his) life", more open to seeing the goodness inherent in everything and everyone, including himself. This grounded him and freed him from becoming preoccupied with himself to working for positive change in the world, including the non-human world. The latter he expressed through "tending a little plot of land", the vegetables and flowers that he grows, and "recycling".

Walter – "Put on the fast lane to development"

Walter, age 67, is a retired practitioner from England. His 25 years of work in the profession involved holding various positions in community institutions, private practice, as well as teaching and training students in a university psychotherapy/counselling program.

Walter identified his spiritual orientation as "Post-Christian" and Quaker, which he said had developed since his middle-age years. For him, spirituality entails the "crucial" element of

inseparability and interconnection with all others and with Creation, rooted in his religious faith and theological tradition. He noted the presence of "a moral element" in his experience of this oneness, involving a responsibility to the outside world, through which he can and does become "changed for the better".

Walter described the impact that clients have had on his spirituality as being "put on the fast lane to my development" - including spiritual development, and which he later came to see as being his "spiritual journey" itself. He spoke of "becoming a better person" because of his work with clients, who challenged his understanding of his own and other spiritual traditions.

One of the major themes in Walter's experience of client impacts was his recognition over time that the spiritual dimension permeates and is present in every aspect of his life and his work, including in his encounters with clients, regardless of how explicit or implicit it may appear. He spoke of its subtle presence in the therapy room, its inseparable intertwining with his work, and the rest of his life. This led to and connected with another theme - a movement toward simplicity in his way of life and being, simplifying his understanding of spirituality, shedding the need for sensationalism and "drama", and becoming more humble. For Walter, this also meant "having a lighter footprint" on the Earth and in relationships with other people - decreasing his demands on others in his relationships, as well as on the Earth's resources.

Maria – "Brought my spirituality up to a different level"

Maria, a Latin American participant originally from Argentina, resides and works in the province of Ontario in Canada. Now at the age of 64, she has been in practice in Canada for 30 years, with previous education and licensing as a psychologist in her home country. Maria's practice has involved working primarily in community mental health organizations, working with populations affected by poverty, mental illness, and addictions.

In sharing her understanding of spirituality, Maria identified it with her Roman Catholic faith and emphasized its inseparability from herself as a person. She remarked: “I don’t see it different than just myself, I don’t separate spirituality from myself”, and ascribed this to her upbringing and culture in which religious rituals, church, prayer, and spiritual experience and practice were part of daily life.

At the same time, Maria noted that she did not “give much thought” to spirituality, taking it for granted, until after she began psychotherapy practice and was confronted with challenging, complex, painful and seemingly hopeless cases, which required her to search more deeply for her own inner resources. Working with such clients, Maria said, brought her spirituality “up to a different level”, though her own personal experiences in that period also influenced this. She recognized more deeply the need for and importance of prayer, and the deeper meaning of spiritual practice. She also experienced and recognized on a very profound level, what it meant to love in the way Jesus loved and taught us to love.

Maria summarized the impact of clients on her spirituality as “ongoing”, “enormous”, “humbling”, and “immense”, particularly in her coming to understand and live out her spirituality “from the inside out”. Her encounters with clients, their struggles, and her reflective practice and inner work, led her to find within herself experientially, and to live, that which she had been taught and surrounded with while growing up. This also lead to a parallel transformation in her therapy practice, where this spiritual development resulted in her work being more grounded, guided from within, as opposed to a “mechanical” practice of skills, techniques, and theory.

Along with these changes, Maria’s understanding of humanity, as well as the nature and source of its problems deepened. She stopped being “afraid” of people, particularly those

deemed potentially dangerous in society. She recognized the human need for connection, recognition of worth, and relationship, and her own responsibility in this regard in each encounter with another human person. This resulted in her being more attentive and responsive to others' needs – those close by, like "the homeless" and those far away, like refugees, and those affected by natural disasters and war. Maria also alluded to her attempts to "help the environment" by "recycling".

Pat – "Breaking through a veneer"

Pat, a 63 year old practitioner in private practice in the province of Alberta, Canada, with 26 years of experience, described her spirituality as being "eclectic" and "esoteric", centering on the notion of congruence between her inner state and values, and her life "on the outside". She expressed this as being "that who I am on the inside would match who I am on the outside… or that's the goal". This, for Pat, involves "the development of the soul" and of character, a process often subtle and outside of our immediate awareness - a "breaking through a veneer".

Discovering purpose, and purpose of life in general, was also an important element in Pat's understanding and experience of spirituality. She noted that her spirituality is an outcome of her disillusionment with the faith (Evangelical Christianity) she had grown up in, and lived in her earlier adult years.

In relation to psychotherapy practice in particular, Pat spoke of the spiritual dimension of her work as being "in service to something greater", present in the therapeutic encounter with her clients. This entailed both an element of mystery, surrender and transcendence, as well as of "being human" and grounded in "that more human place".

For Pat, the major impact of clients on her spirituality came from having to "trust the process", especially during challenging client-therapist interactions. Through this, she became

more aware of the presence and power of the spiritual in her work, and in her life outside of practice. She recognized her own limitations and deepened her trust in the deeper meaning and purpose of that beyond her control, as well as her understanding of the spiritual as a guiding and a grounding force. In turn, she allowed more space for this dimension in her own life, growing in humility. Pat spoke about her clients as inspiring her to greater courage in looking inward with honesty at her own areas in need of change, to greater hope in "life's purpose", and to allowing herself "more space" for her imperfections and "humanness".

Through her work with clients who reminded her of her past in "organized religion", Pat was able to come to terms with this difficult aspect of her life. She recognized the value of this spiritual tradition in the lives of these clients, opening herself to a broader reality, beyond the "safe" spirituality she had developed for herself. She also recognized areas of her own spirituality which she had neglected as a result of these earlier experiences, and which she then worked to integrate and be attentive to. This, according to Pat, resulted in a greater sense of wholeness and "a renewed curiosity and enjoyment of my own life".

France – "Keeping humble and deeply appreciative of life"

France, a 63-year old practitioner, of French-Canadian origin residing and working in the province of Ontario, Canada, has been in practice for 38 years. In addition to her private practice, she is also active in teaching and training new therapists at a university level. France defined her spirituality as being mainly "an openness", and "a search for what I value in life, and for what other people value" as well as "a feeling of being connected to something bigger than myself". She alluded to the sense of meaning and purpose as being a part of this connection, and of her spiritual development as entailing a growing acceptance "that things are the way they are". For France, being spiritual and growing spiritually was concomitant with becoming more accepting,

"more tolerant, and learning to live with not knowing".

France identified the impact of clients on her as grounding, "keeping (her) humble" and "deeply appreciative of life". She had difficulty naming ways in which clients had impacted her spirituality specifically, tending instead to speak of how her own spirituality seemed to affect them and the therapy process. She did note that her awareness of the presence of a spiritual dimension in her work increased over time, in part through experiences in the therapy room and her own reflexivity about her work, which made the spiritual more explicit and tangible for her as a result. This led her to "become more aware that it plays a big role in people's lives". In particular, France attributed this change to the influence of clients who were themselves struggling with spiritual issues, with their belief systems, values, with questions of meaning and purpose. This, she said, "brought it to the forefront for me" and "strengthened my attitudes openness, tolerance… tolerance for ambiguity, for uncertainty".

At the same time, France was clear that client influence played a relatively small role in her spiritual development, and that her process of change was more a product of many other, outside factors combined with those in her work. For her, the key was being in, and forming relationships with others at a deep level – clients or otherwise. Thus, her work as a psychotherapist simply afforded her such relational opportunities, which she would have otherwise found or sought elsewhere, had she not been a therapist. Through her work with clients, France came to recognize that "real change is hard and that often the best thing we can do is to stop trying so hard and just be".

Isabel – "Confronting ethical dilemmas"

Isabel, a 62-year old practitioner from Uruguay, has worked in the field for 35 years. Her experience encompasses providing psychotherapy in health care and psychiatric settings, as well

as private practice. As a result of her experiences and reflection, Isabel eventually left direct work with clients and began teaching and training new psychotherapists in her private educational institute, which she had founded with a number of like-minded colleagues.

Isabel described her spirituality as grounded in "humanistic values", which point beyond one's individual concerns and matters of daily survival, emphasize relationality, and which, according to her, guide and give meaning and purpose to life. She identified those values as being: "authenticity, honesty, relevance", with relevance being the consciousness of the consequences of one's actions – for others and the larger environment. She emphasized the notion of "responsibility of acting, especially as concerns others - and others being also the non-human environment". The ethical aspect of her spirituality were closely identified with an "ethics of resistance" against the dominant pressures of individualism and consumerism. She noted that her past involvement with the Methodist church has influenced her current spirituality, with its focus on "life before death".

Isabel identified clients' main impact as confronting her with ethical dilemmas of working within the limitations of the psychotherapy profession. She described the conflict between her spiritual values and professional practice, the focus of which remains on the individual, subjective wellbeing of clients, without questioning the ethical dimension and broader consequences of this "wellbeing" on others, and which does not include consideration of the sociocultural and economic dimension of the patients' life. Isabel's experiences led her to recognize the incongruence of work that focuses on "serving the patient's wishes" without considering the ethical dimensions of their actions and treatment of others. She became only more aware of the importance and ethical necessity of practicing the values she espouses, and need to work on change on a social level. She also recognized the extent to which the

psychotherapy profession, as practiced today, is part of "the dominant paradigm" of an individualistic and materialistic world, reinforcing and serving to maintain the status quo of a largely dysfunctional and self-absorbed society.

This led her to the decision to leave psychotherapy practice altogether and to devote her efforts to the education and training of therapists, incorporating a strong ethical, social and ecological consciousness into her work, and conveying her learning to future generation of practitioners, as a way of bringing about change in the profession and society. For Isabel, most of her spiritual development and resulting outward change took place outside of her professional practice, which she saw as limiting her spiritual growth and possibility of positive change.

Paul – "Pushed out of comfort zone"

For Paul, a 58-year old participant from the province of Quebec in Canada, spirituality is embedded in his Evangelical Christian faith tradition. Paul has been a psychotherapist for 27 years, most of these spent in private practice. He described his earlier years of work as being with/within different Christian churches, before beginning a general practice in a large city to which he later moved.

Paul's understanding of spirituality was closely connected to his relationship with God, within the Christian tradition. He spoke of this as a relationship which "grounds" him, forms his understanding of: "who I am, of *whose* I am, where I derive myself, my identity, my purpose… and a relationship that provides me with an experience of being loved… of being known… unconditionally loved…and delighted in".

In Paul's understanding, his work as a psychotherapist has been possible *because* of his spirituality, without which he would not have had "the patience or the empathy, naturally (…), to do the work that I am doing". At the same time, he described psychotherapy as work that "does

work on me", exposing his own wounds and areas of life which need attention. This, Paul sees as God's way of challenging him, of guiding him toward greater spiritual growth and development.

For Paul, the major impact of clients on his spirituality came from being "pushed out of (his) comfort zone" and exposed to challenges and questions he would not have otherwise faced - including engaging more deeply with belief systems different than his own. This confirmed for him the intimate presence and working of God in his life. While deepening his own spirituality, these experiences enabled Paul to recognize his common humanity with other people and moved him towards a deeper understanding of human weakness, predicaments, and conflicts. This also led to improving his own relationships with others, and his marriage. His empathy increased, as did his sense of God's presence in the world. All of this has resulted in Paul "slowing down", becoming more grounded, more effective in his work, with increased capacity to appreciate beauty, other people, and their experiences. It also resulted in an increased awareness of the shallowness prevalent in society, feelings of loneliness and alienation within it, while his connection to God, his own spirituality, and his own purpose strengthened and deepened.

Claire – "Becoming real"

Claire is a 54 year old psychotherapist in private practice, who also teaches university-level psychotherapy courses in Ontario, Canada. With 25 years in practice, she has worked with individuals, couples and families, including in community, non-profit organizations in the field. Originally from the province of Quebec, Claire identified her spiritual orientation with Evangelical Christianity. She expressed her understanding of spirituality as being "something that is comprised of going beyond myself", involving the notion of transcendence, a relationship with "the Judeo-Christian God", as well as the existential elements of meaning and purpose. Claire emphasized the centrality of connection and connectedness in her understanding of

spirituality, limiting this however to connection with God, and "to a certain extent, with others", in a "kind of sharing of humanity".

Claire saw spirituality as being "central" to her work as a psychotherapist, an engagement through which "something greater" can take place, surpassing the details of what goes on in a session – a process through which God works as well. She experienced her encounters with a diversity of clients as providing her with rich opportunities for spiritual reflection and questioning. This was particularly the case in regards to suffering, transcending one's pain and one's past, forgiveness, finding meaning and purpose, and the essence of "what it means to be human". As a result of these encounters and her reflections, Claire's spirituality became "much more deeply personal, much more intuitive", with "much more reliance on the Holy Spirit". This has enabled her to practice with greater openness, confidence, curiosity, and grounding, allowing more space for the client and the therapeutic process itself to unfold.

The trust of clients and their vulnerability had the most impact on Claire, contributing to her development of humility, gratitude, faith, and trust in God's guidance and presence - in the difficulties of life and in the process of spiritual growth. Witnessing clients' striving to find and create meaning and purpose brought her to recognize how important having these is in our lives, especially for spiritual development. Clients also taught Claire "to be real" and authentic, especially in her practice. Through this she embraced her own humanity and limitations, along with those of her clients. Claire had little to say about how all of this has led to any change in her daily life in the world. She noted adopting some clients' ways of coping to her daily routine to "feel better" and endeavoring to "make a difference" in the lives of clients encountering systemic barriers in society. In speaking about any changes in her relation to society and to Creation, She commented on there being "nothing new under the sun" in today's society and world and did not

make any connections to her own change or role in relation to this aspect.

Amelia – "The starfish approach"

Amelia is a 51-year old psychotherapist and art therapist in private practice, in the province of Ontario, Canada, with 25 years of experience. She works with adults, youth, as well as with children. She described herself as having been "purposefully disconnected" from spirituality throughout her time of growing up, and into early years of professional practice. It was her clients, specifically those from First Nations cultures, who broadened her perspective, and who introduced her to a different understanding and experience of spirituality than that which she had formed for herself before. Having been an "agnostic", she came to believe in the existence of a Creator. Amelia's present spirituality continues to be connected with First Nations teachings and traditions, which, she says, allow her a "very direct" experience of and relationship with the Creator, with other people, and with the Earth. The element of connection was an important theme in both Amelia's understanding of her spirituality and of her professional practice.

For Amelia, clients "played a huge role" in her own spiritual becoming, as did her use of art in her work. Through clients' expression of their experiences and struggles in art forms, as well as their sharing of their vulnerability, Amelia experienced the presence of "the other" in the therapy room. These experiences made her aware of a greater, spiritual presence in the therapeutic relationship. The suffering Amelia encountered in her clients through her work led her to seek a greater meaning and sense of purpose in existence, to face her fear of death, and to find inner peace, thus contributing to her development of a spiritual understanding.

Through this process, Amelia came to see her work with clients as being a spiritual practice itself, and her calling. She became more humble and open to clients' needs and experiences, and also more confident and "intuitive" in her work with them. Her ability to be

present and to listen grew, becoming deepened and strengthened. The connection shared with her clients in therapy led her to a greater recognition of the importance of connection and relationships in human life, and in the functioning of human societies. Through her deepened awareness and experience with marginalized clients, she also came face to face with the magnitude of disconnection and loneliness prevalent in modern society. And she recognized more deeply the importance of speaking out and "standing up" for those affected by these isolating and marginalizing trends. She has come to see her calling in her work, and her life, as being a "witness" to and for others' experience, and a "steward" of Creation. She characterized her philosophy, developed through all these experiences, as "the starfish approach" of focusing on making a difference to those she can, wherever she can.

Client Impact on Psychotherapist Spiritual Development: Key Themes

The major themes and sub-themes which emerged from participant accounts will be presented below, supported by quotes from the therapists' interviews and written reflections. These themes and sub-themes are also summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Themes and sub-themes of client impact on psychotherapist spiritual development

DEEPENING	INNER EXPANSION	ENRICHMENT	INTEGRATION	BREAKING THROUGH	OUTWARD GROWTH
Introspection – Reaching in	Making space for something greater	Gratitude/ Appreciation/ Wonder	Opening up	Freedom and agency	Presence and Responsibility in Relationship
Grounding/ Anchoring	Pushing against/ Pushing out of comfort zone	Purpose and Meaning	Joining together/ Continuity	Questioning and Disillusionment	Integrity and Congruence
Humility			Becoming whole/ Becoming Real	Inner/Outer Conflict/ Shift in Values	Beyond ME or Back to ME

Theme 1 – Deepening

Sub-themes: Introspection-reaching inwards, Anchoring/Grounding, Humility

The majority of participants expressed that their work with clients contributed to a deepening of their spirituality, and have referred to this explicitly and directly – without hesitation.

> "I would say that it [my spirituality] has deepened." (Pat)
>
> "I got to [a place which is] very deep... because it is the outcome of being deeply changed." (Isabel)

This deepening was described as a process beginning with **introspection** - an initial inwards look into themselves and their inner experience in stillness and attentiveness, in response to encounters with clients which touched, or unsettled them in some way, and with which they felt helpless or challenged. There was a turning of attention to listen to a voice within, and a reaching deeper inside in order to seek a connection with "something bigger" yet hidden in their innermost self.

> "Finally it hit me – no human could help me or [client]. I had to pray to God (…) I kept hearing an inner voice saying: 'It will end soon' (…)." (Dr. I.M.)

This element often appeared first in participants' sharing of the change they experienced, suggesting an initial movement inward so as to lay the groundwork for all subsequent change. The deepening through introspection led to a sense of **grounding** – finding and connecting with this "something bigger", something stable, something which they could trust and on which they could rely for guidance, and something in which they could anchor their unsettled selves. Sometimes, it was something they intrinsically knew they had within, but had been unable to reach before. Overall, there was a shift away from experiencing spirituality as something

extrinsic and drawn from the outside, to a reality intrinsic and integral to themselves, expressed and lived from the inside out, with evermore intensity and consciousness.

> "It's like you know you have something [inside]…but for a while you have not been in touch with that something that you have." (Maria)

> "[It became] definitely much more deeply personal, much more intuitive (…) and deeply experiential (…) [with] much more reliance on the Holy Spirit." (Claire)

Participants' experience of grounding often led to increased trust. Experiences with clients, whether specific ones or their accumulation over time, enabled practitioners to recognize the potential for positive outcomes, and the presence of a larger reality which in some way was "taking care" of the process, or, the process taking care of itself. For some, it was about an increased trust in God's care for them and their clients, as well as for the world. For others a trust in the process of life and in the "greater scheme of things", as well as in their own inner experience and guidance. In their work, it also referred to an increase of trust in clients' own capacity to resolve their issues and look after themselves, to heal. Moreover, seven of the participants linked their experience of grounding to trust in some "greater purpose" of difficult experiences and situations in therapy, for both therapist and client, and in the power of goodness and of truth to eventually prevail, in the most hopeless or difficult situations. This allowed them to remain grounded and open in their work, providing stability and grounding for the client's process as well, while letting go of fear.

> "[Now] I am not afraid that you [the client] are going through this huge struggle because I've learned from my [other] clients (…) having observed that through my

> clients, and I know that at some point, God's gonna take care of you in your relationship with Him." (Claire)

This deepening was also an inner allowing themselves to rest in and to be held in something deeper than the surface concerns of their lives and their work, and let go of some of their fears. It was associated with participants' sense of their identity and belonging in a greater spiritual reality of life, within which they came to see themselves.

> "I have more of a peace around death, and my own death. I've witnessed many terrible things [in my work]… and I guess I've just come to accept death as part of life more than I would have if I hadn't done this work." (Amelia)

Four participants spoke about their deepened understanding of their own worth and place in the world, of a deeper intrinsic value or quality, which helped them to gain a stronger, more grounded sense of their spiritual identity, and their humanity, and with it, a sense of responsibility to use it accordingly.

> "I went from like, an inferiority complex to, just thinking I was a worthwhile, intelligent human being who could do a lot of good in the world." (Dr. I.M.)

> "So for me the spirituality [that developed] is to keep reminding me about my own humanity… you know." (Maria)

For others, this greater integration of the spiritual into their understanding of who they are came through the recognition of their ordinariness as a human being and in increased **humility** – a grounding in their earthiness, as one among others, shedding of pretense, and deflating their previously inflated sense of self. Becoming more humble, and learning what this means, as well

as experiencing a sense of inner peace which came with it, was an element present in almost all of participant accounts.

> "I used to, I used to think I was special (laughs) (…) Yes, yes, and, and I think, I think this sort of ordinariness that I was saying is now… I guess is like a sense of humility (…) I am more at peace [now]." (Walter)

> "I think that they've taught me humility (…) That we don't have a lot of impact on others in our own lives. The impact we do have can be very intense and powerful but it's… it's small". (France)

At the same time, the more their spirituality deepened, the more their understanding of practice, and their work with clients did as well. This was reflected in participants' increasing awareness of the deeper realities underlying surface appearances – in themselves and in their clients - beyond symptom-reduction, alleviation of pain, to discovering, exploring, and addressing the underlying meaning and causes. This also brought them to a deeper awareness in turn of the consequences of symptom-focused practice, to the detriment of clients themselves, and the risks involved in abandoning the very roots, and original meaning, of psychotherapy practice. A sense of sadness and urgency seemed to permeate these accounts, a sense of something important within the profession at risk of being lost and carried away. There was also a call to the profession to reconnect with, and reclaim its roots.

> I am very worried beside because there is an uprise, a very strong uprise of all the schools of psychotherapy which are more superficial, and more based on suggesting… (…), and there is a tendency to forget what was at the core [of

> psychotherapy](…) the, in the sense of a deep understanding, a deeper, much deeper understanding of the human mind. (Isabel)

> "What would it mean for us to come alongside our clients to help them make sense of the 'words of their suffering soul' [psycho-patho-logy]? As opposed to just help pull the batteries out of their smoke detector and say that everything is OK, and help them adapt to the symptoms… of their suffering soul." (Paul)

Theme 2 – Inner Expansion/Broadening

Sub-themes: Making space (for something greater), Pushing against/Pushing out of comfort zone

Participants also spoke about their spirituality expanding as a result of client encounters over time. This involved an expansion of their awareness, understanding, capacity to experience, and their experience of spirituality itself, as well as of the world as seen through its lens. It often led to an explicit recognition of one's narrow view and preconceived notions as limiting and self-seeking. There was a widening or broadening of perspective - an expanding of their inner, spiritual horizons and capacity.

> "Maybe my sense of spirituality was too narrowly defined at the dramatic end… and became broader." (Walter)

Most participants expressed becoming aware of the spiritual reality, of the sacred, as being present where previously they would not have noticed it or thought it would exist, as "implicit or underlying" (Walter) all of reality, including within. As a result, the expansion experienced was also a **making space** within themselves for this new and greater reality, understanding, experience, and awareness – and for the sacred itself, which presented itself to them through the lived experience of client encounters. They needed to adjust, shift, and make

room for it in their conscious awareness.

> "In a way, it [spirituality] has become more explicit (…) I was not as attuned to it [before] (…) so I became more aware, that it plays a big role in people's lives." (France)

Experiences with clients whose presence contrasted sharply with their own notions and experience of spirituality, or whose clinical presentations were a challenge to work with, often pushed participants against and out of their comfort zones. This **pushing against** and **pushing out of the comfort zone** was also a pushing against their own inner resistance to accommodate and make space for the starkly new, the unfamiliar, and the potentially threatening or unsettling to their spiritual understanding and belief system. It was also simply a pushing against and out of their comfort zone of clinical competence – which necessitated a stretch of their spiritual capacity as well, in order to respond to the demands of practice. This brought with it increased spiritual development out of sheer necessity, as a side effect of their willingness to engage in the clinical work needed.

> "The work my clients were doing with me would bring me up against this [what I was not dealing with on my own], you know, so I couldn't avoid, I couldn't avoid. So in that sense it pushed my development. Now I would see that development in me as a spiritual journey." (Walter)

> "[I]t pushed me out of my comfort zone (…) having to deal with various beliefs and unbeliefs [of clients]." (Paul)

Most participants also described this making space and pushing out as a more gradual and gentle process, which occurred through assimilating, listening to and observing clients' own engagement with and expression of their spirituality (or lack thereof). This introduced them to

different spiritual understandings, beliefs, and ways of living, which they then felt attracted to, pulled towards and sought out on their own.

> "I really hadn't had very much connection with anything that I would identify as spiritual (…) I think I very much was being purposeful in leaving that out (…) I think clients have played a huge role in that [her eventual embracing of spirituality]." (Amelia)

Theme 3 – Enrichment

Subthemes: Gratitude-Appreciation-Wonder, Purpose and meaning

A sense of being spiritually enriched, nourished and filled was expressed by most participants. There was an increase in their capacity to experience, appreciate, and to recognize the profound richness inherent in the spiritual or sacred, and in its presence in the world and in their lives/awareness. This was expressed by participants as an increased and deepened sense of awareness of the blessings in their lives and around them, and resulted in experiences of **gratitude, appreciation, and wonder.** There was a greater recognition of the value of their own lives, relationships, and what they had in general. Participants often attributed this to experiences with clients which revealed their own struggles as minor or insignificant in comparison to those of their clients, and which exposed them to, and allowed them to draw from, the richness they recognized in their own lives as a result.

> "I see that my struggles are not nearly as difficult as most of the people I work with… or don't have the same weight as they would have if I didn't have this opportunity to be present to this other stuff that's out there." (Amelia)

> "I think the work with clients also brings me back to being so grateful, that I am so lucky in my life, that I have a happy, fulfilling life, and great people around me. And so my

> feeling of gratitude is often awakened when I hear the stories of clients, and how they have struggled, or are still struggling, so it keeps things in perspective." (France)

Some spoke of their growth, enriched through client encounters, as benefitting client and therapist alike. For three participants, the focus here however was on the "helpfulness" of client work for their own healing.

> "I feel like I was there to help and it makes me… it's like you get therapy… much like I am my own therapist. I feel like being a therapist (…) how that heals you… How being a therapist heals you." (Dr. I.M.)

Being a therapist has been such an intricate and significant part of many of these practitioners' lives that it was difficult for them to imagine their life, their spirituality, and the development experienced, without it. Psychotherapy work was seen as very much a part of their identity, and thus also of their spirituality – enriching both in and of itself. Encounters with clients were viewed as providing a relational context necessary for spiritual development to occur, which otherwise they would have sought elsewhere. The gratitude and appreciation was also expressed for the opportunity to do the work of psychotherapy, which provided the means for participants to engage in what they valued – especially deep relationships with others. This however, again brought with it the risk of using work with clients as a means for their own ends, feeding a sense of self-importance.

> "I think therapy gives us permission to go there, to have that level of intimacy with some people. People bring very deep issues, concerns that they wouldn't talk about with their neighbour." (France)

The experience of having their spirituality enriched and enhanced was also expressed by

participants as recognizing, finding, and/or developing a **sense of meaning and purpose** in their lives, as a result of their work. Through client examples, participants learned that meaning and purpose can be created in the most difficult, and tragic circumstances, enhancing their understanding of what spirituality entails, fostering hope, and inner resilience. With the recognition of how important having a sense of purpose and meaning is, came the recognition of the importance of making a contribution of one's own to the world, of one's responsibility to contribute, regardless of one's situation.

> "[E]ven in the worst possible circumstances (…) you know, the things I would find the worst possible, that there is that innate striving for purpose, for meaning, and to be able to contribute something (…) And I realized how important that is in my own life as well." (Claire)

Others spoke of chance, coincidence, and the idea of synchronicity – a sense of "something bigger" or outside of their influence, pure gift, guiding the events and encounters that enabled this developmental process. This often brought an element of surprise, and a sense of wonder, with a greater meaning and purpose beyond even that which they could recognize or understand.

> Something was happening to me spiritually at the same time (…) and it was a bit like, is this coincidence? Or is it connected, these two things happening at the same time? (…) So it's curious you know I guess Jung's idea of synchronicity might well be kind of the way of accounting for that (…) My journey is something that I understand retrospectively, like, the coincidences that have occurred, the kind of life-changing moments (…) there are patterns, or one finds patterns. (Walter)

Theme 4 – Integration

Subthemes: Opening up, Joining together/Continuity, Becoming whole/Becoming Real

A process of integration of different elements and experiences within oneself, as a result of the changes described in the first three themes, was reported by all participants. It often came through experiencing vulnerability in the face of the challenges presented by client work, and one's own limitations. This vulnerability, when accepted and embraced, created for participants an **opening up** to experiences and elements within them and their own lives which they have suppressed, ignored, forgotten, or of which they were simply unaware. It also created an opening up to others and to others' experience and reality, and to make connections – within themselves and with the reality around them. This opening up tended to result in profound experiences of love, increased tolerance for differences and for ambiguity, but also, in a few cases, a greater awareness of and intolerance for injustice. And, for all participants, it led to a recognition of the common humanity of client and therapist. They experienced a greater sense of connection(s) in how they saw and experienced others, moving away from previously held prejudice or fear of certain individuals or groups.

> "I think it strengthened my attitudes of openness, tolerance, tolerance for ambiguity, for uncertainty." (France)

> "I recognize that these are people, just like me. They are not, they don't need to be so separate from me." (Amelia)

Three specifically spoke of the love that they experienced feeling and developing within themselves in relation to their clients, which then they generalized also to other people, and to a lesser extent, to Creation, as a whole. This opening up also deepened participants' capacity to

give and to receive love, their understanding and experience of what it means to love, and made it more central to their life and their work. Furthermore, six of the participants alluded to a greater understanding of divine love, and their responsibility in sharing and giving it through themselves, in their work and everyday life.

> "And the way I would put it, it's kind of embarrassing but, I would say I was loving them, it was a loving relationship." (Walter)
>
> "So… and him [Jesus], he talked about love you know [breaks down, begins to cry]. And so it's… trying to [give] that sort of help [for these clients]… you know." (Maria)

A process of **joining together**, of connecting and reconnecting of their experiences in the context of their spirituality occurred through, and as a result of, working with clients for most. This was an acknowledging, and a bringing together of their past and present experiences into one whole of their developing spirituality, creating a sense of **continuity** of meaning and of development and growth, from a spiritual perspective. Participants spoke of clients' stories and healing as being the catalyst for their own inner work of connecting, accepting, and re-connecting of experiences, of past and present, and of dimensions of themselves and their lives from which they had disconnected, consciously or unconsciously.

Although their stories differed, some practitioners described painful and difficult early-life experiences with certain forms of spirituality, which remained unresolved and unreconciled within them, and which led them to reject the notion of spirituality altogether, or certain elements of it. It was through their work with clients, which opened up the possibility to revisit these elements within, that they were able to integrate their spiritual past with the present. In being exposed to different expressions of spirituality in clients, they became more aware of their own, and more willing to expose themselves again to what they had previously suppressed, or cut off.

They were able to see their spiritual past and present with new eyes and opened themselves to new possibilities of spiritual understanding. Ultimately, this led to embracing spirituality anew, in a new wholeness, having reconstructed, integrated, and moved beyond their previous limited understanding and experience.

> "I didn't know what it [spirituality] meant, I thought it was sort of, you know, I thought it was something that people just said and I didn't even really know what it meant (…) But I think I had to go through that journey myself, through other people's [clients'] voices I think." (Amelia)

> [Through this client] I was inspired to pay closer attention to my own soulful places. I had come to expect that the work I had previously done was sufficient (…) Instead I was prompted to (…) commit more fully to the callings that were deep in my own heart. [Now] I continue to seek out ways to pattern my days in such a way as to feed the soulful life I had started to take for granted. (Pat)

Another common element in the narratives was a more painful process where participants experienced themselves, and their spirituality being stretched, pulled, "reorganized" and formed by their encounters with clients. Some described this explicitly as the sacred, or God, "doing work on them", through their clients and client encounters. Others referred to the work of psychotherapy itself requiring greater reliance on their spirituality, thus necessitating continued attention to this dimension in their lives.

> "I feel like I am under some kind of divine lesson plan, which is both psychological and spiritual. (…) They teach me things." (Dr. I.M.)

> "The work that has a way of continually exposing issues in my own life that need addressing. And I feel, I understand from my Christian perspective that it seems that God is wanting to address me in order to lead me from distorted beliefs about myself, or others, or Himself (…) It's a work that… it does work on me." (Paul)

This inner work, in all cases, is what led to a greater integration and sense of wholeness for participants. They alluded to **becoming whole and becoming real** – becoming more themselves and more authentic, living from their inner core rather than reacting to outside pressures or circumstances, becoming more spontaneous, genuine, and more free in their work and relationship with clients. They further emphasized that this experience, resulting from their work, allowed them in turn to do the work at a whole new level, and with new quality. There was a shifting of emphasis away from style and technique, towards relying on and trusting the process of therapy, of allowing and creating space for the client's experience. Paradoxically, this stepping back also entailed a deeper, more committed focus on, and engagement with, the underlying issues and dynamics of clients and the therapeutic relationship.

> "I know lots and lots and lots of technique and I'm you know, quite proficient in all that, but honestly when I go back into the room with my client it's about me being (…) They taught me to be real." (Claire)

> "As I've done this work more and more, I trust my client more and more." (Pat)

It was also reflected in a more collaborative stance in relation to clients, a move away from what one described as a preachy attitude of an expert, to recognizing and embracing a new understanding of themselves as facilitators and collaborators in the client's own work and process. There was a more genuine connection to not only the client, but to their role in relation

to the client.

> "They taught me (…) not to preach. So you know, so I don't preach (…) [I learned] the role of the therapist is to facilitate." (Dr. I. M.)

On a broader scale, this becoming real also entailed greater reflection about, and becoming more deeply aware of, the human reality they witnessed. This brought most participants to question, clarify, widen, and at times also to change their understanding and view of human nature and experience, and of suffering in particular. There was an underlying element in every participant's account of the need to integrate the reality of suffering – their own and others' into their spiritual understanding, so as to experience a greater sense of wholeness and inner integration. Most participants expressed existential questions and the need to find meaning and to make sense of what they witnessed in their work, and what they experienced as a result. Such experiences created an appreciation of the very process of suffering and pain, and of client (and therefore human) capacity and choice for overcoming it and for healing – for becoming whole. This, in turn, impacted participants' practice in positive ways, as well as brought more meaning, and agency, into their own lives and difficult experiences.

> "I've seen some people come through some really heavy things and you know, I guess that that's part of it, is recognizing that those things are, they're present in a lot of people's minds but it's how you, it's whether you allow them to take you under with them or you rise a little bit above them." (Amelia)

Theme 5 – Breaking Through

Subthemes: Freedom and Agency, Questioning and Disillusionment, Inner Conflict

The inner integration described above provided a more robust, stronger essence to emerge and to grow out of these experiences for participants, which enabled the inner growth to begin breaking

through to the outside. There was a shedding of concern for external factors and appearances in their stories, and an allowing of something more fundamental, at their very core to emerge outward. This was the point in most participants' experience where the inner change, growth, and integration achieved began to break through and to be expressed in relation to the outside world, and the reality in which they lived. It was a breaking through their own prior limits and boundaries of existence and ways of being – of acting on the inner change experienced and of redirecting the focus of their lives accordingly, and beginning to live from the inside out. This brought a new sense and experience of **freedom and agency** for many – to follow and to act on, and live out their inner experience of change, beyond that which became stifling and incongruent. There was an inner essence that had developed, matured, and grown sufficiently within them through their work, to break through their previous "norms" of being and of relating to the world, including in therapy practice in turn.

> "So that it frees me to be." (Claire)
>
> "It is just a part of who I am, and it's almost like I've allowed my true self to come out doing this work." (Amelia)

Over time, this experience led five participants to a new awareness which was unsettling, and which resulted in profound **questioning and disillusionment**, when their changed self had encountered their outer reality, including that of their clients – which itself had remained the same. This created both **inner and external conflict** for most - an upheaval of awareness, sense of identity, of their inner sense of spiritual stability and understanding, which broke ground for greater growth to occur, allowing them to see in a new light, but which also presented the risk of avoiding further change so as to avoid the uncomfortable consequences. Through client experiences, participants also came to recognize to a greater extent the role that people play in

creating their own misery, individually and collectively, and the responsibility this entails. Some experienced a growing intolerance to clients' apathy, lack of meaning and purpose in life, their self-serving and egocentric use of therapy to justify their actions. This created inner conflict for participants in their role, leading to further questioning.

> "People who have no sense of meaning at all in their lives, I find it difficult to relate and to tolerate that sense of despair or nothing to hold on to." (France)

At times, the inner conflict experienced involved a confrontation of one's earlier naiveté about the nature of the world's problems, of human goodness and capacity for change, and of themselves as persons and as therapists in their role. While recognizing the capacity and potential for people to change for the better, participants also came to recognize the widespread failure to live up to and make use of that potential.

> [A]s a young man I wanted the world so much better than it was (…) And I thought, well, if I become a counsellor, will that change people one by one and so the world will get better? And well, it's not as simple as that (…) I thought that if we just, if people just knew, had information, things would change. So all was needed was information… And it's not, it's not like that (…) [What people need] is a change of heart. (Walter)

Participants also reported shifts in their values and value systems, attitudes, and worldviews, including in relation to practice and the profession. A new awareness formed as a result of their experiences, and changes that had already occurred within them, owing to client encounters and reflection. They began to question what they had known, thought, believed, and lived previously. They questioned what they were taught and what they were told. There was a sense of struggle, of conscious, purposeful work and effort involved, as well as of a more passive process,

occurring naturally, as a by-product of their daily work and life.

> "It was a real, deliberate, conscious kind of growth process (…) The struggle of Jacob, the night of struggle when he went from Jacob to Israel (…) I would say that describes it." (Claire)

> It shifted my whole value system, like, I was taught, like most Americans, like most people are taught – succeed, make a lot of money, get a lot of stuff, have prestige, and you know, get other people to like you. And if you do all those things you'll be a big success. It's all ego… And what I learned from my practice and other things is like, it's all spiritual, it's all gratitude, patience, kindness. I mean (…) and the connection with people, [and] closer to God as well. (Dr. I.M.)

For four participants, this process also meant coming to a greater realization of the discrepancy and incongruence between the demands of love and spiritual values on the one hand, and the values espoused by the larger society they lived and worked in, being exemplified and embodied also in clients. This created ethical dilemmas, and entailed recognizing the superficiality and narrow, individualistic focus of many peoples' concerns, and questioning their own complicity further enabling egocentrism through their professional role.

> And I stopped seeing her (…)because I could not tolerate or naturalize a life devoted to taking houses away from people. But another therapist would not question that… So I learned about human nature that in fact, not always, the need to be helped, very often it's a very neurotic and narcissistic need. I learned that a lot of people are only concerned about stupid, stupid things, and that's when I became very resistant to this. (Isabel)

Participants also voiced their concerns about some current trends in the profession and in clinical practice to become more prescriptive, mechanical, shallow, fix-oriented, and enabling of a self-

preoccupied, materialistic, and consumerist culture. This recognition, itself a result of having developed deeper spiritual values, further created awareness of the need for change of focus within both the profession and their own practice. It also brought about a sense of alienation and isolation, yet at the same time strengthened their commitment to the practice of psychotherapy, and the betterment of the profession itself.

> "The problem is there is a vacuum [of services to address deeper, underlying issues]… and nobody is understanding how dangerous that vacuum is." (Maria)

Greater resistance to and rejection of materialist values based on experience in practice was articulated strongly by three of the participants. Their spiritual development brought them to question the very work they were doing as practitioners, and their role in enabling injustice and complacency.

> In general there has been a strong tendency of psychotherapy to become a sort of way of making permanent and reinforcing these materialist values (…) I think more and more that psychotherapy and psychotherapists become sort of servants of the patient's wishes (…) And I personally have been maturing over the decades in the sense of a more confrontational psychotherapy, and that is one of the reasons why I stopped doing psychotherapy in the traditional sense (…) Psychotherapy can become a narcissistic sport, and where you, well, sort of justify whatever you do and you consider yourself the centre of the world. (Isabel)

In the therapy room, these inner shifts, conflicts and questioning also affected therapeutic boundaries, and resulted in shifts thereof. Here the changes reported by participants varied from developing stronger boundaries, allowing for greater detachment and deeper involvement with

clients at the same time, to refining and loosening them, and becoming more flexible and nuanced. The understanding of the concept of boundaries changed for some participants as well, and involved the use of their time and space, as well as their emotional and spiritual resources, and their very selves. More nuanced use of boundaries and greater respect for client boundaries was a lesson learned by some, who looked back at their earlier mistakes of assuming an "expert" role, or having their own personal agenda for therapy outcomes.

> [E]ven though when I still look at it [example of difficult client situation] I think I was right, I would never say it that way again… give diagnoses and tell, try to tell the guy what to do, so you know (…) Yeah I would say that it helped me transform my way of doing therapy, made me a better therapist and better human being, you know. (Dr. I.M.)

Development of stronger personal boundaries regarding one's own limits of one's capacity as a therapist and human being, understood as a healthy detachment was also an experienced change, and connected to a stronger, more grounded spiritual identity. Stronger boundaries in turn fostered an increased flexibility and openness in relation to clients, and a greater sense of trust and safety in the therapist's own experience of the client-therapist relationship. This created a more integrated and interconnected experience, as well as understanding of one's personal, professional, and spiritual identity, and of these dimensions as inseparable in one's life.

> I think that if I can also say that the detachment that I've learned how to cultivate has been really important too. Not that I am detached from my clients and their experience but the detachment from the, from getting too pulled in to the pain itself has been really, really important (…) I think flexibility too (…) With my own professional boundaries just in client relationships too has shifted (…) They [clients] are not, they don't need to

> be so separate from me but they do need to recognize that I am entitled to have personal space. (Amelia)

Theme 6 – Outward Growth

Subthemes: Presence in relation, Congruence/Integrity, Beyond ME or Back to ME

This theme differed from the previous ones in that it represented the more visible changes (or lack thereof) in participants, in their way of being, in their life and in their work – as reflective of the inner change experienced. Most of what participants shared in this regard clustered around professional practice. Overall, changes in way of life outside of the therapy room appeared to be more difficult for them to identify and articulate.

The spiritual growth and inner development experienced created a more solid, purposeful, and autonomous yet interconnected sense of self, which changed the quality of these therapists' **presence in relation** to the outside world, especially in relation to clients and the therapy setting. It was a change in their demeanor, their attentiveness, and their responsiveness to clients, and to others in their lives, as well as to the needs and situations of the world around them – an embodiment of their response-ability, used in service to something greater. Their work became more purposeful and more open, and more flexible at the same time.

> "I have a purposeful surrendering to what wants to happen, in that something has brought that person to me, and it doesn't have to be really deep (…) it might even be quite light… And so, I am in service to that." (Pat)

Participants reported creating more therapeutically effective connection with their clients as a result. The therapeutic relationships formed with clients were characterized by greater patience, caring, authenticity, trust, connection, understanding, and focus - also, in many cases, confirmed directly through feedback by the clients themselves. There was a change in the quality of their

presence with and for the client, with increased and strengthened capacity to create deeper and stronger relationships with their clients, and to provide a safer, more grounded, and more reflexive relational space in therapy. An increased capacity to stay with clients' experience and thus embody a stable, supportive presence was described by eight of them. Through this, participants developed a capacity to further recognize the buried, hidden, denied, and suppressed goodness in their clients, with greater benefit for the clients in turn.

> Yes, the fact that I can stay with that, that sense, you know, so then the client, the person that is here in this space, they find out what is best for them. You know, I think that is, that is I think in many ways like… If you think about the divinity, the divinity is not trying to solve our problems but supports us so that we can solve, so we can figure it out (…) Kind of like an instrument, you know, sort of kind of part of this oneness that we are. (Maria)

For three participants, there also appeared to be a need to find common ground, and to gain clients' trust as a basis for this connection, and to gain client's acceptance, creating ambiguity about whose needs were being served. It reflected a simultaneous movement towards meeting one's own needs through client work – and, in effect, of being responsive and in service to their own needs instead.

> "I am more focused on the relationship, on really just really building that trust, and making sure that I am there for them in whatever they are going through… building the connection… finding common grounds." (France)

> "The connecting that goes on [now] in my times of therapy with clients, has a way of validating and affirming just how powerful and influential a person I am… they are often very much amazed…" (Paul)

The change in quality of presence was also a reflection of participants' evolving towards greater **congruence** in their work and their relating with clients, as well as in their life beyond practice. There was a continuation of the integration between the inner change experienced and its outward expression, a oneness of change and development without division, which had tangible, and visible effects, and which participants channelled into "becoming a better person" overall.

> When I first started to work I felt like I was a better person when I was in the role of counsellor. It was (…) some of the best in me was coming out of that. And even though at times it felt like my life outside the counselling room was in more of a mess in contrast to this, you know, 'effective counsellor' me. But, then (…) I began to see that I was living more of my life outside informed by the learning I had from the counselling work - it blurred the distinction between the two. And the point that's sort of gotten to now is more like, if I was in the counselling room today I'd say about myself that I am pretty ordinary, as if I am the same person that I am outside. (Walter)

This increasing integration and commitment to live with **integrity**, the becoming whole and becoming a better person, led to two participants' decision to change direction in the work they were doing. One participant expressed becoming unable to continue working with clients precisely because of the point she came to in her spiritual development, with its increasing commitment to social and ecological justice, to an authentic (rather than symptom-focused) wellbeing of clients and of society, and a recognition of the limitations of the current focus and standards of practice, as well as the role of the therapist within it. For her, continuing and further deepening this commitment would have required a direct confrontation of clients' self-serving tendencies and unjust values within the therapeutic relationship, as well as the normalization of such by her professional milieu, and, in effect, losing her licence to practice.

> "So I would say I've been moving on to a more committed psychotherapy to the point that I have stopped doing therapy." (Isabel)

The majority of participants did mention a change in how they relate to others within their social environment, and noted a change in their way of being in all of their human relationships as an outcome of the growth experienced. The inner change was expressed directly as a change in relating to other human beings.

> "It's a way to continue searching for an understanding of human beings. How I see my spouse, my son, when I see someone in the street, you know, a beggar… So (…) I do connect differently because of my spirituality [now] (…) it's compassion and at the same time respect." (Maria)

In addressing the question about participants' tangible, concrete changes in their way of life outside of practice, the focus of most seemed to remain on their close personal relationships or surroundings, despite of the interviewer's attempts to explore beyond this inner circle. In comparison with the first two research questions, which focused on their experience of spiritual change and development, with its effects on their work with clients, participants had considerably less to say. There was also considerably more contrast and variation in their responses, with approximately half addressing the question in one way or another, and the other half tending to remain focused on, or reverting back to, their inner experience, and a more theoretical, abstract level of inner understanding, perceptions, aspirations, and ideas. Thus, in relation to the world beyond the therapy room, the responses reflect a tension between continued spiritual development and shedding of self-interest, or reverting back to themselves and their comfort zone in a **Beyond ME or Back to ME** focus and dynamic.

Participants gave examples of changes in action mostly in relation to themselves – that of

smiling at oneself in the mirror to raise self-esteem, as learned from a session with a client, becoming more "wise" in their advice given to their children, and in a "slowing down" of the pace of their lives through adopting a more "present-centred" attitude, towards "enjoying" their present experience, and seeking of comfort from others. Three had difficulty in answering the question at all.

Three participants mentioned the alienation and isolation experienced as the deeper questioning which their development engendered was not shared by others in their circles or wider society. There was both a need and a seeking for such deeper connection, and a realization that the opportunities for such relationships became scarce as one's life continued to deepen and gain meaning. This too changed their understanding of the society around them, requiring a response and adaptation to this new reality. For one therapist, the emphasis was on periodic retreat and withdrawal into more "spiritually nourishing" spaces and relationships, while for another it meant finding a different role and space in which to further engage in advocacy and work for change, despite the barriers and resistance encountered.

> And so [as a result of our spiritual development], we are the ones who ask questions but it also confronts us with our own loneliness because it's very, very rare that those questions are reciprocated (…) We're often the ones who are called upon to care and connect with others but who can we connect with on that same level ? It's not easy to find. In fact we travel to [another city] on a monthly basis to connect with a couple of friends there, at this very level. (Paul)

> That's why I have devoted myself to teaching, because that is a field where I can train psychotherapists. I mean, I think I can change this if I work with young students, but I can't change it when I am with a patient (…) Not only with patients, also with

> colleagues… I cannot talk about this [social and ecological responsibility] with colleagues because they always consider it something exotic, I am seen as eccentric, I am sort of isolated in this. (Isabel)

For two participants, the spiritual development experienced led to them confronting and questioning attitudes and behaviours in their circle of family and friends, creating some tensions. Although this created interpersonal conflict, it also freed them to live their lives and relationships more authentically. One participant spoke about a "lightening" of relationships as a result of this inner freedom, albeit as an unintended side-effect, rather than conscious choice. Another one spoke directly and explicitly about her aspirations and efforts to extend her "help" and to "provide relief" to others - beyond the therapy room.

> I was making less emotional demands on people because I was being satisfied spiritually, and so that was part of the lighter footstep (…) There was probably, there was probably a kind of an ecological thing as well, but I was shifting more towards not consuming so much and not throwing stuff away as much and, and thinking about my lifestyle and stuff (…) [I]n both cases I was satisfied with less because I was getting more nourishment if you like. (Walter)

> I try to do my little seed on the environment, you know, on the recycling, and if I can participate… I mean I used to participate in the Development and Peace, and helping refugees from Central America. And I have to say that one of my goals when I retire (…) maybe sometime I can go to a place where [natural disasters have occurred], especially because I speak Spanish, you know, and [to provide] some relief. (Maria)

A greater aesthetic appreciation for nature, especially its beauty, which enriched participants' inner lives as reflected in the second theme above, was also present. Here, the focus for two of them was on the recognition and responsibility to care for it as their "environment" and the idea of stewardship, in connection to their spiritual awareness and practice.

> "I [went from] not caring about the Earth that much before. Now I totally care about the Earth, and I want to… I am a green guy, I recycle, and I care about my own little plot of land. I plant four gardens every year." (Dr. I.M.)

For the others, it reflected merely an intensified utilitarian attitude towards Creation in the face of the current ecological crisis, emphasizing a desire to maximize their enjoyment "while it lasts", and expressing concern over the potential loss of sources of spiritual and recreational self-fulfillment – for themselves and their children. While some claimed to have become more mindful and respectful of nature and other beings, recognizing their intrinsic worth, it remained on the level of inner concepts and ideas, without any noted changes in behaviour or way of life.

> The fear that my children in their lifetime might not be able to swim in our lake you know, are things that have made me much more deeply appreciative. When I was a little girl it's like, lakes were to jump into to swim and today well you have to kind of choose the lakes to swim (…) So I think that there's that element and so I would say that I probably deeply savour that a whole lot more. (Claire)

> I am more mindful of the planet, the environment, respect for animals, for things, than I was thirty years ago (…) wanting to respect all, all parts of that whole (…) [My life] hasn't changed that much but it's become more conscious (…) They [outside observers] would not see me do things much differently, they would probably see me

> slow down, a little calmer… Yeah, I don't think [seen on] the outside it [my life] would be that different. (France)

Four participants mentioned their awareness of the potentially far-reaching consequences of their everyday actions (or lack thereof) on others and on the world, and of their need to be responsible and accountable for these. Only one however identified ways in which she has consciously changed her everyday life accordingly, emphasizing at the same time that this was the result of other influences in her life, not those of clients or professional practice. She noted the lack of any contributions of the professional dimension of her life to her own development and change beyond practice, especially in relation to the Earth and other (non-human) beings, while stressing that this aspect of her development was influenced by sources outside of her work:

> "Nothing, nothing (…) Because the psychological world is very resistant. And they consider this as not important. What is important is an unsubstantiated inner self, and if you damage the environment it has nothing to do with psychology." (Isabel)

Some participants also used concepts and ideas earlier attributed to their greater spiritual development, such as the recognition of a greater power beyond themselves, a greater plan, and the idea of "human frailty" to justify resistance to change beyond certain limits. Whereas the experience and belief in "something bigger" resulted in a greater sense of responsibility for some, it also seemed to become an equally convenient explanation for absolving oneself from it, or remaining complacent and comfortable in the attitude that there is nothing more they can, or ought to change.

> I live in an affluent country (…) And it causes me some discomfort that other people don't have that. I realize how very, very difficult it is to let go of power, or privilege (…)

> Could I, would I let go of that so that somebody else could have enough food to eat ? (…) It's not my fault that I came into this country. So I need to be as responsible as I can with that, but also trust that there are much, much greater forces [at play]. [My children] tell me that when they went travelling to [other countries] they saw happiness and a family structure that we don't have here. So to say that I am in such a better place than they [people in poor countries] are is, is simply not true. (Pat)

> "We've never been materially driven as a family, we live pretty simply, my footprint is small - I don't drive very much, we're conscious of how we go about our daily business, and we try to recycle." (Amelia)

Wisdom and Lessons for New Generation of Therapists

Participant responses to the fourth research question, "What would you like to impart to the younger generation of therapists in training/beginning practice today?" are summarized in Table 6 below. Four main themes were created to group the responses, reflective of the main lessons learned from a life-long psychotherapy practice, which participants shared as a contribution to beginning therapists, starting on their path of development. These themes are: Therapist as a Person, Spirituality, Psychotherapy Practice, and Therapist Responsibility.

The first theme, Therapist as Person, reflected participants' understanding of what being a psychotherapist is, and what it entails. The wisdom shared here focused on the importance of developing one's identity as a person first, and as a professional second. The emphasis was on developing one's self in the profession from the inside out, so as to offer this depth and integrity of self in relationship to clients worked with. The recognition that "we are no different than our clients" (Claire) enjoined the beginning practitioners towards both the openness to learning from clients, and to listening to one's own inner voice, as necessary for development in practice.

The second theme, Practitioners' Spirituality centered around the notion of spirituality in particular. Here the senior therapists interviewed stressed the inseparability of spirituality from the person and the life of the psychotherapist, as well as it being something "to be lived and experienced, not talked about" (Walter), which also cannot be easily conceptualized, and requiring an openness to be challenged, surprised, and to grow through searching and difficulty.

Professional Practice as such emerged as the most robust theme in participants' sharing, with most of the wisdom they had to offer centering on this dimension specifically. Here, the senior practitioners stressed the importance for those beginning practice of having a good support system, as well as the ability to "trust the process" - both in therapy work and in their own development – including in making and learning from mistakes. At the same time, they encouraged beginning practitioners to "never underestimate" and to recognize the value of listening, of "holding the space", and of engaging with clients on a deep level, while noting the potential of client influence on therapists as being "life-changing and transformative" (Claire). Some warned also against reducing psychotherapy practice to steps, techniques, and treatment protocols.

The last theme was that of Responsibility – for oneself and for oneself in practice. Participants cautioned against the risks associated with lack of self-awareness, especially in regards to one's motives for entering the profession, and of operating from unconscious, naturalized values and paradigms, without questioning them – in self, in the profession, and in society. To this end, they encouraged those entering practice to engage in self-reflection, personal therapy and spiritual practice to nurture self-awareness, and an openness to being unsettled and triggered by client work, so as to use these opportunities for growth. Some also noted the importance of fostering commitment to the larger world beyond professional practice,

of living useful and purposeful lives, while deepening understanding of human psychology and the mind.

Table 6. Senior Therapists' Wisdom for the Young Generation of Therapists

Theme	Participant Statements - Summarized
Therapist as Person	We are no different than our clients – what separates us is only the role we have in relation to them. (Claire) Be patient with yourself. (Claire, Pat, France) Become deeply aware of your own inner reality and how it shapes your life, so you can help clients do the same. (Paul) We need to change from the inside out – our outer world, our life is a projection/reflection of what is inside. (Dr. I.M.) Full development of psychotherapists requires work with long-term clients. (Maria) The greatest and only tool you have to offer is yourself and who you are as a person. (Claire, Maria, Paul) You are the vessel, you are your own instrument - the more you can be at peace with that and with yourself, with whatever you believe that's important to you, if you are in touch with that then you can be available to whatever clients throw at you. (France) Pay attention to who you are and who you develop into – this is all you have to work with. Commit to developing yourself and your quality as a person. (Paul) Keep your humanity, keep your spirituality. (Maria) Trust and follow your inner voice. (Pat, France) Stay open to learning from clients. (France) You have to bring yourself back to who you are - that's the foundation. And you will learn a lot from your clients, if you're open to it. (France)

Spirituality	Be open to spirituality outside of your preconceived notions of it – spiritual reality transcends human language, categories, and attempts to grasp it. (Walter) Spirituality is to be lived and experienced, not something to be talked about. It's the experience that matters, not the words we put to it. (Walter) Each one must find their own unique way, their own meaning and purpose in this work, alone. Be willing to experiment. (France) The stuff of growth is in the deeply difficult places. (Pat) Spirituality is integral to and inseparable from who we are and the work we do – it needs to be a part of everyday life. (Amelia) You have a right as a therapist to not go against your own values. (Isabel)
Psychotherapy Practice	The impact of clients is life-changing and deeply transformational. (Claire) There is always something more, something greater taking place in therapy than we realize. (Claire, Pat, Walter) The most profound thing we can do is to truly listen and hold the space for our clients. (Amelia, Pat) Find/form a good peer support group, and chose your supervisors and mentors wisely. (Claire, Paul) Guard against the current instrumentalization of therapy, against its reduction to a series of steps and techniques. Do not lose sight of the original meaning of the words "psychotherapy" and "psychopathology" (i.e. "Care of / attending to the soul" and "the word of the suffering soul"). (Paul, Isabel, Maria) Trust the process and let yourself grow. (France, Claire) Don't be afraid to make mistakes and to learn from them. (Claire) Psychotherapy work is a calling, a spiritual endeavor. (Dr. I.M) Psychotherapy is like a sacred space – if we can see ourselves as being on the same level with our clients, in mutual learning. (Maria) Therapy is a vocation that can be a lonely place – make it a lifelong journey with others you can trust. (Paul)

Psychotherapy Practice Cont'd.	It is the relationship, the encounter we have with clients that heals – the most important factor. (Maria) Develop a good capacity to feel and to suffer with the patient, and to connect to them and your own self in the therapy process. (Isabel) Develop and maintain good boundaries. (Amelia) Don't underestimate the power, hard work, and responsibility of being present to your clients and to what they bring. (Amelia) Good can come out of bad situations, we can create good, positive outcomes from bad, difficult situations. The job of the therapist is to facilitate. (Dr. I.M.) Don't be afraid to bring spirituality and questions relating to it into the therapy process. (Claire)
Responsibility	Be aware of your own issues and seek help if needed when these are triggered. (Pat) Awareness of your own needs and motivations for entering this field is essential – many do and enter into this work for the wrong reasons. (Amelia) Welcome what clients stir up in you and use it as an opportunity for growth and self-discovery, as well as a deepening of your relationships and your spirituality. (Paul) Be very aware of your own often unconscious and naturalized values – social values and paradigms which define and guide your practice. (Isabel) Recognize the ethical necessity of including the patient's outer world in your assessment of their suffering. (Isabel) Commit to the larger world and to a deeper understanding of the human mind. (Isabel) Spiritual practice and personal psychotherapy are important. (Dr. I.M.) Living usefully and purposefully is a lifelong responsibility. (Walter, Dr. I.M.)

Conclusion

The process of spiritual development, as experienced through a lifetime of work with clients by the senior psychotherapists in this study, revealed its multi-dimensional and dynamic nature in the accounts of participants, inextricably intertwined with their development as persons and as professionals.

The six common themes of Deepening, Expansion, Enrichment, Integration, Breaking Through, and Outer Growth, which emerged, were the outcome of participants' inner engagement with the experiences and effects of encounters with clients, resulting in their growth and development. This occurred through becoming exposed to understandings and experiences both similar and different than their own, through allowing themselves to be changed by these experiences - whether with enthusiasm and openness or reluctantly through necessity in practice. And, through actively engaging with the new awareness and reality encountered, as well as their own resistance to change themselves – inside and out.

Within this process, the push-pull dynamic between their own resistance and tendency towards self-interest on the one hand, and the tendency towards self-transcending and moving beyond oneself also became apparent as that which ultimately determined the nature, course and extent of development. While the role of clients in this process was significant, it was not exclusive, with participants acknowledging the presence and intertwining of many other factors, such as personal histories, family, friends, spiritual/religious community, and other involvements.

In the next chapter, a conceptual model will be presented, developed on the basis of the themes presented here, to further elaborate the essence of the phenomenon studied.

CHAPTER 5

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The results of this study, presented in the previous chapter, described senior psychotherapists' perspective of their process of spiritual development, as influenced by their work with clients. Whereas the themes which emerged correspond to the common elements in their experience, an overall, underlying, dynamic process occurred within which these themes were embedded and interconnected, reflective of an intricate, organic whole of the spiritual development experienced, and of its essence. This process as a simultaneous movement of growth inwards and outwards, which deepens, expands, enriches, integrates, makes whole, breaks through and transcends the self, will be presented and described here in the form of a conceptual model.

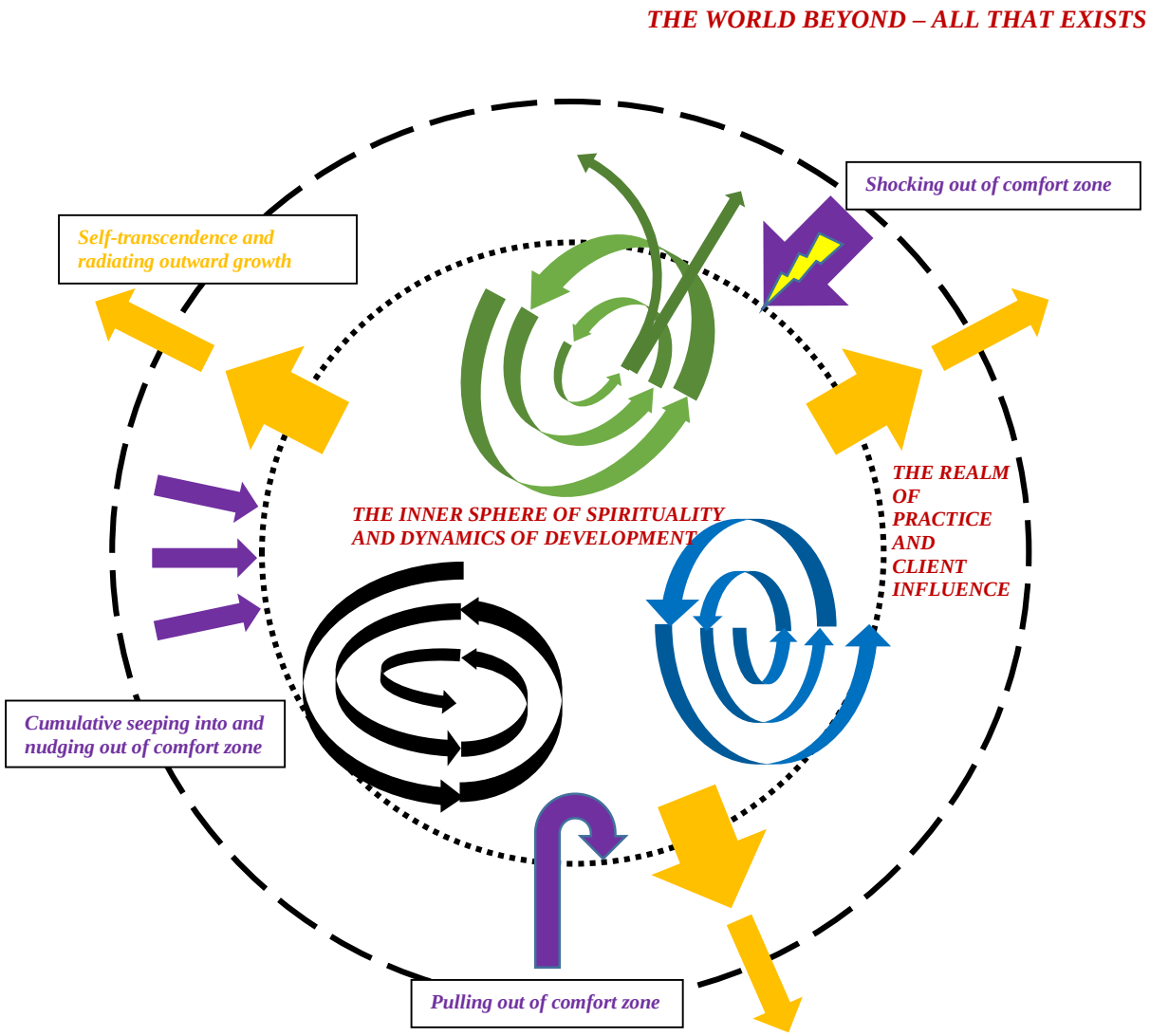
Proposed Model of Client-Mediated Psychotherapist Spiritual Development

The proposed model (Figure 2) consists of an inner and outer dimension, represented here by the inner, and invisible sphere of development within the person, and the outer space of the world beyond the self - of all that exists, in which this development is expressed and manifested, in tangible, observable ways. A second sphere – the realm of practice – is added to reflect its prominence in participants' experience, and in the focus of this study, as looking specifically at its impact on the developmental process. The boundary between this inner and outer reality, including that between the sphere of practice and the beyond is porous and flexible, as represented by the broken lines of the borders, which also points to the tentative distinction between the two, and their interconnectedness.

Within this whole are the processes, dynamics, and elements of change and of growth, the sources and forces of influence – generated from both the inside and the outside of the individual, and the greater reality of life which, together, over time, constitute the overall process

of spiritual development, as shared by the participants of this study. The catalysts of this process of change and development are encounters with clients, which influence psychotherapists in various ways, both inside and out. These processes and their flow are depicted by various arrows within the model and will be described in greater detail below.

Figure 2. A proposed representation of the process of client-mediated psychotherapist spiritual development – Becoming whole beyond the self



Client Influence as the Catalyst of Change

The influence of clients, as focused on in this study, is situated within the sphere of practice, and is represented by purple arrows which point to and cross into the therapists' inner experience. Three distinct types of client influence are shown, based on what participants described. The experience of being "pulled out" of one's comfort zone and "stretched" by clients from the outside is represented by the **hooked arrow**, pulling participants' spirituality outwards, beyond the comfortable and the familiar, often against their own reluctance.

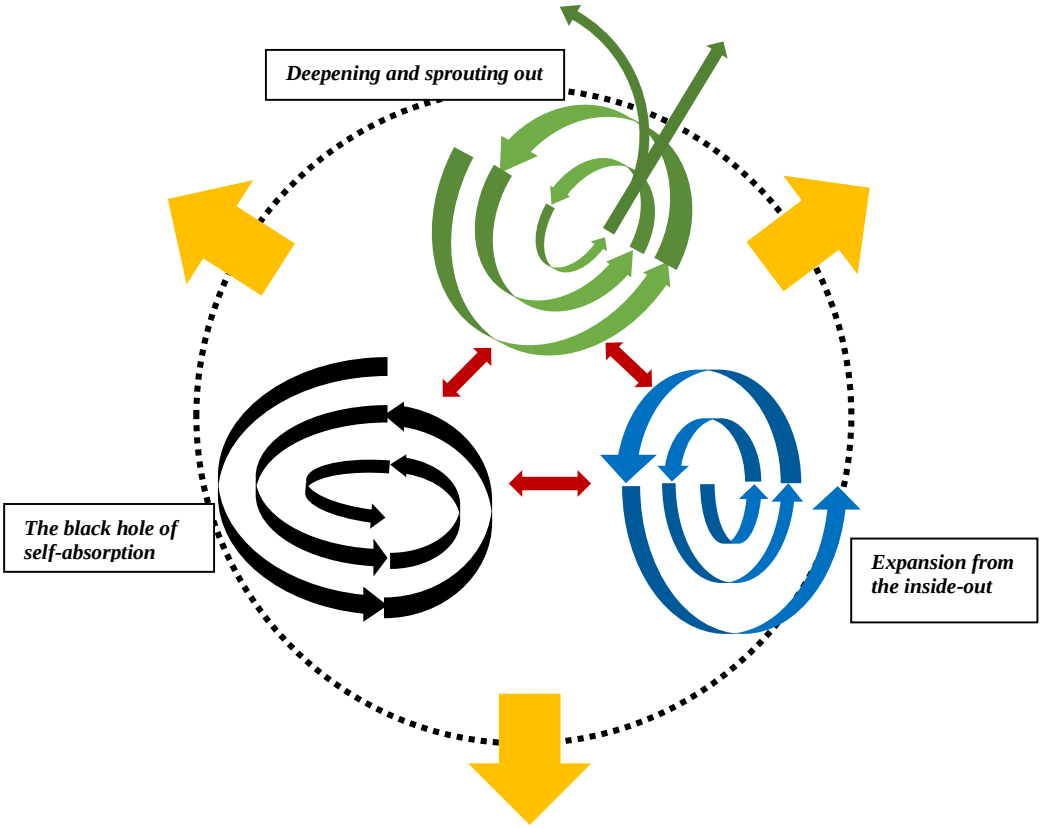
The stark experiences of being confronted with realities wholly other and different than their own, of having their own spirituality jarred, shaken, unsettled, and/or otherwise challenged directly, are represented by the **lightning bolt arrow**. This corresponds to both the shock and intensity of these experiences, as well as to the insight, freedom and new clarity that they often brought with them, breaking through previously established limits.

Along with these, there were also the more ordinary sources of influence, experienced as less drastic, and more diffuse over time. They were simple, everyday, and inviting – gradually seeping into and enriching participant spirituality by providing a different perspective, opportunity and material for reflection, for deeper spiritual experience, nudging them to expand, to deepen, question, and further integrate. These are represented by the **three small arrows**.

Psychotherapist Spirituality – The Inner Sphere

This sphere, situated at the center, represents the central place and focus of participant spirituality as the phenomenon of interest in this study. Its positioning is also representative of spirituality being the innermost dimension of the individual, the invisible yet fundamental core of one's being, from which the process of change originates. It is inseparable from, interconnecting

with, and embedded in all other aspects (spheres) of one's existence, which is further embedded within all that exists.



This central nature of spirituality in therapists' lives as represented here thus also reflects its capacity and potential for inner depth, for enrichment from within and from without, and an inherent propensity to radiate outwards and to transcend beyond itself, towards the "other" and the greater reality of life. It is from this inner sphere that the inwards and outwards movement, and process of growth and development, is initiated.

The Three Key Processes of Inner Change

Participants' inner experience of change and its resulting outward expression (described in the themes and subthemes), revealed three key underlying dynamics, or processes within. These

processes appeared to occur simultaneously and in tension with one another within this inner realm, as an undercurrent of the narratives, and emerged as the driving force behind the overall process of therapists' spiritual development. These processes are represented by the three large spirals within the inner sphere of the model, reflective of their spiralling nature. The spiral form of these processes is further representative of participants' inner mulling over and sifting, circling back to one's client experiences, to revisit them in self-reflection and in the context of on-going life experience, as well as in spiritual practice, over time. It also is symbolic of the intertwining and drawing in of the surrounding space – of one's existing spirituality and elements of past and present client, and other influences, which have already been integrated - as if in a spinning wheel that draws in, intertwines, and integrates the surrounding space of experience, and forms a thread. The first is described as a spiraling movement deeper inwards, which in time sprang outwards in outwards growth **(green spiral).** The second was also a movement of circling inwards – and remaining there, in self-focus, which also resulted in a progressive closing-off of the self and in self-absorption **(black spiral)**. And, the third process, a gradual but steady pushing out through a spiraling movement of expansion from the inside outwards **(blue spiral)**.

The first process was reflective of an overall dynamic of taking in of/from outside influence, in this case particularly of/from client encounters, processing it within and using it as ground for further growth - with the ultimate focus being on using it for self-improvement and becoming "a better person" - in relation to others and the larger world. It was the deepening, enriching, and broadening/expanding, so as to eventually break through one's own inner limits and comfort zone, and give outwards from this growth and richness, beyond oneself. This process tended to be connected with specific, singular experiences reported by participants, and the resulting direct change - breaking through and outward growth in relation to specific,

particular others, or contexts, or areas of one's life. Hence its representation here as branching off into singular, distinct arrows reaching towards particular points in the whole.

In contrast to the green spiral, the process represented by the blue spiral was less connected with any one, or cluster of, particular experiences. Rather, it tended to result from the cumulative, and often undifferentiated chain of experiences over time which, together and through participant reflection and integration, slowly and gradually (and often imperceptibly), filled and pushed out on the boundaries of participant spirituality, like water slowly seeping in. This was the process of stretching and expanding through becoming filled, enriched and more whole, with more substance, causing a natural overflowing into the spaces beyond, all while continuing to draw from the simultaneous deepening occurring through the green spiral process, like from a deepening well. It was also representative of the change and growth which occurred as a "by-product" of more direct, conscious change, as was described by Walter.

The third process, the black spiral of self-absorption, was reflective of participants' tendencies to circle in and spiral around their own comfort zone and their own needs for affirmation. It encompasses the use of their experiences in a self-serving manner, with a spiritual narrowing to oneself and one's spirituality, or oneself and God, and/or to oneself and one's own healing/spiritual wellbeing. It tended to involve an exclusive taking in from client encounters, client influence, and the surrounding space, with a sole focus on the utility of these for building up their own self-image and feelings of gratification. The process here was of a cumulative "taking" from experience, including client encounters, without outward flow.

The Process and Fruits of Development – From the Inside Out

Overall, the analysis of participants' narratives revealed spiritual development to be comprised of a movement inwards, and a movement outwards, which resulted in inward and outward

growth. This was the result of the three spiralling processes described above occurring simultaneously, and interdependently, to varying degrees and with varying prominence in participants' experience over time. Together, they created a net effect on the overall movement (and its direction), and dynamic, of the inner sphere of participant spirituality. This net effect was the spiritual development experienced and its extent, with its respective outward effect and impact on the whole of therapists' life (i.e., the surrounding space and beyond). This net effect could further be seen in the degree of expansion and transcendence (or lack thereof) beyond the boundaries of this inner sphere, into the outer, visible reality beyond – represented in the model by **yellow arrows**.

Resulting from this overarching process of development within the inner sphere – the "how" of the phenomenon, was its outward, visible, and tangible manifestation – the "what", which emerged as a result. This "what" were the fruits of development – changes in participants' way of life and way of being, and expressed in actions - towards the outer reality and the others within it, beyond their inner selves, and beyond the therapy room, with tangible effects on the greater whole. Thus, in the model, this movement of transcendence beyond the inner sphere and beyond the sphere of practice represents the flow of the accumulated and integrated inner change, leading to growth outwards from the inner realm, in a breaking through of its boundaries to the outside world.

The fruits of development – within the therapy room

Participants' experience of this breaking through was most poignantly expressed in relation to practice. The effects of spiritual development experienced manifested themselves in their work with clients unambiguously and directly (hence the thickness of the arrows between these two spheres). The change and growth which occurred in the inner sphere appeared to flow outward

easily, unobstructed, towards and into this outer sphere of participants' work. There were, within this sphere, numerous changes reported, rich and wide in scope. The boundaries between these two realms seemed most porous, reflecting participants' understanding and experience of their work as being directly connected with their spirituality, and as being a form of its expression. There was a sense of passion, intensity, and enthusiasm expressed in participant accounts when speaking about their professional practice as being spiritual practice as well, and instrumental in their living out of spirituality. There was also a sense of passion and intensity in the accounts of those for whom professional practice constituted an obstacle to further spiritual development, and for whom the change in relation to practice was also significant – in this case, by leaving it.

The fruits of development - beyond the therapy room

Beyond the sphere of professional practice lies the greater world within which participants' lives are embedded, and with which they are interconnected – the vast space of all that exists. This dimension reflects participant responses to the fourth research question regarding change in their way of being in the world. It concerns the outermost reaches of the effects, and the expression, of the spiritual development experienced. While the spiritual development experienced as a result of client influence was expressed in tangible ways in participants' lives beyond practice, its overall reach and intensity seemed to lessen the farther away it radiated from therapists' inner selves and their immediate world. There was also a split which appeared in participants' accounts around this question where for some, the development continued to bear fruit beyond (though still to a lesser extent), while for others it tended to become stifled and reverted into their personal world. Overall, the richness, substance, intensity and extent of reported change appeared to decrease with each step beyond their inner sphere, becoming reduced (or non-existent) in relation to the larger world beyond, for all but three participants. It was also most

often either selectively focused on isolated aspects of this larger world, or diffused in inner experience/understanding.

It became apparent through data analysis that a distinction existed between participants' experience and understanding of the world as *their* world, and the actual world as outside and beyond their immediate, close circles. What emerged is that for about half of the participants, their "way of being in the world" could be better described as their way of being in *their* world – their *own*, immediate world, limited to their own everyday concerns, themselves, their family, friends, neighbourhood and (human) community, at times with the natural environment and its non-human inhabitants - other Creation - around them as only the backdrop to this world. Questions about change in relation to this dimension literally drew a blank from three participants. It existed as an undifferentiated, abstract concept in their discourse, a kind of alien world, seemingly removed from their immediate awareness or relationship, except insofar as having a function or utility for them.

Thus, the dynamic which occurred here could best be described by an increased inwards pull or resistance, diffusion of the intensity and scope of development, and a trickle-down effect from the changes experienced in relation to one's closer reality. There was a more stark differentiation in the direction of development for participants – a fork in the road where for some, much of the spiritual expansion, growth, and transcendence which had occurred up to this boundary was stunted, and at which point it tended to be deflected backwards – in relation to themselves and their own worlds. For others, it continued to unfold unobstructed, with conscious choices to change, concrete changes made, and an enthusiastic, generous embracing of the larger world, of Creation, and of their responsibility towards it. The space between *my* world and *the*

world was the space most poignantly apparent as either an opportunity for further development and transcendence, or a mirror of deflection back into self-focus .

Spiritual Development through Client Encounters - The Essence of the Phenomenon

The contribution of clients and client encounters to psychotherapists' spirituality and spiritual development was relevant for all participants, and ranged from having relatively little significance (France), to being "immense" (Maria). The influence of clients was at times subtle and implicit, at times stark, drastic and intense, at times perceptible only in retrospect. Intertwined with other sources of influence, it increased therapists' understanding about what spirituality is, and what it is not, raising their awareness, and serving to guide them in discerning the nature and direction of their own spiritual path.

The experience of spiritual change and growth through client encounters was an active, dynamic and organic process of simultaneous inward and outward movement. Within this dynamic occurred the processes of expanding, enriching, challenging, and deepening of spirituality, stretching it beyond the comfortable and the familiar, and, at times, serving to maintain its pre-existing limits and self-serving focus. It involved experiences of taking and of giving, of struggle and freedom, of effort and effortlessness, of searching and of finding, of disillusionment and painful withdrawing, as well as of wonder, surprise, and joyful blossoming. There were also experiences of clarity, light, and of darkness, of affirming, grounding, dismantling, creating and recreating, of pausing and changing direction, of shedding facades and self-concern.

The resulting spiritual development over time was the outcome of a perpetual tension between the dynamics of self-transcendence and self-absorption, which created the potential for deepening and for shallowing, for expanding and narrowing, for connecting and disconnecting,

for the making of choices and choosing direction at each point in time. Thus, it was the organic, dynamic integration of both past and present, the inner and the outer, of self and other, of one's context, and of "something greater", a bridging of limitations and of potential, of taking and of giving, creating a sense of wholeness from which to break through one's comfort zone - to at once become and to move beyond oneself.

Flowing over and outwards into therapists' work with clients, and into their lives beyond the therapy room, this development resulted in changing and enhancing the quality of therapists' work, their therapeutic presence, and relationship with clients. It created greater clarity to see and to challenge incongruence in clients, in their own practice, and in the profession itself. It was also at times thwarted by self-serving motives, self-centredness, and remaining comfortable in the comfort zone.

A greater blocking of this flow seemed to occur past the point of professional practice, with the overall development having relatively less effect on actions and actual way of life beyond the therapy room, and still less beyond one's own circle of family, friends, and (human) community. The translation of spirituality into action did not flow as easily at the level of one's everyday life in, and in relationship to, the larger world and the rest of Creation for most. There was an element of stuckness and resistance in awareness which appeared to surface for most participants at this point, with an overall tendency to remain within and to circle back to the level of one's inner experience. The tension between the three key processes of change outlined was most apparent in relation to this greater world beyond - with the process of deepening towards outward growth, and the process of inner expansion seeming to weaken and decrease, and the tendency toward self-absorption tending to intensify its pull, potentially leading to further fragmentation and disconnection from the greater whole.

Summary

The results of this study, as depicted in the model proposed, brought new insight into the process of spiritual development – as seen through the lens of senior psychotherapists' experience, and of the client influence upon it. The nature and dynamics of this development, presented here, reflect the simultaneous spiralling inwards and outwards movements, of ever increasing levels of integration and deepening within, and of radiating outwards beyond oneself in embracing, and responding to, the larger reality beyond oneself. This process was further revealed to be the outcome of tension between the individual's propensity towards self-absorption on one hand, and self-transcendence on the other.

The cumulative effects of these inner, invisible dynamics are what lead to the outer, observable changes in one's way of being. Fundamental to all of this, furthermore, was the process of self-reflection, openness to outside influence, conscious choice, and a commitment to better oneself. The role of clients proved to play an important part in each aspect of this process. In the next chapter, the implications of these results and the proposed conceptual model will be further discussed, and examined in light of the literature.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to explore the impact of clients on the spirituality and spiritual development of senior psychotherapists, the subsequent changes in their way of practice, and way of life outside of the therapy room. While the results obtained answered these questions and brought new understanding of this phenomenon, they also raised more questions to consider, and revealed more areas to explore. The answers obtained, and the new questions they raised, will be discussed in this chapter, and examined in light of the existing literature.

Overview of Findings

The psychotherapists interviewed described an overall deepening, expansion, enrichment, and integration of their spirituality as an outcome of their work with clients. These four themes gave rise to the fifth - that of "breaking though", which opened the way for the sixth – outward growth. The first four themes formed the inner experience of participants – the hidden, invisible, but inwardly palpable and recognizable change and growth occurring within. The theme of "breaking through" was one in which this inner reality became externalized and expressed outwardly, bridging the inner and the invisible world of participant experience, with their outer and visible. The last theme, of outward growth, was reflective of visible, outward change – in actions and in way of life.

The theme of deepening involved an initial focusing of participants' attention inwards in introspection and reflection, in response to lived experiences with clients. There was an active reaching in into one's inner depth, and searching deeper within oneself, which also resulted in a sense of grounding and rootedness in one's spirituality.

The theme of inner expansion was related to a broadening of participants' awareness and understanding – about themselves and their experience, others, the world, reality, and spirituality itself, including the Transcendent. There was also a sense of lightness, of space, and a strengthening involved in this, a sense of something powerful that also pushed against one's inner limits, expanding them - making way and making space for something new, something more, and something greater - more than what they had known and understood previously.

Enrichment was the theme which reflected the filling in of the space and quality created by the changes reflected in the previous themes. This theme was characterized by experiences of being nourished and filled, a sense of gratitude, wonder, and increasing appreciation for what one had, and for everyday life. There was also a growing sense of meaning and purpose in participants' lives, which reflected the development of an inner core and sense of direction, a sense of substance and quality in one's life.

The theme of integration reflected the experiences of connecting and reconnecting of past and present, of elements of their spirituality and their life experience, of themselves, as well as gaining a sense of continuity and wholeness. This theme of integration also involved becoming open and vulnerable within oneself to recognize, face, and "work with" the truth and reality about themselves which was becoming integrated, and to become whole as a result.

The theme of "breaking through" encompassed participants' coming to new levels of awareness, of new clarity and vision. This often entailed profound questioning, shifts in values and commitments, and conflict - an inner/outer upheaval which broke through previous limits, and broke through to the outside world – a reflection of the beginnings of visible change.

Outward growth was the theme that spoke of participants' experience of increasing and changing the quality of their presence and their way of life in the world – of *becoming* present,

accountable to, and responsible for and in relation to the greater whole. It was about inner and outer congruence – in experience and in actions. This theme also highlighted the divide between the tendency and potential towards transcending beyond the self and one's own "world" on the one hand, and the tendency and potential towards greater self-absorption on the other.

The Processes of Development

The six themes and the accounts of participants further revealed a broader, and deeper, underlying and overarching processes of development. More specifically, they reflected the process of participants' spiritual development as being both a movement inwards and a movement outwards, in a tripartite spiraling form which integrated outside influence, conscious choice, and inner change over time. This dynamic produced both inner (invisible) and outward (visible) growth, bringing together the two into one, evermore congruent whole, of the person and their way of being with and in the world, and reaching beyond in an overall movement towards self-transcendence - by both breaking through the separating limits, and by joining together. This spiraling movement inwards and outwards was further distinguished as being the product of the tension between the tendencies towards self-absorption and self-gratification on the one hand, and towards self-transcendence/shedding of self on the other.

The Findings in Light of Existing Research

Psychotherapist Spirituality and Spiritual Development

The importance of spirituality in the lives and practice of psychotherapists, as noted in existing literature (see for eg. Cashwell et al., 2007; Cornish et al., 2012; Cummings et al., 2014; Hofmann & Walach, 2011; Matteson, 2008; Mackay, 2008; Smith & Orlinsky, 2014), was further reaffirmed by the findings in this study. The apparent importance of spirituality for senior therapists, and their increased focus on spiritual and existential questions in life (Carlson &

Kottler, 2014; Goldberg, 1992; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) was also confirmed. For participants in this study, the senior stage in their life and in their career played a distinct, albeit intertwined role in spiritual reflection and meaning-making. However, the study also highlighted the fact that the degree to which spirituality was relevant for them in the senior years was reflective of how relevant (or not) it had been throughout their lives. Most notably, professional practice and client work was shown to influence senior therapists' spirituality by either maintaining continuity and building upon one's earlier/existing spiritual background, or by leading to a changing of direction, and creating/adopting different forms and expressions of spirituality altogether.

The study also brought more attention to the therapist as a person, and to their spirituality as being part of their personhood, within a greater context and life experience beyond the professional, while also affirming its close identification with their professional identity and practice, as found in existing literature (Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008). Moreover, the study noted the considerable differences in therapists' understanding and experience of spirituality, and of its deeply personal nature. This raises questions about the often-used term "psychotherapist spirituality" in the literature (Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008), as though it were a uniform reality for all psychotherapists by virtue of their profession. As was made clear here, participants' spirituality is that because they are persons and individuals – with a life outside of practice, with their history, context, and continuity of experience far greater, and deeper, than their profession, or role, or time in practice – and not because they are psychotherapists per se.

The understanding of spirituality as a universal human phenomenon (Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017) seemed to be reflected in the findings as well. There was a

common experience of the spiritual among these participants, despite of participants' varied backgrounds, histories, and, in some cases, despite of their initial resistance to, questioning, or denial of this dimension.

Whereas much of the literature so far has focused on what spirituality brings into psychotherapists' lives and practice, as well as how it brings them to engage in practice and to choose this work (Cashwell et al., 2007; Carlson et al., 2002; Goldberg, 1992; Smith & Orlinsky, 2005), what has emerged in the findings here is that, in many cases, it is psychotherapy practice which has brought many practitioners to recognize and embrace the spiritual in their lives, and contributed to their spiritual integration, development, and validation. In encountering clients in their work, some participants have encountered the spiritual in their life.

As practitioners are increasingly encouraged to reflect on how their spirituality and beliefs influence their practice (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Aponte, 1996; Carlson et al., 2002; Cashwell et al., 2007; Brady et al., 1999; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008) this study provides further support for the need to do so. It also suggests that it may be equally important for them to reflect on how their work influences their spirituality and its development, and on the implications of this for themselves as individuals and practitioners, for their clients, their profession, and for the society in which they work and live.

Furthermore, the study highlights the equally important element of conscious choice and commitment in acting on and using the products of one's reflecting/reflexive practice, to change accordingly, along with the taking of responsibility. While reflection and reflexive practice is emphasized throughout the literature as key to development, spiritually and professionally (Carlson & Kottler, 2014; Klein et al., 2011; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), it is often referred to and described in isolation, as an entity in and

of itself - removed from the putting into constructive action of its implications and end results. As was demonstrated by the findings of this study however, reflexive practice, and reflexivity, can become little more than an exercise in self-preoccupation, if it is not used as the means to the greater end of bettering oneself, and of changing accordingly.

Similarly, within the current focus of integrating spirituality into practice and client work (Captari et al, 2018; Hefti, 2011; Schafer, Handal, Braver, & Ubinger, 2011) the results here highlight the need to question how psychotherapy practice, the everyday work with our clients, embedded within a broader social context, is integrated into therapists' spiritual understanding, experience, growth and development. As this and other studies has shown, such integration has the potential to impact the quality of therapists' work with clients substantially (Brady et al., 1999; Cashwell et al., 2007; Cornish et al., 2012; Mackay, 2008; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Seustock, 2009). What emerged from the findings here, is also the potential it has to increase their awareness and critical self-reflection in regards to the actual manifestation of this development, and its consequences, within and for this broader social and ecological context. As this study has also revealed, there is a risk of this potential to be stifled, and to remain untapped in many therapists' lives, revealing a need for greater attention to be paid to this area.

In contrast, despite of the increased attention which spirituality has received within the profession, the discrepancy noted between psychotherapists' recognized need for spirituality and spiritual development on the one hand, and the professional barriers encountered within its established norms (Carlson et al., 2002; Smith & Orlinsky, 2005), was still echoed by the participants in this study. The concerns raised by some participants (though apparently unnoticed by others), about the implications of this for society in general, where the profession appears to have become a tool for the validation and reinforcing of individualistic, materialist, consumerist,

and anthropocentric norms, with their concomitant injustices, warrant further attention.

The question of the role which psychotherapists themselves play in this, being part of both the profession and of society, is also an important one, to which this study has brought attention through the lens of spiritual development as lived out in daily life (Helminiak, 1987; Carlson et al., 2002; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). Insofar as therapists' spirituality and spiritual development *can* result in the self-transcendence and the shedding of (individual and collective) self-interest demonstrated here, the potential does exist for the profession as a whole to change and to transcend its current limitations. However, as the findings here suggest, much focus and attention (by both therapists' themselves and research) is devoted to therapists' own identity – whether spiritual or professional, and its discernment and development. In this light, the study corroborates Matteson's (2008) observation of the self-centred focus in contemporary psychotherapy practice - a fixation in an "adolescent identity crisis" (p.3), and the difficulty, and resistance involved, in moving beyond this. Following Marsella (2006), it also calls for the recognition of a broader reality and the needs of the world today, along with our responsibility in relation to it.

As a resource for therapists themselves, spirituality was shown in this study to benefit them by serving to guide and to sustain many of them in their work and in their daily life, supporting existing data (Carlson et al., 2002; Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008). While it has been generally viewed in a positive light, as being a positive and desirable influence in therapists' lives (Carlson et al., 2002; Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008), the results of this study suggest a more nuanced examination of this may be warranted, given the different understandings of spirituality and how, and to what end, it is used by therapists. Therapists' own positive experience of spirituality, and its role in their work, leads to the question of its farther-

reaching effects, beyond their own subjective experience. The question which emerges here, and brings us back to the meaning of authentic spirituality as always involving a concern with more than oneself (Matteson, 2008), is whether the consequences and effects of such spirituality for those others on the receiving end of it is equally positive and life-giving ? Those others beyond therapists' own circle of concern?

Pargament (2007), along with Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013) proposed that the key to professional and spiritual development, respectively, is the extent of integration of difficult and challenging experiences (whether in relation to our professional practice or that which we hold sacred). Pargament (2007) further asserted that regardless of the spiritual trajectories individuals may follow, it is the extent of their integration with the rest of the person and their experience that determines the end result of spiritual growth or stagnation. While affirming the importance of integration for spiritual development per se, the findings of this study and the proposed model appear to challenge these assertions, pointing instead to the need for and extent of the authentic self-transcendence referred to by others (Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017), as the determining factor for spiritual growth and development. As the findings here have shown, participants' integration of their experiences in relation to the sacred and of the sacred within the whole of their experience did not necessarily result in self-transcendence (and thus authentic spirituality), but could equally well further feed tendencies toward self-absorption, self-focus, and a self-serving use of these experiences, as well as of the spiritual/sacred itself.

In this study, psychotherapists' understanding and experience of spirituality, and of client influence upon it, seemed to determine the focus and extent of development. By providing an initial point of reference in their spiritual life, it also provided (and limited) the lens through which client encounters were seen, integrated and used, thus influencing also the direction,

extent, and the destination of development. This was true of both the "feel good spirituality" (Matteson, 2008, p.43) of positive feelings and self-focus, and the spirituality of "authentic self-transcendence" (Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017) which results in a movement beyond one's own self and one's close circle, towards responsibility for and connection with all of life (Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

As the proposed model suggests, the tensions involved between the tendency towards self-centredness and a focus on gratifying spiritual experience (including in client encounters) on one hand, and the commitment to authentically becoming a better person by leaving one's comfort zone and shedding of concern for self on the other, are what appeared to determine both the direction and the extent of spiritual development experienced. One towards a self-serving and self-comforting spirituality of the sacred made (and limited) to fit one's "own world" and one's understanding, as Pargament (2007) seems to suggest, another towards the transcendence of self, of one's own spiritual comfort zone, of one's world, towards a greater reality beyond, which calls for responsibility, and which is otherwise so easily ignored. Thus, the model proposed here suggests that the trajectories themselves, their direction, and their destination are indeed relevant to authentic spiritual development or self-serving decline. As this study has shown, authentic spiritual development, as the "absolute self-transcendence unto all that is true and good" (Helminiak, 1987, p. 23), and the movement of "extending ourselves beyond our self and our close circle" (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017 p.186), appears to be all too easily lost in the self-serving focus on individual wholeness and integration.

The dynamic and non-linear nature of psychotherapists' spirituality and spiritual development, in particular as experienced in relation to their practice and beyond, was made more apparent in the findings of this study and represented in the model proposed, addressing a

lack in the literature noted so far (Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017). While providing additional research evidence for the theoretical descriptions of spiritual development provided so far (Carlson, 2002; Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007) the study also further elucidated the nature and process of this phenomenon. It confirmed and provided additional evidence for the multi-dimensional nature of spiritual development (Mayseless &Russo-Netzer, 2017; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000) with inner and outer dimensions of growth, with its tendency towards self-transcendence and focus on transcendence, in a movement beyond the familiar, comfortable, and self-serving, towards that and those beyond oneself and one's self-interest (Carlson, 2002; Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000).

The findings obtained also supported the notion of spiritual development as being a dynamic, complex process, intertwined with one's whole being and existence, manifested through outward change, actions, and way of life (Carlson, 2002; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007), with commitment and choice, as well as conscious effort playing a key role as well (Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007). It corroborated the notions of cyclical patterns of integration and growth as being at the core of the developmental process, with the wide spectrum of experiences, positive and negative, contributing to and catalyzing these patterns (Helminiak, 1987; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007).

While supporting the notion of the inherent tendency towards self-transcendence (Helminiak, 1987), this study revealed the presence of another force or tendency, not noted in the literature. Namely, the tendency and pull towards self-absorption and self-preoccupation, as playing an equally powerful role, and being in direct, simultaneous, dynamic tension with the

propensity to self-transcendence. The study brought a new element and dynamic into our understanding of spiritual development, pointing to the tension between these two propensities as being at its core, and as ultimately determining the course, and extent (outcome) of spiritual development.

Furthermore, while affirming and further elucidating the inner and outer dimensions of spiritual growth and development (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer 2017; Pargament, 2007), the results of this study revealed the process whereby the two are integrated into one whole, and where the inner, invisible change and growth eventually breaks through the surface and manifests in the visible, outward change. While existing literature has focused on the process of spiritual development within the individual (Helminiak, 1987; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007), with scant attention to the influences and patterns of influence, as well as the context in which this development occurs, this study further contributed a more in-depth understanding of the nature of the outside influences which play a role in the process, and of the individual's integration of these into the dynamic, presenting a more complete picture of the process – of the person in their environment, and, in this case especially, of the psychotherapist as person, influenced also by their practice, and their work with clients.

Spiritual Development and Professional Development

The spiritual change and development experienced by the psychotherapists in this study was accompanied by, and resulted in, their development in the professional sphere of practice as well. This confirmed previous research on the interrelationship between the two, and highlighted the role of spiritual development in professional development specifically (Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2010). For many practitioners in this study, their spiritual and professional lives were not only interrelated, as Goldberg (1992) and

others (Matteson, 2008; Smith & Orlinsky, 2005) suggest, but also interdependent.

Parallels can be seen between psychotherapists' accounts of their spiritual development trajectory through client encounters, and models of professional development (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2013). Most notably, the interplay between positive, fulfilling and affirming experiences, and those that were experienced as challenging, distressing, and difficult in practitioners' spiritual experience, closely resembled the dynamics described in the model of Healing Involvement and Stressful Involvement in professional practice (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005). Whereas the interplay and tension between Healing Involvement and Stressful Involvement was found to determine the extent and direction of professional development, the results of this study revealed the same to be true in spiritual development, in this case through the interplay and tension between the propensity for self-absorption on the one hand, and towards self-transcendence on the other.

Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, what emerged from the results in this study is the complimentary relationship between these two dimensions in relation to spiritual development on the one hand, and professional development of the therapists studied on the other. For many practitioners in this study, experiences of what Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005, 2013) referred to as the "stressful involvement" dimension of professional development were often buffered by their spirituality, and corresponded with positive, healing experiences in the spiritual dimension. In these instances, spirituality was a resource for therapists, confirming earlier studies (Brady et al., 1999; Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008). At the same time, the difficult experiences in practice further enhanced spiritual growth for these therapists. On the other hand, the experience of "healing involvement" (Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; 2013) in regards to professional development/practice carried with it the risk of stagnation (remaining in

one's "comfort zone") or regression in regards to spiritual growth, and was associated more closely with the "black hole of self-absorption" referred to in the proposed model, in relation to spiritual development.

The experience of the Transcendent in therapists' accounts brought in an added dynamic to the process of professional development as conceptualized by researchers in this area (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). The shifting of practitioners' frame of reference and locus of control between the Internal and External, through their years in practice and the developmental trajectory (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), was modified with the added dynamic of relation to the Transcendent. The shifts inherent in their accounts represented a more complex, and nuanced, interplay between the Internal, the External, and the Transcendent as understood by them. Professional practice, and professional development, were now part of something greater – seen and experienced within the Transcendent reality, and their work – a spiritual calling within it, supporting earlier literature (Cashwell et al., 2007; Mackay, 2008; Young-Eisendrath & Millet, 2000).

Although attempts have been made to draw connections between psychotherapists' work with particular populations or client issues and their spirituality and spiritual development (Brady et al., 1999; Mackay, 2008), these factors seemed to have little bearing on this for participants in this study. All experiences, populations, and difficulties were valuable in contributing to these psychotherapists' reflexivity, questioning, change, growth and development, insofar as they were recognized and utilized as such. The difference appeared to lie not in the clients or problems worked with, but in how particular experiences touched and challenged the therapists, and in what they did with these experiences. In other words, the impact as described by the participants in this study was not so much in what the clients brought, but what these encounters touched,

subjectively, in the therapist. This highlights the role that the subjective and personal experience of the therapists' self plays in their development as practitioners (Bernhardt, Niessen-Lie, Moltu, McLeod, & Rabu, 2018).

Whereas the spiritual development experienced by the therapists in this study led to greater professional development, it continued beyond the professional, and at times resulted in direct conflict with the profession, and with the understanding of "optimal development" as described in the literature (Bernard, Schermer, & Klein, 2011; Goldberg, 1992; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Just as a healthy, authentic spirituality necessitates the capacity to question and to challenge society and its norms from the vantage point of higher values (Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Pargament, 2007), these results suggest the same hold true in regards to the profession as embedded in, and reflective of, this society and its norms.

In this light, the experiences of some therapists in this study raise the question of what constitutes optimal psychotherapist development, when evaluated through normative professional and societal criteria. Just as judging spiritual health and authenticity by how well one adapts to society "avoids the issue of evaluating the society" (Matteson, 2008, p.16), so the spiritual and professional development of therapists interpreted based on their adaptation to society and the profession potentially avoids evaluating both. The results of this study draw attention to this and to the need for more serious consideration of this in the literature.

The apparent tension between spiritual development and professional development noted by some practitioners appears to also be reflected in a discrepancy between the characteristics of their experience in regards to spiritual development on the one hand, and professional on the other. Although the therapists in this study were all in the senior stage of professional

development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), their accounts of spiritual change and development through practice most closely resembled the characteristics of the Novice stage of professional development, and the sub-stages of confirmation, disillusionment, and exploration (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) - this time, in relation to their spirituality.

These senior therapists' experiences of profound spiritual questioning, exploration, confirmation and doubting, disillusionment, and the quest and struggle to integrate, create and re-create their evolving spirituality, and their practice and life in relation to it, reflect these same processes and dynamics of novice therapists in relation to professional practice (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). As in professional practice, therapists' willingness and openness to learn, to reflect, and to persevere at this stage was crucial for continuing spiritual development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Bernard et al., 2011; Trottier-Mathison et al., 2011).

It is of interest to note here that whereas participants expressed concern for the increasingly superficial trends and symptom-oriented focus in the current world of professional practice, and whereas they called for attention towards addressing the underlying problems from which these symptoms originate, they engaged in such a focus themselves where their own lives in the world beyond practice were concerned. The changes reported in relation to the world beyond their inner circle and practice, and to the problems facing this world today were, for the most part, little more than attempts to alleviate symptoms – recycling (or "trying to" as Amelia phrased it), volunteering in natural disaster relief efforts, giving money to the homeless, and tending one's garden. With one exception, none of the participants made a direct connection between the problems noted "out there", and their own way of life "in here" – as underlying, creating, and contributing to the symptoms of social problems and the ecological crisis, about which many expressed concern.

With the settling in and "winding down" (Klein et al., 2011, p. 273) of experienced and senior practitioners in the professional realm, it appears from this study's findings that spiritual growth and development is only unfolding into its potential, far from the "settling-in" and view towards retirement from a professional view. This would support and add a different lens to Helminiak's (1987) observation of spiritual development being a "properly adult phenomenon" (p. 77), beginning only in adulthood, and flourishing only once certain other tasks of development (psychological and otherwise) have been integrated (Helminiak, 1987; McNamara Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Matteson, 2008). The results of this study seem to suggest, later stages or levels of professional development or "maturity" do not necessarily correspond to the same in regards to spiritual development. While the senior practitioners in this study were all at the most "mature" of stages professionally, the same could not be said of their spiritual development. Given the degree of self-focus of some, this process remained at the adolescent stage (Matteson, 2008).

The findings also suggest that instead of integrating of the professional self into the personal self as was necessary for professional development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), the process of spiritual development of the senior therapists studied involved a further integration of these two dimensions into their spiritual self and spiritual understanding explicitly. It was evident in this study that this integration (although an on-going process throughout their professional lives), was more fully possible once their professional identity was established enough, with enough proficiency in practice to allow for focus to be extended further, beyond skills and techniques and theories, to serve as a means for spiritual exploration, reflection, questioning, and self-transcendence through professional practice. In this case, a degree of professional groundwork had to be completed in therapists' development, so as to be able to tap into its

potential for contributing to spiritual development. This would further support previous research noting the increased "spiritual worldview" (Goldberg, 1992, p.50; Kottler & Carlson, 2014) of many senior practitioners, and the development of wisdom in their later years (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Rabu & McLeod, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

The gratitude, and deep appreciation for the opportunity to work as psychotherapists, and the re-assessment of one's values and priorities, characteristic of the Experienced and Senior practitioner stages (Klein et al., 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) appeared to be even more present and intensified as a result of these senior participants' spiritual evolution in practice, especially when reflecting on the contribution of work with clients to their spirituality and spiritual growth. The challenges typically encountered by practitioners at the senior stage around failing health, the prospect of retirement and ending of practice, as well as the feelings of sadness, regret, and disillusionment about their work and their lives (Goldberg, 1992; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) did not find resonance with the therapists in this study. In fact, it appeared to be a far-away, and non-existent question for many of them.

Instead, the depth of spiritual awareness and connection to something greater which these practitioners also experienced, made these concerns secondary, if not irrelevant in light of the sense of meaning, purpose, and connection to a greater reality beyond their own limitations from which they derived their enthusiasm, strength, and inspiration for their life's work. It appeared as though professional practice was only one part of this life's work, which was seen in relation to the transcendent, and the greater reality within which they saw themselves and their lives. Similarly, the psychotherapists in this study continued to feel challenged, enriched, and continued to develop through work with all clients, including the most ordinary, in contrast to the

limited out of the ordinary cases reported elsewhere for practitioners at this stage (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013). It appears that here too, the spiritual, or transcendent dimension played a key role, where each client encounter was understood and experienced as part of the transcendent, of something greater, of something given to them to learn from, to grow from, as a manifestation of a "divine lesson plan", as Dr. I.M. had phrased it.

The development of wisdom as especially characteristic of senior therapists, and as an element of spiritual development also emerged as a finding in this study (Carlson & Kottler, 2014; Goldberg, 1992; Kottler & Hunt, 2016; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Rabu et al., 2016). Wisdom was mentioned explicitly by three participants, who described developing wisdom as part of the spiritual development experienced. Elements of wisdom however, as described in the literature (Rabu & McLeod, 2016), were woven throughout all of the accounts. These elements included a deeper understanding of life and of "the human condition" (Rabu & McLeod, 2016, p. 2), an openness and sensitivity to the complexity in relationships, in professional practice and in life, an increased capacity to create meaning, as well as an increased pragmatism. The capacity to resolve and integrate dilemmas, as well as to reconcile opposites, was also noted by participants, corroborating existing findings (Rabu & McLeod, 2016). At the same time, while humility was a key aspect of spiritual development described in this study, it did not appear to be linked to wisdom, as it has been elsewhere in the literature (Rabu & McLeod, 2016).

Participants' sharing of their wisdom and the lessons learned throughout this lifetime of development, and their advice to younger generations, shared some overlap with that reported elsewhere (Hatcher et al., 2012; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Trottier & Mathison, 2011). The content of what they shared was also reflective of the focus they expressed in relation to their own experience, and its limitations. The themes which emerged here centred primarily on the

practitioner's inner self, inner experience of spirituality, and on their practice, with little regard for anything beyond these realities. Given the richness of experience and learning from the lifetime of practice which these senior therapists claimed overall, and which was alluded to in other findings (Geller & Farber, 2015; Goldberg, 1992; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2015; Rabu & McLeod, 2016), the limited focus of what they had to share with beginning therapists was surprising. It appears that the extent to which participants were able to see themselves, and their responsibility, in and to the world beyond the self and beyond the therapy room, was also reflected in the extent to which they were able to consider the younger generation of practitioners as persons within a larger world – and, with a responsibility to this larger world.

The necessity of therapists' integration (including spiritual integration) within themselves and their own lives for the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic work alluded to in the literature (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Cashwell et al., 2007; Rabu et al., 2016) was supported by the results of this research. *Who* the participant therapists became as a result of the spiritual growth and development experienced (in this case through client encounters themselves) had significant positive impact on their work with clients. In confirming this connection, the findings also point to the potential resource for spiritual development and integration that psychotherapy practice itself can be. As being in the senior therapist stage of professional development is "no guarantee for wisdom" (Goldberg, 1992, p. 147) but offers "an excellent opportunity for it" (p. 147), so this study suggests being a psychotherapist, while by no means a guarantee of spiritual integration and development, nevertheless offers this "excellent opportunity" for it as well.

At the same time, the results here caution against the risks of identifying psychotherapy practice and client experiences with one's spirituality and the means of spiritual development too closely. Participants' experience of practice as "a calling", as one's lived expression of

spirituality and spiritual role in the world, as a spiritual endeavor itself, and part of a divine plan for their life, was reflective of a large body of existing literature (Dlugos & Friedlander, 2002; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008). While this appeared to enhance therapists' commitment, presence, and depth of involvement in the therapy room, it also at times created an understanding of 'me, my practice, and God' or 'me, my work and my spirituality' as sufficient, increasing therapists' focus on themselves and their 'special' calling, to the exclusion of all else. This tended to result in a "mystification" (Helminiak, 1987, p. 150) of the psychotherapy profession, the equivalent of the "pious inflation" (p. 149) encountered in spiritual and religious practice, which compromised its integrity, and the spiritual authenticity towards which psychotherapy practice can contribute. It seemed to foster a sense of complacency for some, in relation to the reality beyond their professional (and personal) lives, limiting awareness of this reality and of their responsibility in/to it, so much so that, beyond the therapy room and their inner experience, further development and awareness was ignored or stifled.

The importance of authenticity and genuineness in relation to clients was also highlighted in this study, confirming previous findings (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Klein et al., 2011; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000). In this study, participants attributed the presence of these qualities specifically to the development of their spirituality, and manifesting primarily in their work with clients. It appears as though in this study, professional and spiritual development intersected and were joined together in participants' experience most closely through this one element.

Client Influence

The results of this study confirmed the importance of client influence on therapists and on their development, as individuals and as professionals, noted elsewhere (Freeman & Hayes, 2002;

Hatcher et al., 2012; Kottler & Carlson, 2014; Kottler & Hunter, 2010; Rabu et al., 2016; Turner et al., 2008; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Skovholt, 2012; Trottier-Mathison, et al., 2010). It further confirmed and elucidated the important role which client encounters can have in their spiritual development, and the potential of practice to result in farther-reaching change of therapists, beyond the therapy room (Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Hatcher et al., 2012). The notion of discovering oneself in relationship (Buber, 1947; Miller, 2000) was reflected in participants' experience with clients, and spoken of quite explicitly. The discovery of having changed, and deeply so, as well as the discovery of *who* they have become in retrospect (Rabu et al., 2016), as a result of client influence and its integration into their development, was also true for most. Furthermore, the results of this study also attest to some existing findings, which suggest that such discovery can often be possible only in retrospect, and often only fully recognizable in one's senior years (Rabu et al., 2016).

The intertwining of client influence with other factors, including practitioner's pre-existing spirituality, its understanding and experience, and their focus of development, was also highlighted by this study. The experiences of client encounters for practitioners contributed through many "eye opening" experiences, as well as through the "enriching and burdening" (Rabu et al., 2016, p. 749), challenging ones. Findings further elucidated the extent that client influence can have, and the different ways in which client influence is experienced and integrated by therapists, adding to existing knowledge (Freeman & Hayes, 2002; Hatcher et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2008). Moreover, the study revealed that the degree to which therapists saw their work as interconnected with spirituality also played a strong part in their experiencing and recognizing of this influence.

Whereas this role of clients has been noted as key in the professional aspect of therapists'

development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; 2013), it was seen as only one, albeit significant for many, among many other sources of influence in regards to the spiritual dimension reported here. Most participants echoed the understanding of clients as being "co-contributors to maturation and integrity" (Miller & Young-Eisendrath, 2000, p.34). However, the opposite was also the case, where participants' experience revealed the struggle to continue developing spiritually, to maintain their integrity and values despite of their experiences with clients and, in one case, being able to do so only through leaving professional practice. In these cases, the influence of clients did play a key role in practitioners' questioning of the profession, as well as the society whose values it reflects, from a "higher values perspective" (Matteson, 2008, p. 49).

Overall, client encounters were a catalyst for and expression of spiritual development in the experience of many of the psychotherapists' in this study, echoing previous findings (Dlugos & Friedlander, 2002; Mackay, 2008). Clients played an important and dynamic role in participants' spiritual development – challenging them and opening up the possibility for deepening, expansion, integration, and self-transcendence. Their influence also proved to be a potentially limiting factor, contributing instead to a stifling of growth, and to deepening of a self-centred orientation. For some participants, client encounters reflected the individualistic focus of prevailing societal norms (Dlugos & Friedlander, 2002; Matteson, 2008; Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017), and either served to entrench the same in practitioners, or catalyze development through examples of how not to be, found elsewhere (Hatcher et al. 2012). It was here that the level of therapists' awareness, and conscious choice, as well as their understanding of spirituality (all outcomes of development heretofore) played a pivotal role.

As has been noted in the case of therapists' professional and spiritual development, much

appears to depend on therapists' willingness to reflect (Rice, 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Orlinsky & Ronnestad, 2005; Goldberg, 1992). As this study has shown, client influence, however significant, meaningful, and potentially beneficial, remains of little use or impact without therapists' willingness to reflect upon it, to recognize its potential to influence and contribute to their development, and to engage and use it accordingly. In addition, the focus of this reflection appears to be salient as well. In this study, differences appeared in both the extent and the quality of responses from participants who had already previously reflected on certain experiences with clients, than those who have not, and who were only prompted to do so as a result of the interview questions. The capacity to make meaning, as well as to discern one's direction to take was most prominent in this regard. Equally, if not more importantly, the study revealed that much also depends on therapists' willingness to act on their reflecting.

Lastly, the results of this study reflected the extent to which client encounters can be the opportunities which nudge practitioners out of and beyond the "adolescent identity crisis" (Matteson, 2008, p. 3) of self-centredness, or contribute to further entrenching them in it through focus on their inner experience, professional identity and the limited realm of therapist-client interactions. As the dynamics proposed in the model described point to, much here depends on the awareness, focus, intentionality, and understanding of spirituality and spiritual development of practitioners. With the tendency, and underlying propensity towards self-absorption, comes also the potential, and underlying propensity, and ever-present opportunity for self-transcendence. The choice between the two remains with the psychotherapist – as person. It is also a choice that remains to be made over and over again, as part of an on-going, dynamic, and cumulative process of development, which continues over a lifetime.

Relevance of Study

The research discussed here contributed a rich and in-depth exploration of participating senior psychotherapists' experience of spiritual change, growth, and development, resulting from work with clients. In doing so, it brought new understanding and furthered existing knowledge about psychotherapist development, psychotherapist spirituality, and about spirituality and spiritual development per se. It also added valuable data to the existing research in the area of senior practitioners and the final stage of therapist development in particular, providing the opportunity for them to share the fruits and wisdom gained therein with the younger generation of therapists entering practice today. Furthermore, the study provided a clearer, and more detailed perspective on the influence that clients have on psychotherapists in these abovementioned aspects.

The findings confirmed the importance of spirituality in many psychotherapists' lives, and its significance in their work. They also raised some important questions about psychotherapists' understanding of the spiritual dimension and of themselves in relation to it. In examining the role that clients and psychotherapy practice have played in influencing and shaping the experience, understanding, and development of practitioner spirituality, the study further confirmed the extent and limits of client influence, along with the inseparability of the spiritual dimension inherent in psychotherapy practice. It also highlighted the dimension of practice as being only one influence in this process of development, and brought attention to the *person*, behind and beyond the label of "psychotherapist".

In doing so, the study revealed some important connections between psychotherapy practice, spirituality, and spiritual development especially. The process, nature, inner and outer dynamics and direction of psychotherapists' change and development as individuals - in relation to not only their work and those close to them, but also to society and the larger world beyond,

have been elucidated and examined here more closely. Most notably, the close, intimate and highly engaged nature of their relationship and commitment to their work and profession, as well as to their very identity as psychotherapists, was contrasted with the relatively low awareness, commitment or responsibility to, and engagement in the greater reality beyond "their" spirituality and practice.

Since spirituality has become a popular area of consideration in psychotherapy practice and research (Aten & Leach, 2009; Cummings et al., 2014; Mackay, 2008; Matteson, 2008; Pargament, 2007; Smith & Orlinsky, 2014; Sperry, 2012), and since the development of psychotherapists as professionals and as persons has been emphasized as key the therapy outcomes and effectiveness (Aponte, 2016; Klein et al., 2011; Kottler & Hunt, 2014; Rice, 2011; Ronnesad & Skovholt, 2013), a closer look at the understanding and the nature of spirituality and spiritual development being advanced is warranted. The present study, with its finding and with the questions these findings have raised, has opened a door into such an examination.

Implications for Practice and Psychotherapy Training

The results of this study present a number of valuable implications for psychotherapy practice and the education and training of new generations of therapists. The concerns raised by the senior practitioners interviewed here in regards to the profession's current trends of a symptom-oriented approach to psychotherapy practice, with the corresponding shallowing of understanding of both the client as a person, of their difficulties, and of the therapeutic relationship, deserve consideration. Some participants' observations of the profession's distancing from the inclusion of values and of issues of social and ecological justice in practice also present difficult questions to be explored. This is especially the case in regards to the role of psychotherapy and the profession in enabling and reinforcing the very societal norms/trends

which contribute to the issues its clients present with - in no small measure a result of individual psychotherapists' own lack of awareness and contribution through their own way of life. .

The importance of spiritual development for effective and quality work with clients was also highlighted, suggesting the need for more attention to be paid to this dimension of psychotherapists' development per se. The study further revealed the potential of learning, growth, and development, inherent in client encounters – both in professional and personal aspects, including the spiritual, while at the same time drawing attention to the responsibility and choice of the therapist to recognize and to utilize it as such.

Furthermore, the implications of the wisdom and advice shared, as well as the concerns many expressed about the current trends in the profession, offer meaningful and practical implications for education and training. In particular, they bring attention to the importance of one's development as person, of development of quality within them, and of that person's integrity as a whole being, in a wider social context, for psychotherapy practice. They emphasize the need for self-awareness, and awareness of beginning therapists around their motives for entering the field, bringing attention to the need to address this in training programs. They also bring to the fore again the importance of spirituality and its inseparability from professional practice and development for many, which remains a neglected, if not ignored, reality in many educational settings. Lastly, they point to the key and irreplaceable therapeutic value of the quality of the therapist's being and presence in the therapeutic relationship, that which requires development beyond skills and theory, and call for increased attention to this in the profession.

Finally, the study, and the theoretical model of development proposed, is an invitation for psychotherapists to reflect more critically on and become more aware of their own role in creating both the inner, as well as the outer - the social, political, and environmental reality

within which they live, and within which they work, along with their responsibility to, and interconnection with, the greater whole and the "others" within it, beyond their own inner experience, their work, their clients, and their own worlds.

Methodological Critique

Study Limitations and Strengths

The study was limited by the small number of participants resulting in a relatively low level of generalizability and representativeness of the sample. Generalizability and representativeness was further limited by the heterogeneity of the sample. At the same time, the data obtained from a broad range of participant variation of cultures, nationalities, spiritual traditions, practice histories and orientations of the participants, invites further exploration of these as potentially relevant factors. The difficulty and appropriateness of study replication in qualitative research has been noted, especially in the case of phenomenology (Roberts, Dowell, & Nie, 2019), and may be seen to constitute a further limitation of this research. However, it has also been argued that as qualitative methods are becoming increasingly more accepted in the scientific community, the value of a well-described and delineated methodology in ensuring rigor is also being acknowledged (Roberts et al., 2019).

With nine participants completing the study, this number was well within the norm for qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The smaller number of participants allowed for in-depth focus and the rich narrative accounts obtained yielded a deeper level of exploration, and of understanding of the phenomenon in question. This constitutes a strength and opens the door to further investigation. Participant self-selection bias was also a limitation. While participants' personal investment in the topic investigated did provide a rich understanding of the phenomenon studied, given the level of intimacy between it and the participants, it excluded the

experiences of those therapists for whom the subject matter may not be as relevant.

Similarly to the research of Ronnestad and Skovholt (2013), the findings were limited to those therapists who have stayed in the profession in one capacity or another for 25 years or more, neglecting the experience and developmental trajectories of those who have left practice or the profession altogether. The study did open a door however to investigating the latter with the experiences shared by one of the participants who did leave practice, but not the profession, and remained involved in teaching and training of therapists. Thus, the findings reflect the experience of those practitioners for whom the work of psychotherapy has provided enough meaning to remain in practice for 25 years or more.

Furthermore, the concept of spirituality, with the many definitions that have appeared in the literature, and the operational definition that was used in this study, was a limiting factor. Such a limitation is inherent each time we attempt to use language to define and describe an elusive phenomenon, which lies beyond language. It is also inherent in conducting qualitative research, which often seeks to describe such phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Houser, 2015). In light of this, measures were taken specifically to ensure the methodology chosen was most suitable for investigating such an elusive subject matter (Houser, 2015; West, 2009).

Overall, the study focus and design, as well as its implementation, resulted in making a meaningful contribution to the aims of the investigation as outlined in the research questions. The results have contributed meaningful data in light of the existing literature and current gaps, and provided new, relevant knowledge in an area so far unexplored, thus ensuring the study's utility (Levitt et al., 2017). Coherence of findings, or internal consistency, as a guideline for ensuring research utility (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Levitt et al., 2017), was addressed through a general description of the phenomenon, the layering and interconnecting of themes, and creating

a visual representation which connected findings (Levitt et al., 2017; McLeod, 2001). While the nature of the study depended on subjective interpretation by the participants as well as by the researcher and peer review, accountability of research practices was ensured by a transparent and explicit account of the research procedure, allowing for the possibility of external evaluation of the findings (Bergman & Coxon, 2005).

Lastly the research also succeeded in giving voice to the important influence that clients have on therapists' lives, and inner growth, and change, and to the wisdom, and experience of senior practitioners, which could be shared for the benefit of younger generations of therapists in training. Thus, both the study's limitations and its strengths provide relevant material for further research to build and improve upon.

Future Research Directions

This study began as a proposal to further examine the role that clients play in the spirituality and spiritual development of psychotherapists, and of its manifestation in way of life. As spirituality is a dimension of the human person characterized by the capacity for self-transcendence, its use as a lens through which to conduct the study was intended to serve as a stepping-stone in an attempt to direct more focus on the person of the therapist, as well as on who they themselves become in relation to their work, and to the wider societal/global context in which they live, and which they also create, by virtue of their everyday lives outside of practice.

In light of the findings, which have provided a rich account of psychotherapists' experiences of client encounters and their impact on their spiritual understanding, experience, and development, a number of areas for further research emerged, along with more questions to consider. Among them, the experiences of psychotherapists who have left practice emerge as an on-going gap remaining to be investigated. The question of possible differences in spiritual

development outcomes as related to individuals' understanding of spirituality and spiritual orientation, have also emerged as an area for further study. Moreover, questions remain around the challenges associated with research in this area being limited to therapists' self-reports.

Specifically in the area of tangible effects and outcomes of development, including spiritual development, which have tangible consequences for a larger whole and for the "others" within it, the question of using measures other than subjective participant self-reports appears relevant. Lastly, in looking at the experiences of senior practitioners, the study here invites further exploration of what the experiences of those at other stages of professional development might be, and of how their developmental process might look like.

One unexpected finding in this study was the extent to which participants tended to center on themselves, and the degree to which what they described resembled the "feel good spirituality" (Matteson, 2008, p. 48) alluded to earlier. Connected to this was also the surprising degree of discrepancy between their overall described extent of inner spiritual change and growth, along with that extending to their therapeutic practice, and between the degree of awareness and change described in relation to the broader social and ecological context.

While many participants voiced their concerns about the social and ecological crises in today's world, only one seemed aware of and willing to consider their own role in contributing to this reality through their own lives – outside of the comfort of the therapy room. It is further important to note that cultural differences, and differences in understanding of spirituality, appeared to play a significant role. Thus, in many cases, for a phenomenon such as spirituality which had been characterized by the capacity for self-transcendence, the degree of self-centredness was indeed surprising.

The subjectivity of participants' understanding of spirituality and spiritual development,

as was explored here, brings with it the question of how spiritual development, as manifested in actions and in a way of life (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017) can be examined more objectively. The challenge brought forth by this study was reflected in the discrepancy between participants' changes in perceptions and attitudes, and those in actions and way of life. While most of the literature examined here, and the results of this research, appear to remain focused on the inner experience, with the noted difficulty in transcending it, further research may be useful in examining this discrepancy, and therapists' awareness of it.

Furthermore, the influence of clients studied here was accompanied by other sources of influence in participants' own spiritual change and growth, such as their spiritual community and traditions, education and on-going learning from fields other than psychotherapy, social involvement in initiatives which have raised their awareness, as well as their relationships with family and friends, and other personal experiences, worth investigating further. As noted earlier, the understanding of spirituality itself was key in determining and guiding the direction, and nature, of participants' change, growth and development, and the degree to which this resulted in self-transcendence or self-absorption. The connection between the spirituality one espouses, and the direction, and extent of, spiritual growth might be an area for future research, as is the relationship between this and the cultural and social milieu within which one lives and practices. This may be especially relevant in the context of psychotherapists' professional practice, which, as was noted in these results, can be used to further the social agenda of a particular culture.

As the experiences of therapists who have left practice have been neglected by research to date (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013), and as this study has hinted at, they too have a valuable, and unique perspective to offer on both psychotherapy practice, therapist development, spirituality, and the reality of the profession in society, more focus on this population in future

studies will be important.

Given the focus of this research on senior psychotherapists, similar investigations of those in earlier stages of development will contribute to a more complete understanding of this phenomenon, given the considerable differences in experiences, characteristics, and areas of emphasis for psychotherapists across the spectrum of professional development (Klein et al. 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Trottier-Mathison et al. 2010).

Lastly, the senior psychotherapists who participated in this research contributed valuable insights and wisdom for the younger generation of therapists entering practice. These reveal the potential for and importance of maintaining a connection between those in the beginning stages of development as psychotherapists, and those in its final stage, for supporting and enriching the continued development of both.

Conclusions

This study explored the experience and process of spiritual development, as influenced by client encounters, through the eyes of senior psychotherapists, seen retrospectively over their lifetime in practice. In doing so, it gave a valuable perspective not only on the phenomenon of spiritual development, but also on the role that clients play in influencing psychotherapists, their development, and their life.

The results of this study revealed spiritual development to be an on-going and dynamic process which results from the tension between a propensity towards growth and self-transcendence on the one hand, and the propensity towards self-centredness and self-absorption on the other. It is furthermore a process of deepening, expanding, enriching, and integrating which occurs within the individual, so as to in time break through to the outside and manifest in outward growth – in actions and way of life, and in relationship to the outside world, and all

"others" within it. Being an outcome of self-reflection, conscious choice, and ultimately of a commitment to change and to "become a better person" (Dr. I.M.), it can equally be thwarted and co-opted by self-serving tendencies.

For the senior psychotherapists studied here, spiritual development was also a process influenced in no small measure by clients, and by their work with them. Client influence served as a potentially important catalyst for change, growth and development. However it remained limited by the extent of awareness, willingness, and choice of practitioners to utilize it to this end. Spiritual development, as this study revealed, is a process which requires, and can also result in the "change of heart" to which one participant alluded.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITÉ SAINT-PAUL UNIVERSITY

04-07-2016
dd-mm-yyyy

Bureau de la recherche et de la déontologie
Office of Research and Ethics

Ethics Certificate
Research Ethics Board (REB)

REB File Number **1360.1/16**

Principal Investigator / Thesis supervisor / Co-investigators / Student

Last name	Name	Affiliation	Role
Godula	Magdalena	Faculty of Human Sciences	Principal Investigator
Grafanaki	Sotiria	Faculty of Human Sciences	Supervisor

Type of project Doctoral Thesis

Title Spiritual development through client encounters: The experience of psychotherapists

Approval date	Expiry Date	Decision
04-07-2016 *(dd-mm-yyyy)*	**03-07-2017** *(dd-mm-yyyy)*	**1 (approved)**

Committee comments

The Research Ethics Board (REB) approved the project.
The researcher is invited to use the reference number 1360.1/16 when recruiting participants.

In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board has examined and approved the application for an ethics certificate for this project for the period indicated and subject to the conditions listed above.

The research protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB. This includes, among others, the extension of the research, additional recruitment for the inclusion of new participants, changes in location of the fieldwork, any stage where a research permit is required, such as work in schools. Minor administrative changes are allowed.

The REB must be notified of all changes or unanticipated circumstances that have a serious impact on the conduct of the research, that relate to the risk to participants and their safety.
Modifications to the project, information, consent and recruitment documentation must be submitted to the Office of Research and Ethics for approval by the REB.

The investigator must submit a report four weeks prior to the expiry date of the certificate stated above requesting an extension or that the file be closed.

Documents relating to publicity, recruitment and consent of participants should bear the file number of the certificate. They must also indicate the coordinates of the investigator should participants have questions related to the research project. In which case, the documents will refer to the Chair of the REB and provide the coordinates of the Office of Research and Ethics.

Signature

Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

Université Saint Paul University | 223, Main Ottawa (Ontario) Canada K1S 1C4 ☎ 613 236-1393 Télécopie / Fax 613 782-3005

APPENDIX B – PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the research project: Spiritual development through client encounters: The experience of psychotherapists.

Researcher: Magdalena Godula, PhD. (Cand.)
School of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, Faculty of Human Sciences, Saint Paul University.
Telephone: XXXXXXXXX
E-mail: XXXXXXX

Research Supervisor: Sotiria Grafanaki, PhD., Full Professor
School of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, Faculty of Human Sciences, Saint Paul University.
Telephone: XXXXXXXXX
E-mail: XXXXXXXX

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned study conducted by Magdalena Godula, under the supervision of Dr. Sotiria Grafanaki.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to explore retrospectively the experiences of spiritual change and development of psychotherapists resulting from their lifetime of work with clients.

Participation: My participation will consist of completing a demographic questionnaire, a one-page written reflexive account of a significant client experience which affected me deeply on a spiritual level, and of meeting with the researcher in person for one one-hour interview to share my experiences of being impacted by clients through answering a series of open-ended questions. The interview will be audiotaped and will take place at Saint Paul University or at my workplace depending on my own preference.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail minimal emotional risk in that it may result in emotional disturbance due to bringing up sensitive memories or experiences

which have affected me deeply. I have received reassurance that every effort will be made to minimize these risks, that I will be free to share only that and only as much as I feel comfortable in sharing, that the researcher will discuss any negative impact of the process with me should this occur, and will make the appropriate arrangements to ensure additional assistance and support for me as necessary.

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to the understanding of how psychotherapists develop, and the role that clients play in their development, especially in the area of spirituality. My participation will also enrich the current understanding of psychotherapist spirituality and the process of spiritual change and growth. It will provide the opportunity for me to reflect on my own experience in this area, and to share my experience in a way which will be helpful to beginning therapists.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that the information I provide will only be used for the purpose of the abovementioned research study. I also have been reassured that my confidentiality and anonymity will be protected by using pseudonyms or codes instead of my real name, and no identifying information will be used in the dissemination of the findings at the end of the study.

Conservation of data: The data collected through my participation will be stored securely in a locked cabinet in the research supervisor's office, which will also remain locked. This includes the interview tapes, transcripts, questionnaires, demographic information, written accounts, and the researcher's notes. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. According to the University's regulations, the data will be stored for a period of five (5) years, after which it will be securely destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in this study. If I choose to participate, I understand that I am free to withdraw at any point and for any reason, and /or refuse to answer any question or provide any information asked for, without any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all the data collected up to that point will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the abovementioned study conducted by Magdalena Godula of the School of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, Faculty of Human Sciences, at Saint Paul University, under the supervision of Dr. Sotiria Grafanaki.

If I have any questions regarding the study or my participation, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of the study, I may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON, K1S 1C4. Tel.: (613) 236 – 1393.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's Signature: **Date:**

Researcher's Signature: **Date:**

APPENDIX C - RECRUITMENT POSTER

REB File # 1360.1/16

INVITING LONG-TIME PSYCHOTHERAPISTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY OF CLIENT INFLUENCE ON PSYCHOTHERAPIST SPIRITUALITY

Researcher: Magdalena Godula
E-mail: XXXXXXX
Telephone: XXXXXXXX

This proposed research project seeks to explore the impact of clients on the spirituality, spiritual change and development of psychotherapists, as seen retrospectively, over the course of their career. The study focuses on the experience of psychotherapists with at least 25 years in practice, as a result of their work with clients, and, in turn, on the effects of this on their everyday lives. It is hoped that the results will shed more light onto our understanding of the impact of psychotherapy practice on therapists, therapist development, and on the process of spiritual development, with implications for psychotherapy training and education.

Participation in this research study will involve completing a brief demographic questionnaire, a one-page written reflexive account, as well as a 60-90min. in-person interview, scheduled at your convenience.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any point in the study. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, and your anonymity will be preserved.

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to share and reflect on your experience, and to pass on important lessons learned to the younger generation of therapists. You will also be contributing to our understanding of the role clients play in psychotherapist development, psychotherapist spirituality, and the impacts of this on continued professional practice and way of being in society.

If you would like to find out more about this project, please contact the researcher, Magdalena Godula, PhD (Cand.), by e-mail at XXXXXXXXX or by telephone at XXXXXXXXXXX.

APPENDIX D – DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Study: Spiritual Development through Client Encounters: The Experience of Psychotherapists

Researcher: *Magdalena Godula, PhD (Cand.)*

Participant Demographic Information Questionnaire

Participant Code: _____

Year of Birth: _____ **Country of Origin: _____**

Gender: _____ **First Language: _____**

Marital Status: _____

Current Spiritual Tradition (if any): _____

Past Spiritual Tradition(s) (if any): _____

_____

_____

Education (list degrees and year of graduation):

_____

_____

_____

Memberships/Designations: _____

Number of Years in Practice: _____

Current Theoretical Orientation: _____

Specialization (if any): _____

Current Place of Work/Practice: _____

Population(s) Worked With: _____

Estimated lifetime client contact hours: _____

Current estimated number of client contact hours per week: _____

APPENDIX E – WRITTEN REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT

Research Study: Spiritual Development through Client Encounters: The Experience of Psychotherapists

Researcher: *Magdalena Godula, PhD (Cand.)*

Written reflexive account of significant client impact

Using the space provided, please write about the most (or one of the most) memorable experiences with a client which have affected you deeply on the spiritual level, the lessons you have learned from this experience, and how this has changed you and your life in retrospect.

APPENDIX F - INTERVIEW GUIDE

Semi-Structured Interview Procedure and Questions Schedule

Overview

The interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes in duration. The interview questions will enquire about your understanding and experience of spirituality, the role clients have played in shaping your spirituality, and your process of spiritual change and development through the years of your work as a therapist. We will also explore how these changes in your spirituality have in turn impacted your clinical practice, and your everyday life beyond the therapy room. At the end, you will be invited to reflect on the lessons you would like to impart to the younger generation of therapists preparing for, and beginning their practice today. The interview will be audio-taped for transcription.

Questions:

1) How would you define spirituality? (Prompt: What does spirituality mean to you?)

2) If you look at your experience as a therapist over the last X years, what would you say has been the role of spirituality over your lifetime of practice?

3) If you reflect back, have you noticed any changes in your spirituality since you first started your practice as a therapist and now? (Prompt: what are these changes? To what do you attribute these changes?)

4) What has been the role of clients in the process of your spiritual change and development? (Prompt: Were there any changes in your spirituality that you believe could not be possible without your work or without the influence of your clients?

5) During this lifetime of psychotherapy practice, were there any specific events, moments, situations that you consider as the most impactful on your spirituality? Spiritual growth? Spiritual struggle? (Prompt: What specific examples come to mind?)

6) How did these affect you? (Prompt: How did these affect your life outside of the therapy room?)

7) What specifically did clients teach you about spirituality? About the spiritual (or the transcendent dimension of life)? About spiritual development?

8) What did clients teach you about your own self? (Prompt: About your day to day life? Your decisions? Your choices? Examples?)

9) In what way have these lessons you received from working with clients impact your work as a therapist? (Prompt: Can you give some examples?)

10) How has work with clients impacted the way you view the world? Humanity? The Earth and the non-human world?

11) How has your work with clients impacted your understanding of your place on Earth and your way of being? Of all life on the planet?

12) What would you consider as the greatest blessings from your work with clients? The greatest struggles? Difficult experiences you would rather not have had?

13) In retrospect, were there any blessings in disguise? Painful and difficult experiences that in time, proved to be blessings? And apparent blessings which turned out to be the opposite in the long term?

14) In light of these experiences, what would you like to pass on to the younger generations of therapists in training today? And to those beginning practice?

15) If you try to describe the impact of client encounters on your life in just a sentence or just a few words, what would you say?

16) Is there anything you would like to add that I did not ask you but you consider important to mention?

APPENDIX G – RESEARCHER'S REFLECTION

The idea for this research study came as I was sifting through old notes from my MA program, all of which I still kept in a thick binder. I had been reflecting on a topic for a while, having decided to return to Saint Paul University for doctoral studies. At the end, in a back pocket was a paper, yellowed over the years, which my then-and-now supervisor had written: "How research can change the researcher: The need for sensitivity, flexibility, and ethical boundaries in conducting qualitative research in counselling/psychotherapy". There is was. If research changes the researcher, surely psychotherapy practice changes the psychotherapist?

As I pondered this more, I realized what I was really interested in was how we, psychotherapists, change on that deep level, at the very core of our being - that place where values, purpose, meaning, faith, and responsibility to or sense of something greater than our own lives, is found. The second light bulb came on in my head, though the connection was made in my heart before I was aware. Spirituality. How does practice impact our spirituality? It's no secret that it had impacted mine. So much so that only two years prior, I had decided to leave the field – only to return for another degree, and effectively delve even deeper into it, and more intensely. I also knew of other therapists who spoke about the impact their work had on them, and on how they have changed as individuals because of it. I became curious.

At the time, it had simply seemed like an interesting, and important question to explore. I was genuinely curious. Looking back however, I realize it also arose from that deeper place within me, a place of questioning and of a profound concern about what I had seen over my own years in practice. Something seemed to be missing, or I was missing something. More and more I was becoming aware of an apparent disconnection between all the good therapists do in the

therapy room (and I know they do), with the values and spirituality many claim to espouse, and the lifestyles they lead, which contribute to so much injustice, suffering, and inequality in the world. This led me to reflect more on what spirituality meant, and how it is experienced and understood, and ultimately lived out. My research developed as did my own reflective process.

Before I began the study, and up until after the last interview was completed, I naively thought I would find something special, extraordinary, and that the participants I studied would somehow be very, very different people than the ordinary ones I knew, by virtue of being research participants. This was a research study after all, not just my everyday experience. It took a while for me to realize that they weren't. But they were real – real people, and because of this, also revealing of reality.

I also naively thought that given the existing research I have read (or misread), the effects of clients on therapists and on their development will be very direct, a 1:1 ratio, input = output, client impact = therapist change of life. After all, that's how I thought it should be – we learn something, we recognize a need to change, and we change. End of story. That was my world in which I grew up. But this conflicted with what I was seeing "out there". I too, like Walter, had to recognize that at least for many people, this is not the case. And recognize it again. Something else is needed, and there is more to the process of inner change, and to changing one's life, than this. Doing this research helped to elucidate this and identify what seemed to be at the source of disconnect. What was revealing is how much groundwork does have to be laid for genuine change to become possible – groundwork that I had taken for granted. I came to appreciate the role of external sources of influence, and their importance in our development. I became even more grateful to all those who have contributed to my own development through life.

I realize that entering into an academic role, I too created an artificial split between my

"researcher self" and the world as interpreted through research, and my "ordinary self" with "ordinary" observations. I had unconsciously, and in spite of myself, put academic research on a pedestal, while second-guessing my own inner voice, perceptions, and common sense, as well as those of others. In doing so, I shortchanged myself and that very core which I sought to give voice to in my research participants, and shortchanged the very critical lens which is needed as a researcher. It was through my clinical training and knowledge that I was able to observe what was happening inside of me, and what I was doing with this. It was my development as a clinician that enabled me to integrate and recognize these perspectives as being two sides of the same coin. The interplay between the academic and the clinical realm of my own experience was providing ample opportunity to grow, strengthen and form me – spiritually and morally.

Throughout the research process, I was also developing in my clinical capacity and integrating more theoretical understanding into my work. This combination allowed me to look at spirituality in a very different way than I had before. And I began to question how much of what spirituality is in our understanding is nothing more than another way humans make sense of their experience, and justify, or explain, their existence. In collecting data, I started having the rather out-of-my-comfort zone feeling that this was all just another self-serving invention, another attempt to cover up emptiness with many fancy words. The discomfort grew into painful frustration when it further became clear that what we call spirituality can be used equally as a means towards self-serving, and towards self-transcending ends. As humanity itself, it seemed, it has so much potential for the latter, yet so often degenerates into less than. The discomfort grew enough for me to realize I needed to move on. What mattered was how I was going to continue living my life so as to be useful, faithful to this potential – for love and for selflessness, and respond to the responsibility I have to those affected by my life and beyond. To get beyond

myself, I had to get beyond spirituality, or at least notions of it. The initial question of *who* therapists become through their work illuminated an equally, if not more important question of *how* they live – as people on this Earth, among others.

Completing this research enriched and strengthened me. It brought me closer to my values, and farther away from the crowds. I can say that through its process, I too have become more 'real'. Far more importantly than providing answers, it clarified my questions. It helped me to see and to experience more completely, and to be more aware of my own tendencies for self-serving use of spirituality. It also left me baffled about the degree of denial, lack of awareness, and the extent/intensity of defenses which even long-time psychotherapists will use to avoid uncomfortable questions. This was difficult for me to deal with, and to place aside in data analysis. As much as my psychoanalytic training attuned me to recognize such dynamics and was a blessing in my clinical work, it made my research downright painful at times. One of the most sobering discoveries in doing this research, though in retrospect not at all surprising, was that even the most seasoned practitioners are really not that much different from the clients I (and they) work with, with regards to their level of awareness. Seniority in practice or in age does not equate with spiritual maturity. While development in different aspects and dimensions of one's person may be intertwined, it is not one and the same. There is something to be said for that separation of professional and spiritual (or other), development, mentioned earlier.

It became clear for me that while research can help us understand, clarify, elucidate, describe and explain, it does not change the reality of that which we investigate. It has no special powers. In this case the reality is change. Change and development remain up to us – as participants, clinicians, researchers, clients. As persons sharing and living in the same world, and creating the reality of this world, for ourselves and for others. Including those others whose lives,

out of sight and out of mind, may be of little consequence for us, yet for whom the impact of our lives is of great consequence indeed. I am grateful to my participants for revealing just how true this is.

At the end of this study, I again touch the same questions, concerns, and the same reality within and "out there" from which this study grew. I come away with a greater understanding of what spiritual, and all development entails – in myself and in others. I come away with a stronger direction for my "being useful", with a sense of relief in being able to more confidently listen to my own conscience, and with gratitude. I also come away with a greater heaviness inside. And sadness. The rift and disconnect between words and actions is real, as is the difference between real change – change of heart, and appearances of change.