A Portfolio of Academic, Therapeutic Practice and Research Work

Including an investigation into the spiritual and psychological development of a former alcoholic.

by

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Statement of anonymity

Throughout this portfolio all names and places have been replaced with pseudonyms and identifying information has been altered or omitted to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of the clients and research participants.
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Introduction to the Portfolio

This portfolio contains a selection of the work that has been submitted over the three years of my training as a counselling psychologist. It is divided into three dossiers which cover academic, practice and research aspects of the training. The work included also reflects my areas of personal interest and how these have influenced my development as a practitioner. Before discussing each dossier in turn, I would like to give the reader a sense of my life before this course and what led me to train to become a counselling psychologist.

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in the nature of being human and what makes us all ‘tick’. Psychology thus seemed the natural choice for me to study at university and I looked forward to the chance to study a topic that truly inspired me. However I was quite disappointed with the undergraduate psychology course as it did not seem to touch on the aspects of human nature that really fascinated me, such as exploring the nature of relationships, and how people might find meaning in their lives. Following my graduation I made a distinct choice to move away from the field of psychology and into the world of business as a qualitative researcher, where I stayed for twenty years. I loved this world for a time, which felt quite glamorous and exciting and fulfilled my curiosity about people through its focus upon understanding the motivations behind views and behaviour. However, after a while, the ‘information gathering’ side became less interesting to me as compared with a more therapeutic orientation. Over time I began to feel somewhat disenchanted and trapped within a fairly lucrative career.

In my late twenties I discovered personal development groups and seminars and became fascinated by them: it felt as if I had finally found what I had been looking for when I had initially studied psychology. I immersed myself in intense experiential work for a number of years, finding it at once challenging, painful and liberating. Over time I moved away from these courses and towards those with more spiritual and meditative leanings, and also worked one to one with a spiritual counsellor. At this point it felt as if my work life and my private life had become quite separate aspects of myself and I think
that my decision to finally train in the therapeutic field heralded a ‘bringing together’ of these two aspects. I decided to take the ‘leap’ into formal training but, knowing little about the different theoretical models, was not sure which course to pursue. As chance would have it, I met a counselling psychologist who had trained at Surrey University and who explained that the training involved three different models. I really liked the idea of being exposed to a variety of approaches as I felt it would give me a good grounding both theoretically and experientially. It was also important to me to find a course that focussed upon the therapeutic relationship and the personal development of the practitioner, and counselling psychology appeared to fulfil this. At my interview I tentatively posed the question around research into spirituality and the fact that it was so warmly received was the deciding factor in my undertaking the training at Surrey University.

The Academic Dossier

The academic dossier comprises three essays, each of which reflects some of the areas that I have been drawn to examine throughout the training. The first essay is about the dying process. It explores how death and dying is understood in our society, and suggests ways in which counselling psychologists might use this knowledge with people who are dying. As I look back, I also wonder if my interest in aspects of the dying process might have been an attempt to understand more about life and its meaning, especially as the point of death can be a time to reflect upon how a life was lived. It also fits with my interest in relation to the spiritual and the wider context of life. Subsequently I found that the exploration of the subject of dying helped me in quite a practical sense with my clients, specifically with those who were facing bereavement but also with clients who were having to come to terms with a painful loss of any kind.

The second essay is related to narcissistic personality disorder and is viewed through a psychodynamic perspective. I chose this topic as narcissistic traits appear to be increasing in society, and I was interested to gain a greater understanding of what might underlie this and how best to work with it. I enjoyed learning about Kohut’s (1971, 1977) psychodynamic approach for narcissistic personality disorder within this essay and
exploring the nature of therapy using his approach. In fact Kohut's thinking impacted upon my work more strongly than I realised at the time and it has been interesting for me to note that references to his theory emerge a number of times throughout this Portfolio. As the principles of his therapy are useful for a broader range of clients than those solely with narcissistic presentations, knowledge of his ideas enriched my understanding of relationship issues within the therapeutic domain per se. His ideas helped deepen my understanding of the ways in which the therapeutic relationship can be used to help the client build internal self structures that might have been lacking in early childhood development. As I hope that the reader shall see, the use of the therapeutic relationship as a vehicle for healing has been a key interest for me throughout the training. Within this essay I also discuss the idea of diagnosis per se and issues associated with the diagnostic classification system.

In the final essay on containment, I was quite fascinated with the idea that the therapist might be able to 'contain' and 'detoxify' a client's projections and 'intolerable' emotions, ultimately helping them to develop the capacity to become their own container. The importance of exploring this issue was paramount for me as it highlighted a challenge that I faced as a practitioner with my clients. Early on I found that I was quite heavily impacted by my clients in a physical and emotional sense and I knew that I needed to reach an understanding of this issue if I was to physically survive in this field. This essay helped me to understand more about the process of containment and contributed to my exploration of how to be with my clients in a way that I did not experience as depleting. It also enabled me to more fully explore some of the thinking of Klein (1946), Bion (1962) and Winnicott (1971), all of whom have made significant contributions to psychodynamic theory. I consider their ideas to be fundamental to my psychodynamic work and I continue to draw upon their thinking in my work today.
The Practice Dossier

This dossier describes the placements that I have worked in over each of the three years. I started in an organisational setting, which suited me well with my business background and I felt as if it eased me more gently into this new vocation. My second two placements were both in NHS settings: a new and different environment for me as I had previously tended to work for small, privately owned agencies or for myself from home. This dossier also contains my final clinical paper, which attempts to convey to the reader my theoretical preferences, the challenges that I have experienced during the training and my development both personally and as a practitioner.

The Research Dossier

The research dossier contains a literature review and two pieces of qualitative research. The main theme running through the three years has been in relation to the spiritual aspects that might be present within recovery from alcoholism. Based upon Jung’s view, cited in the Alcoholics Anonymous literature (AA, 1988), of alcoholism as a misguided quest for the divine, I have attempted to explore the effect that alcoholism and subsequent recovery might have upon a person’s spiritual and developmental journey. The first year literature review explores some of the ways in which change might occur for a person within the AA 12 step programme of recovery. AA holds that a ‘spiritual awakening’ is necessary for a full recovery, and so this review investigates definitions of ‘spiritual awakening’, the part that such an awakening might play as a mechanism of change within the 12 step programme and how such change might best be facilitated. In a sense, this represented the beginning of my exploration into spirituality and how it is related to the process of personality change. It formed part of my inquiry into the ways and means that shifts of consciousness and growth might occur for a person (whether alcoholic or not). I consider this to be fundamental to my work as a counselling psychologist and intended it to deepen my understanding of how I might best assist a person as they strive towards a life freer of internal conflicts.
The second year research concerns the faith development of three former alcoholics/addicts who had been through the 12 step programme and subsequently left. Taking into account the 'spiritual awakening' aspects of the programme, I was interested in how a person's spirituality might continue to develop over time, and whether a part of this progress might be, for some, to leave behind the structure of the AA organisation and to find a more personal sense of faith. The case study approach seemed appropriate for such a detailed investigation of such a sensitive subject. As I have tended to regard myself as a 'bigger picture' person, enjoying drawing themes and commonalities from many different views, I thought I might find it a challenge to stay at the level of the individual in this research. However I found it enjoyable to be able to explore each participant's life journey in such detail and instead found a greater challenge in attempting to provide an adequate representation of each person within the confines of the word count.

My final year research represents the culmination of the three years of investigation for me. In a sense I have been trying to look at a person's journey through life and to see how their struggles and challenges have helped them grow and develop both personally and spiritually. I have been trying to see if there is some kind of overarching means of construing a person's development, in order that I can better understand how to contribute to a person's growth in my work as a practitioner. My explorations caused me to read about the medieval model of alchemy, and I became very interested in the concepts that were explored within this approach. (The process of alchemy is concerned with producing the 'philosopher's stone' which enables the 'Prima Materia'- or base metal such as lead- to be transformed into gold. It has been suggested that this model can be a metaphor for a person's psychological and spiritual progress. See year three research, p.190 for a fuller description). When I discovered the principle of alchemy I was excited to have discovered something so all embracing and it caused me to wonder if one might be able to look at a person's life through this model. I decided to conduct a single case study on the life of a former alcoholic and to explore whether their development might be usefully viewed through the lens of alchemy. As a single case study had not been used as a research project on our course before, I am immensely grateful to my supervisor for
encouraging me to go ahead with this. I am also grateful to the participant for his willingness to participate in the research so openly and honestly. For me it felt as if theory, practice, research and personal development all converged in this study. To listen to a person’s story in this depth required the sensitivity of counselling skills but also the curiosity and enquiry of research skills, as well as a good deal of personal involvement and self reflection from me. I found the experience to be intense and challenging, but also feel that it contributed to my development both as a counselling psychologist and as a researcher in a positive manner.

In conclusion, I hope that this portfolio will give the reader a sense of the unfolding journey that I have been on in the last three years, and the ways in which the academic, practice and research aspects have all contributed to my development as a practitioner.
References


ACADEMIC DOSSIER
Introduction to the Academic Dossier

This dossier comprises three essays, written over the three years of my training. The first essay considers psychosocial understandings of the dying process and how we as counselling psychologists might best use this knowledge when working with people who are dying. The second essay discusses narcissistic personality disorder viewed through a psychodynamic perspective, and the third essay is concerned with the concept of containment within psychodynamic therapy.
Critically review psychosocial understandings of the dying process and suggest ways in which counselling psychologists might use this knowledge when working with people who are dying.

Until recently, the study of the dying process had received only limited attention and interest from psychologists and sociologists. Beyond Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ seminal work ‘On Death and Dying’ (1969), there had been little else of such impact in this area. More recent research appears to have moved towards a more individualistic exploration of the needs of the patient, and also towards a more holistic perspective (eg Boerstler, 1998) even incorporating spiritual needs (eg Breitbart, Gibson, Poppito & Berg, 2004). This paper will explore possible reasons for the previous lack of research, and briefly overview the movement of research over time. It will focus upon 3 significant contributions to this field and will make suggestions as to how we as counselling psychologists might utilise this knowledge in order to facilitate our work with people who are dying.

Death is a relatively taboo subject in our western society, and tends to be sanitised and separated from most people’s normal lives (Exley, 2004). It may be that this taboo has affected research and exploration into the subject of the dying process. As Exley states in her review of 5 recent books on this subject, “at an individual level we are able to discuss death and dying in the abstract...But, when confronted with the realities of these phenomena, many of us are less able to talk openly” (p.11). The challenge of being with the dying, let alone the ethics and discomfort of researching them, may have simply proved to be too difficult a subject for many researchers. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) describes how she was met with much resistance from healthcare professionals when she attempted to interview dying hospital patients, from “stunned looks of disbelief to rather abrupt changes of topic of conversation” (p.20).

Kübler-Ross is renowned for being the first to really explore the experiences of the terminally ill and to create a framework for their emotional processes. In her study of 200 terminally ill patients, the 5 stage model of dying was conceptualised, comprising of
denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. The first stage is characterised by denial and isolation, where people refuse to admit that this could be happening to them. The denial gives way to anger and resentment, where rage and envy can be directed towards anyone and anything. Following this can be an attempt to bargain for more time, possibly with their doctor or with God. This gives way to depression, where the loss of their life is truly confronted. Beyond this stage can come acceptance, where they finally come to terms with the reality of their situation and impending death.

Kastenbaum and Costa (1977) consider her work to have been of great importance, not least that it “awakened many to the emotional needs of the dying person” (p.241). They also assert that her work has probably been more influential than any others in encouraging concern for the psychological needs of the terminally ill. It has also provided a type of structure for healthcare professionals, giving examples of problems that might occur at each stage and suggestions as to how to cope with these problems.

There have however, been a number of criticisms of her model and methodology, not least from Kastenbaum and Costa (1977) themselves. They have concerns about her model because psychologists and carers have tended to lean upon it a little too heavily and treat it as the ‘ideal’ way that a patient could attain a ‘good death’. They criticise it for the fact that subjective observations have been expanded into larger generalisations. They further maintain that it does not take account of a host of individual differences in terms of personality, emotionality, personal history and the specific disease process. Shneidman (1973) further suggests that the standard critiques of a stage model can apply, namely that not all people may go through all of these stages in such a discrete and ordered manner and some may skip stages completely. Some people may also never reach the final stage of acceptance.

Overall then, it appears that the Kübler-Ross model has been important for focussing professionals upon the needs of the patient. It provides a useful framework from which to view and understand some of the processes and emotions that someone may go through
when confronting their death. But like many stage models, it needs to be used merely as a general guide and not adhered to too rigidly, in case it begins to detract from the individual needs of the person.

Beyond Kübler-Ross, there had been few subsequent explorations in this area, until more recently. However, in the past 10-15 years, as Exley has recently observed (2004), it would seem that interest and research on this topic has increased significantly. Breitbart et al (2004) further suggest that as part of this recent interest, there has been a move away from a symptom focussed discourse towards a more person centred approach to patient care.

It also appears that the research focus has become more about individuals rather than general principles, in that the needs of specific people with specific diseases have been studied. However the predominant bias has been upon AIDS and cancer patients which has caused Exley to request a further widening of the debate to include the ‘disadvantaged dying’ or those with other ‘lower profile’ terminal diseases.

Overall, though, the thinking has begun to widen its perspective, beyond just physical symptoms, exploring needs from a more holistic approach, and even including the spiritual dimension (Boerstler 1998; Breitbart et al 2004: Pierson, Curtis & Patrick 2002). Further, the, training aspects amongst healthcare professional are also beginning to be addressed (Masters 2003: Papadatou 1997; Werth & James, 2002). Could it be that, using the Kübler-Ross model, we as psychologists and sociologists are also beginning to get to a stage of acceptance about the subject of death, resulting in a more healthy and balanced exploration of the field?

This theme around acceptance is a fundamental one with respect to death. Erikson (1982) suggests that the last stage of psychosocial development (integrity versus despair) requires that people integrate the prospect of their death with the achievements of their past. The final developmental task is to reconcile ones struggle against death and despair. This can lead to a state of satisfaction and a sense that one’s life has been meaningful, or conversely it can leave the person with a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction, often accompanied with a fear of death.
Butler's (1963) 'life review' cited in Lewis (2001) is suggested as a valuable process that can help people to reach Erikson's stage of integrity. The life review can be a natural stage that people move through as they begin to face the prospect of their own death. It comprises reflecting back upon their lives and reviewing their memories.

Although naturally occurring in the aged, the life review can also be utilised therapeutically as a tool to help facilitate attainment of ego integrity and to come to a sense of completion and resolution of one's life and experiences. Lewis (2001), states that the life review can be useful in bringing unresolved past conflicts into the present in order to reach a resolution and thus helping those facing death to move from despair to integrity. Haight, Michel and Hendrix, (1998) found the technique to be useful in preventing despair amongst older adults, as measured by depression and hopelessness scales; and also found that, using a measure of psychological well being, it was empirically shown to promote integrity.

Lewis is keen to incorporate a more spiritual aspect into the life review, and cites Erikson (1997) as referring to hope, fidelity, care and wisdom as the "the highest spiritual aspirations" (p.58) that can be gained from a successful resolution of his developmental stages.

Lewis describes a number of different ways to utilise the life review therapeutically, eg by using such as imagery, music, recollections, pictures from peoples past lives. They can also be asked existential questions such as 'who are you?' and 'how have you lived your life?' Although much of the work appears to be amongst the aged, Brietbart et al (2004) have conducted existential group therapy amongst cancer patients as a means of life review.

Overall, then, it seems that the idea of the life review can be a helpful tool in helping people come to terms with their impending death. It can help facilitate an acceptance of their life and imbue it with meaning, thus enabling a resolution about their future. It must however, be used sensitively especially if the more spiritual dimensions are to be considered and explored. Also, it may be the case that the state of ego despair is reached rather than ego integrity (Edinberg, 1985). It would be interesting to explore more fully
why this may occur, and whether further therapeutic techniques may assist in moving the person on from the despair.

Again on the theme of acceptance, the last main contribution in this essay will focus upon the therapist’s own acceptance of death and how this impacts upon the therapeutic relationship.

The Tibetan meditation master Rinpoche, in his book The Tibetan book of Living and Dying (2002) discusses at some length the importance of how to be authentic and congruent with a dying person. He asserts that “you cannot help the dying until you have acknowledged how their fear of dying disturbs you and brings up your most uncomfortable fears” (p.183). This brings to mind Exley’s previously mentioned point referring to our discomfort and anxiety when in the presence of the dying.

He also talks of showing the dying person unconditional love and of putting oneself in the patient’s position in order to elicit compassion. From the counselling psychologist’s stance, these may be more clearly understood as unconditional positive regard and empathy, both a part of the core conditions of Carl Rogers’ client centred therapy (Mearns & Thorne, 1982).

He discusses the importance of touch and of simply being present with the person. This is consistent with the research of Lawton (1998) who discusses how, as the dying person’s body begins to diminish and lose its usual form, they become increasingly isolated and cut off from society, particularly in relation to physical contact. Zilberfein (1999) also mentions the comfort that hand holding and a gentle touch can have and stresses how crucial it is to “simply listen” (p.73).

Rinpoche feels strongly about the importance of telling the truth to the dying person. In his experience, people instinctively know that they are dying. Research tends to bear this out; even if not actually told, most people know that they are dying from people’s reactions (Glaser & Strauss, 1966; Kübler-Ross 1969). Further, nurses take longer to react to calls of the dying than those who are expected to recover (Kastenbaum & Aisenberg, 1976). Rinpoche feels that to try to hide the truth only causes anxiety and
exacerbates feelings of isolation. He asserts that the truth is vital in order to allow them to prepare for death.

He also includes some advice in terms of helping the person complete unfinished business, and also to say goodbye to prepare the way for a peaceful death. He gives some examples of visualisations and meditations that can help to facilitate this process. The members of the family also can be included in this and also need to learn how to let go of the dying loved one, so that they too can get to a point of acceptance.

Rinpoche's ideas around dying appear to reflect much of what has previously been mentioned in this essay, but succeed in bringing them together as a complete picture. His suggestions include helping the person to come to a point of acceptance and coming to a sense of completion with themselves and others. However, for the counselling psychologist, his ideas may need to be modified in terms of degree; the unconditional love may (or may not) be more suitably considered as unconditional positive regard. His ideas about touch may or may not be appropriate for a given counsellor. Finally, his ideas are predominantly based upon observation and spiritual truths rather than empirical research.

Suggestions for the ways in which counselling psychologists may assist those who are dying have been woven throughout this essay. A summary of the broad principles follows. The key may be that the therapist has faced his or her own fears about death, which will allow the focus to be entirely upon the dying person. The therapist needs to be in complete acceptance of the person, willing to listen to their experience and fears. Kübler-Ross' 5 stage model can be useful throughout, as a wider framework from which to understand the processes that the dying person may be going through. But responding to what the person as an individual is experiencing must not be lost in the process. The life review in some form can help them reflect upon their past with the intention of giving their life meaning, and ultimately to facilitate an acceptance about their impending death.

It may also be pertinent to include family and loved ones, either together or separately. They too need to come to terms with the death of their loved one and may benefit greatly from talking about how they feel. They could also benefit from hearing about the needs
of the terminally ill person; from their practical concerns, to the importance of being honest with them, to the importance of physical touch (if appropriate within that particular family setting). Finally, supporting the dying person to complete any unfinished business can be vital, in whatever ways may be necessary; from making a will to saying goodbye to friends and family.

In conclusion, for a number of years following Kübler-Ross' 5 stage model, there had been a relative silence in terms of studying the dying process, but more recently there has been a renewed interest. The topic appears to have broadened to include a discourse far greater than only the physical care of the dying person. Studies are now beginning to look at the dying person as an individual, with a range of needs from psychological to spiritual. They are now beginning to explore the training needs of healthcare professionals beyond catering only for the physical symptoms alone. This broadening of perspective, I would suggest, is a healthy movement. Perhaps the caring professions themselves have gone from a stage of collective denial to one of greater acceptance and interest. Conversely, at the same time as embracing this more outward and expansive approach, we as counselling psychologists may also benefit from looking within ourselves to our own personal fears about dying. The more we can come to terms with our personal issues around death, the more we can accept and be genuinely present with the dying person.
References


Explain the genesis and presentation of narcissistic personality disorder using Kohuts' psychodynamic theory and outline the nature of therapy using this approach.

Although present in only around 1% of the population (Zimmerman & Coryell, 1990), the incidence of narcissistic personality disorder is rising (Cooper & Ronningstam, 1992). Some consider this rise to be integrally related to our cultural values which are increasingly reflecting narcissistic traits (Lasch, 1978; Lowen, 1985). The possible repercussions of this are intriguing, and it is thus a particularly fascinating disorder, which deserves some attention. In this essay, I view this condition through the lens of Kohut's psychodynamic approach (1971; 1977). His model provides a rich explication of the condition, and his suggestions for therapy provide a synthesis of the more empathic humanistic stance with the psychodynamic approach. I explore the possible nature of therapy using his approach, in particular concerning the presence of transference within the therapeutic relationship and the challenges that this might pose for therapist and client alike. Finally I discuss inherent difficulties with the concept of psychopathological classification.

The Condition

Diagnostic Criteria

Narcissistic personality disorder is classified as a cluster B Personality disorder (dramatic, emotional or erratic disorders) in the DSM-IV. The pathology is described as “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity⁴, (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration and lack of empathy, that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts.” (DSM-IV, p.658). Diagnostic criteria require that 5 or more of the following indicate narcissistic personality disorder: has a grandiose sense of self importance; is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited power and control; believes that he is special and unique; requires

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⁴ Grandiosity is described as "exaggerated feelings and fantasies of greatness" (Barlow & Durand, 2002, p.410)
excessive admiration; has a sense of entitlement; is interpersonally exploitative; lacks empathy; is often envious of others; shows arrogant or haughty attitudes.

Narcissistic personality disorder tends to be more prevalent in males\(^2\) and is also currently on the rise. This may be due in part to an increasing focus upon this phenomenon, but it has also been suggested that it is linked to certain cultural factors. Lasch (1978) contends that it is inextricably linked to the fact that our society is becoming more valuing of external attributes of success (image, power, status), which will tend to reward narcissistic traits. This view is echoed by Lowen (1985), who also sees narcissism as both a psychological and a cultural condition wherein image and external attributes are promoted at the expense of the self, ultimately leading to feelings of emptiness and frustration. To illustrate this he states that “power, performing and productivity have become the dominant values, displacing such old fashioned virtues as dignity, integrity and self respect.” (Lowen, 1985, p.11)

The Experience of the Condition

For friends and spouses particularly, it is likely that the person would require much attention and adoration, continually seeking feedback and praise. Although apparently full of self importance and arrogance, their self esteem seems to be entirely dependent upon external acknowledgement. As LeBeau (1998) maintains, “underneath a worldly arrogant veneer is inadequacy and fear” (p.428). They suffer from a lack of self esteem which underpins the need for adulation. Kernberg (1971) describes this as a “chronic uncertainty and dissatisfaction about themselves” (p.16).

The need for recognition from others can result in rage if they are thwarted in some way, or do not receive satisfaction in their desires for the right feedback. I would imagine that this continual demand for emotional reassurance and praise could be quite exhausting for close friends, particularly as they would receive very little back in return. The narcissist’s lack of empathy towards others would make it very difficult for him to be sensitive to another’s concerns, and indeed he is often highly exploitative of others.

\(^2\) In the interests of simplicity, the narcissistic client is thus referred to as ‘he’ within this essay.
One might wonder, then, what the appeal for friends or spouses of this person might be. I imagine that this person would be attractive and compelling company in the initial stages. Kernberg (1975) describes his relatively good social functioning and propensity to be highly successful in terms of career. He can be extremely creative and engaging, and may thus stand out from the crowd, initially providing a degree of attraction or vicarious gratification for the friend or spouse. Bird, Martin and Schuham (1983) describe the wives of such men as tending towards ‘submissive mothering’, so it may be that their spouses tend to be more passive, giving types.

**The Psychodynamic Approach**

As is the case with many of the personality disorders, there seems to be no clear evidence in support of any particular approach for narcissism (Roth & Fonagy, 1996). Treatment research is extremely limited, both in terms of number of studies and reports of success (Turkat & Maistro, 1985) and there are currently no randomised controlled treatment studies (Groopman & Cooper, 2001; Oldham, 1988). However Links and Stockwell (2002) maintain that “intensive individual psychotherapy remains the mainstay of recommended treatment” (p.525).

I have chosen to view the condition through the lens of psychodynamic theory, as it contains such a rich and embracing explanation of the genesis and experience of the condition for the person. It provided for me, the clearest sense of what the person might really feel like underneath the exhibitionist and grandiose display. I shall focus upon the theory of Heinz Kohut, who devoted a lot of attention to the condition of narcissism, and whose style of therapy is particularly interesting as it represents a “meeting of psychoanalysis and humanism” (Khan 1991, p.87).
The Theory of Kohut

Kohut has a particular theory of development, termed 'self psychology'. His theory provides an explanation of the context within which narcissistic disturbance can occur. Kohut adhered to Freud's view of 'object relations', but he also saw the self as something that continually developed throughout the course of a person's life.

Object relations theory suggests that initially, the child begins in a state of perceiving the world as undifferentiated from itself. This is primary narcissism, where all his energy is directed at himself. He subsequently moves to a state of recognising that there are objects or others that are separate from himself, with whom he begins to relate. Some of the psychic energy thus begins to be directed at the 'other', with only a small amount still focussed upon himself. Inadequate parenting at these stages can disrupt the healthy development of the child and he can fail to create adequate structures of self.

Kohut spoke of 3 fundamental needs requiring fulfilment in the child; the need to be 'mirrored', to 'idealise' and to be like others ('twinning'). The need to be mirrored is related to fulfilling the grandiose and exhibitionist needs in the child. The parents need to show him that he is special and valued by them. Kohut described this beautifully as 'the gleam in the mother's eye' (cited in Jacoby, 1985, p.46). This is about acknowledgment of the child's existence and inherent worth. The next stage in his development is the growing ability to internalise this process, ultimately to be able to do this for himself. On those occasions when the mother falls short of providing adequate mirroring, the child, bit by bit, learns to become his own mirror. Kohut called this process 'transmuting internalisation'. In healthy development this helps the child to build a strong sense of self and self esteem; the primary level of his grandiose, exhibitionist needs are fulfilled, and he can move beyond them. However, if the parents are unable to provide adequate mirroring, this primitive need is not integrated into the development of the self. It is frustrated and repressed. It can ultimately result in the person feeling worthless and insecure, fluctuating with feelings of omnipotence and grandiosity.
The need to idealise is related to the child's need to experience the parents as powerful and capable, perfect and confident, in order to give him a sense of security in the world. Again, through transmuting internalisation, the child begins to develop an inner confidence. Problems in this domain give the child no opportunity to feel strong in the world, or to gain an appropriate balance of idealism and reality in his outlook.

Finally, the need for twinship is about identifying with some important characteristic of a parent, which enables the child to feel that he belongs in the world and is able to identify and connect with others. Failure to do so can result in feeling different from others in some way or feeling alienated in the world.

In the therapeutic domain, Kohut focussed upon transferences (mirror, idealising or twinship) as the way to both verify the diagnosis of narcissism and to help address the condition. He believed that therapy provided the opportunity to build self structures where there had previously been a lack. The therapist could replace the role that the parent had (inadequately) played, and hopefully be there for the client in a way that could fulfil his basic needs.

Unlike earlier psychoanalysts, Kohut was concerned with the nature of the therapeutic relationship and stressed the importance of empathy within the interaction. He felt that, by providing the right therapeutic conditions, repressed ideas and emotions could emerge. Understanding and explanation were considered to be key to therapy; it was necessary for the client to begin to see the genesis of the behaviours and to feel understood by the therapist.

His aims for narcissistic clients were fairly modest and realistic. He felt treatment could be considered successful if the person’s compensatory structures were improved, even if the primary defect were not healed. (Kohut believed that the child would not develop a pathological disorder, if at least one of the three needs outlined were met. Instead he would develop ‘compensatory structures’. These differ from defences in that they are a more positive response to a lack or gap in development, rather than repression or denial).
The Nature of Therapy

Few narcissistic clients come to therapy of their own accord (Lemma, 1996), and they can be quite challenging to work with. Fundamentally, the idea that he is in need of another is abhorrent to the narcissist. Riviere (1936) accordingly alludes to the fact that some narcissistic clients delight in defeating the therapist, because to improve would mean to admit that that someone else had helped them. The clients might thus denigrate the therapist in obvious ways, such as responding to their comments with disdain or anger, or they may use more subtle means, such as lack of engagement or interest in the therapy. Kernberg (1975) warns that even distance can be an active process of devaluation.

Further, there is a high risk that the client will terminate therapy. The person with a narcissistic disturbance will have an extreme vulnerability in terms of being hurt or wounded by what he might see as slights or disrespectful behaviour. He will show strong reactions to this, such as rage, grandiose defensive behaviour or retreat to a depressive state. The only way through this will be by constant empathy and understanding from the therapist, gently explaining possible reasons for his reaction and hurt and putting it into the wider context of the client’s past.

One might question, then, how the narcissistic client might come to therapy in the first place. Links and Stockwell (2002) describe the narcissistic husband who has finally pushed his wife too far and she is threatening to leave him. He is thus faced with the removal of the source of his emotional support, and he may be at a point of panic. Also there is evidence of a depression that can befall narcissists. Kohut speaks of their “pervasive feelings of emptiness and depression” (1971, p.16). Lowen describes a person who lacks a solid sense of self and is beset with emptiness and depression; “it is a desolate place” (1985, p.ix). When in this state of depression, it may be that their vulnerability is emerging, and they might thus be more open to outside help.

It is likely that a narcissistically inclined client will relate to the therapist through a powerful transference. The therapist needs to recognise this and understand which
particular lack or need that this represents (mirror, twinning or idealisation). The therapist can then hopefully help the client to fulfil this need and help promote a healthy self structure in this particular area. This will be achieved partly through the empathy and understanding of the therapist. It is about the therapist letting the client know that he is really understood and accepted. It is also about the therapist explaining how the client came to be this way, ultimately communicating to him that this has been brought about through his early experiences, not through anything inherently 'wrong' or unacceptable about him. ‘Optimal frustration’ within therapy will also play a part. That is, the therapist will naturally fall short in some respects and let the client down in some way, even if this simply means by leaving him when he takes a holiday. In this way, ‘transmuting internalisation’ can occur as the client begins to internalise the need into himself and for himself, thus beginning to create a healthy self structure.

Recognising the transference and not reacting with defensiveness may well provide the main challenge for the therapist (Khan, 1991). Mirror transferences can manifest in angry and indignant behaviour and demands for exclusivity, from the client. Kohut advises the therapist to continue to respond in a warm supportive manner and to interpret the client’s behaviour with understanding and respect. Idealising transference may manifest in terms of flattery towards the therapist. Kohut further warns not to reject idealisations abruptly. The client needs to be allowed to idealise the therapist and eventually work through this to a more realistic view. Although his journey from ‘enchantment’ to ‘disenchantment’ (Jacoby, 1985, p.217), might be a little difficult for the therapist to accept, it needs to be viewed as the healthy sign that it indeed is for the client. Because of this, as well as the tendency to constantly devalue the therapist, Kernberg (1975) cautions the therapist to be discerning in terms of how many narcissistic clients to work with at one time.

**Issues in relation to Psychopathological Classification**

There is evidence to show that, in terms of our diagnostic system, both reliability (Brockington, Kendall & Leff, 1978) and validity (Bentall, 1990) are in question. The whole subject of psychopathological classification brings up a host of issues to be
addressed, too many to be given the attention that they deserve within this essay. I will thus focus upon the issues surrounding diagnosis and classification within the domain of personality disorders.

Personality disorders are a particularly controversial category in psychopathology, as the idea of ‘personality’ is multifaceted and somewhat abstract (Allport, 1937). It may appear that there is clarity about the distinctions between different conditions, if one reads the DSM-IV clusters, but in practice there is much overlap (Lemma, 1996). In fact in general, half of those considered to have one type of personality disorder, also meet the criteria for at least one other personality disorder (Grove & Tellegen, 1991).

One of the main debates in this area, is whether personality disorders are basically normal ways of relating that have become too extreme, (dimensions), or whether these ways of relating are fundamentally different from ‘psychologically healthy’ behaviour (categories) (Costa & Widiger, 1994; Gunderson, 1992). Although the idea of dimensions seems closer to the richness and complexity of a human being, there has been much debate, but little agreement as to what the basic personality dimension might be (Barlow & Durand, 2002). So currently the system of categorisation is still the most popular one for most professionals.

The categorisation system, however, has its own inherent problems, because it makes no allowance for degree of traits or attitudes. Instead the person is either considered to be in or out of a category. It is as if a line is crossed and then the person has the disorder, rather than giving a sense of the extent and progress of certain characteristics. My concerns would be that the psychologist might see enough elements that fit within a specific category and then assume that other characteristics of that person would probably also fit within that disorder. It will thus give a less rich and unique picture of a person, in favour of a tangible, preordained category.

It also places a big responsibility upon the person who is to decide whether the client is in or out of a given category. When diagnosing a disorder, someone has to make a
judgement that the client’s characteristics are “inflexible and maladaptive and persisting and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress” (DSM-IV p.633). The professional is thus given a lot of responsibility and yet the way in which to make this assessment is not clear. It has been shown that this is often a highly subjective decision that can be dependent upon the interpersonal interactions between a clinician and client (Westen, 1977). It has further been shown that assessment tends to be affected by cultural and gender values (eg Beliappa, 1991; Kaplan, 1983). Overall then, the current diagnostic system appears to be a highly subjective process of attempting to fit a client into a predefined category of questionable relevance.

I accept that the category system can provide a common language of communication between professionals, and that having a framework based on previous learnings and experience can be useful. However, there is the danger of relying upon this too heavily as a fact. I wonder if the categorisation system serves more to reassure and aid the psychologist, rather than the client. I feel that it is important to bear in mind that it is only an inexact tool or suggested framework and that we are dealing with unique individuals. I would thus suggest that diagnosis needs to be handled carefully and respectfully by professionals.

It is interesting to ponder what might happen in terms of narcissistic personality disorder in the future. The DSM-IV partly defines a personality disorder as comprising behaviours that are inconsistent with cultural expectations. However, as previously discussed, current society is increasingly reflecting narcissistic values. If this continues, it may be that we will continue to see an according increase in the number of narcissistic clients. However, it has also been shown that perceptions of a disorder can be radically affected by changing cultural values (Raimbault & Eliacheff, 1989). I wonder, then, if we might see a time when narcissistic values become so common in our society that the diagnostic criteria in the DSM will have to be changed.
References


Discuss the concept of containment in psychodynamic therapy and use clinical illustrations and personal experience to explore its application in the therapeutic setting.

This essay focuses predominantly upon Bion’s concept of ‘containment’, but also draws upon the closely aligned ideas of Winnicott and his ‘holding environment’. Initially the concepts of containment and holding are outlined, and their importance in terms of the developmental process is described. The focus then moves onto an exploration of how containment might work in the therapy room. A host of ensuing questions and issues emerge in terms of how in practice a therapist might provide an environment of containment and holding and what the experience of this might be for the therapist and client. These are the questions that initially motivated me to choose this subject for this essay and their exploration has proved fruitful and thought provoking for me.

Containment and Holding in Early Development

Bion (1962) progressed Klein’s (1946) thinking about projective identification into his model of ‘container contained’. Initially a child has unbearable feelings of fear and anxiety that he is not yet able to cope with, so he gets rid of them by projecting them into his mother. The mother’s ability to tolerate these fears and anxieties is vital at this stage. If she is able, she will contain and detoxify them for the child, making them in some way palatable enough for the child to reintroject them, or take them back in a form that is manageable for him.

Bion refers to the fearful feelings that a child might have as ‘beta’ elements. They are primitive elements that precede conceptualisation, tending to be at the level of sensory impressions. Green (1998) encapsulates their quality beautifully in his description of “a pain with no image of the wound” (p.658). The beta elements require the ‘alpha function’ in order to be transformed into alpha elements, a more conceptualised and concrete form,

3 In the interests of simplicity, the child will be referred to as ‘he’ in this essay and the caretaker will be referred to as the mother or ‘she’.
more akin to the early stage of thoughts. The alpha state is one of balance and containment, necessary in order to detoxify the nameless fears for the baby. It is called a state of ‘reverie’ by Bion. Ideally the mother “is able to experience the feeling of dread that this baby was striving to deal with by projective identification, and yet retain a balanced outlook” (Bion, 1967, p.104). Bion further explains- “a well balanced mother can accept these [fears] and respond therapeutically: that is to say in a manner that makes the infant feel that it is receiving its frightened personality back again but in a form that it can tolerate- the fears are manageable by the infant personality”(ibid, p.114-115). Now they are no longer overwhelming and he is able to tolerate them and survive in spite of these anxieties. He thus begins the gradual process of learning through experience how to become a container for himself.

If she fails in this task, for example, because it arouses fears in the mother herself, she will not able to process them for the child. Instead he must take them back, still in toxic state, in fact exacerbated by their rejection from the mother. If we take as an example a mother’s inability to process the fundamental fear of a child that it is dying, Bion (1967) explains that “it therefore reintrojects, not a fear of dying made tolerable, but a nameless dread” (p.116).

One final point about Bion’s theory is that he saw it as a dynamic process, in which both the container and contained are looking for the other. Symington and Symington (1996) explain this as “thoughts seeking a thinker...container searching for realisation” (p.52-53). They further describe the dynamism of the situation as “an intercourse between the two...both can grow through the experience of containing and being contained” (p.52).

Winnicott’s ideas of the ‘holding’ or ‘facilitating environment’ bear similarities to Bion’s ideas about maternal containment. Winnicott (1958) describes a state of ‘primary maternal preoccupation’ wherein the mother is innately and spontaneously responsive to the baby’s needs. The ‘good enough mother’ is able to provide adequate ‘holding’ and ‘handling’ to protect the baby from the harshness of the external world, in order to enable him to remain in a state of unintegration long enough to allow his true self to develop. Physical holding is fundamental to this but maternal holding encompasses far more than
the purely physical; to include “the whole of the adaptive care of the infant...what is needed is a capacity to identify, to know what the baby is feeling like” (Winnicott, 1986b, p.27-28). She needs to “sense his emotional needs, share his feelings with him and to modify them through her greater awareness of reality” (Bateman, Brown & Peddar, 1979, p.105).

Failure in her task can result in the child not feeling safe or held and disrupt the process of integration. If she cannot help him to feel safe, then the fear of annihilation can be experienced and ‘primitive agonies’ will predominate, which include fear of falling for ever and going to pieces (Winnicott, 1986a).

Winnicott (1971) also speaks about the child’s fear of destroying the loved object if it allows its destructive and attacking feelings to occur. It is important that the child experiences that the attacked object both survives the attack and does not retaliate. If the mother can demonstrate that she can tolerate and survive the attack, the child can begin to separate and ‘use’ objects for its continued development.

Although Winnicott’s concept of the holding environment has more emphasis upon the physical and might be seen as relatively passive compared to the more dynamic container theory (Symington & Symington, 1996), the fundamental principle of both is similar. Both focus upon the ability of the mother to be a ‘holding place’ for the child, through her responsiveness and emotional capacity, until he learns to develop the structures and resilience to function more autonomously. Both point to the importance of the mother’s ability to tolerate the baby’s negative emotions without becoming overwhelmed or retaliating. Finally both highlight similar potential terrors that the baby might face if the mother is unable to provide the appropriate early environment. The two concepts, of containment and holding thus tend to be used interchangeably, particularly in terms of the therapeutic process.
Containment in the Therapy Room - Theoretical

Many clinicians, including Bion (1967) and Winnicott (1971) draw parallels between the ideal maternal environment and a productive therapeutic one. Holmes (1996) refers to the 'holding operation' that therapy can provide. Although therapy cannot hope to change the past, there does seem to be a general agreement that the therapist can provide a caring environment which can help to encourage the natural tendency of the client towards growth and maturity (Jacobs, 1988).

There appear to be two levels of containment in operation in the therapy room. One concerns the analytic frame and the other refers to the function of the therapist. The frame plays an important part in providing the context for containment, ensuring that certain boundaries are put in place and can be relied upon. It provides a structure for confidentiality and location, and an agreement that the therapist will be there at an appointed time (Lemma, 2003). Hopefully this will help provide the client with a sense of stability, from which a degree of trust may ensue.

The therapist's function seems to be about feeling the impact of the client's projections, containing them and transforming them (Lemma, 2003). In this way, negative or fearful feelings may become more acceptable and integrated within the person, ultimately helping them to become their own container. Burke (1998) describes how her clients gradually increased their ability to take back their projections and "make contact with the contents of their mind, face their mental anguish and conflict and take responsibility for it" (p.331).

This may be achieved through the therapist being in a state of 'reverie', which entails being attuned to the needs of the client and responding appropriately. Using Bion's terms this would involve being in an alpha functioning state in order to digest and transform the client's beta elements. A client once described the process as akin to a "nuclear waste recycling plant" (Holmes, 1998, p.130).
Containment in the Therapy Room- Practical and Experiential Aspects

Personally, I was initially taken aback by the impact that starting my first three long-term psychodynamic clients had upon me, leaving me feeling quite drained and exhausted. I started to wonder about the physical and emotional impact of being a container, and how it is possible to contain and yet maintain one's energy and strength. So a number of questions and issues arose for me, which I have begun to explore in this assignment as follows.

Firstly I wondered about the balance of feeling and being compared to interpreting, that might be necessary, in order to accept a projection and help to transform it. Some clinicians stress the importance of bearing the suffering with the client. Wolff (1971) alludes to the overriding importance of simply ‘being with’ the client and Balint (1968) stresses the importance of giving emotional space to simply allow the experience. It has been suggested that the feeling must be suffered by the therapist in order for transformation to occur (Bion, 1962, Fleming, 2005). Ogden (1992) has the clearest explanation for me of how to truly transform a projective identification. He says that we must ‘do’ nothing, “instead the therapist attempts to live with the engendered feelings without denying or in other ways trying to get rid of them” (p.30). This reminds me of a female client of mine who spoke about being in a ‘dark place’ in terms of therapy. I had personally been feeling like I was in a foggy dense place all day and had been finding it really difficult to think straight, particularly with this client in the session. I wondered whether this was an example of attuning to the client, experiencing and containing this density with her. There was nothing for it but to be aware of it and ‘be with’ it and see if it abated, which it did after a few days. My experience of working with this client in general feels like there is a lot of heaviness with odd bursts of ‘sunshine’. Overall, however, there is a very gradual lightening of atmosphere as she becomes more able to face and accept the previously dark and unknown aspects of herself.

There also seems to be agreement that doing nothing and simply ‘being with’ the client is often more difficult than being in action through interpreting. There are examples of how therapists can quite easily ‘distance’ themselves from suffering with their clients partly
through intellectualising and interpreting (Mitrani, 1993; Rosenfeld, 1987; Symington, 1986). However, for most clients, the importance of interpretations also cannot be discounted. Although I don’t entirely agree with the statement that “the best containment is a good interpretation” (Casement, 1985, p.153), I do feel that it is a vital component as appropriate. Both Winnicott and Bion stress the importance of timing and appropriateness of interpretations and that there needs to be a patient build up and development towards a well-timed and appropriate interpretation.

I wonder how much a therapist actually has to feel in order to be sufficiently attuned to their client’s suffering? One of my clients is a young woman of 27yrs with bulimia. It appears that she asks for help but currently seems able to take little in from the therapy. Occasionally in the silence she shoots a look at me that I experience as so aggressive and attacking that it feels ‘like daggers’. In the first session I felt that I attuned to the pain of her inability to take in much of the good in her life alongside her desperation to be loved. I also felt that whatever I tried to do was not helping. Afterwards I felt quite depleted and exhausted.

In retrospect I think that, sensing her need, I had allowed myself to try to give her more and more, yet because of her inability to receive, ended up feeling depleted. This may be an example of the fact that I was unable to simply ‘be’ with her suffering and tolerate the fact that I would never be able to satisfy her; instead I fell into the trap of trying to ‘do’ something. Subsequently I felt that I needed to gently pull back to a degree and become more balanced within myself, yet remain alongside her, understanding her suffering. Although it might be argued that my pulling back was an inability to contain her pain, I think it was more akin to regaining a necessary sense of balance which would give her the space to begin to take responsibility for herself. Ogden (1992) speaks of avoiding the trap of “becoming as sick as the patient” (p.28), and maintains that “the therapist must be sufficiently open to receive the patient’s projective identification and yet maintain sufficient psychological distance from the process to allow for effective analysis of the therapeutic interaction” (ibid, p.33). I feel that this has been my experience and that I am gaining a sense of this delicate balance of how to be open and yet not overwhelmed by my client’s projections. Holmes (1996) talks of providing “a still point” (p.131) for the
client and I would say that the way I have been learning to be in reverie with my clients is to find the ‘still point’ within myself in order to feel with them and yet maintain my own internal state of balance.

Winnicott also talks of the importance of the therapist’s ability to survive attacks and aggression from the client; that is, to allow the attacks without retaliating. He states that changes in therapy “do not depend upon interpretive work. They depend upon the analyst’s survival of attack” (Winnicott, 1971, p.123). One of my clients talked about how difficult she finds it to be angry or confrontational with others. Interestingly, quite soon after this she simply failed to turn up to an appointment. The following session she was remorseful and apologetic, quite concerned that all was ok between us. She said that she had imagined how it must have been for me, waiting for her, and as the appointment was at 4pm on a Friday, how annoying it must have been for me not to be able to get off early. I wondered if her behaviour may be interpreted as an act of aggression against me. I was not confident enough to interpret this in such a straightforward manner but was able to bring the idea of anger into the therapy room in a non retaliatory manner. In fact this opened up a greater exploration of her relationship to anger than before, and also enabled her to begin to think about how she might deal with any negative emotions she might have towards me and others. I hope that this may have begun to give her the sense that her anger in the transferential relationship is something that we can explore together in therapy without fear of retaliation or recrimination from me.

Personally I am aware that talking about negative, irritated feelings towards my therapist has felt quite frightening, but has also been containing as she responds in such a balanced manner. What I find most containing is not really what she says to me, but simply the fact that she allows me to talk about my irritations towards her, without reacting emotionally. Thus, in this respect, the power comes from the state of being of my therapist rather than her interpretations.

A personal experience that I had with a friend provides an example of lack of containment. I was angry and upset about a situation that I had found myself in and wanted to talk to someone about it. However, I was interested to note that my friend
became very angry on my behalf, comparing it to a similar situation he had once found himself in. Not only did I experience this as not containing, but I ended up feeling that I needed to contain his anger! Although this was not a therapeutic situation, one might see this as an example of an attempted projective identification that had to be reintrojected still in toxic state. Rosenfeld (1987) alludes to the hard work and the active process that is involved in being in an alpha state in order to digest beta elements, and I think the above example gives an indication of the effort and awareness that it can take to contain someone.

There is also evidence that acting as a container can impact upon a therapist in a somatic manner and that becoming conscious of this can help to transform it (Alexandris & Vaslamatzis, 1993; Rothschild, 2004). Certainly I feel that I have had experience of physical manifestations of containment as explained above. Also I have noted that in the first few months of my psychodynamic placement, on the days that I see my clients, my digestion has been a little out of kilter. Although this might be related to other issues, I am also wondering whether this could be an indication of the fact that I am 'digesting' some elements of the clients' experiences.

As a part of my enquiry into the experience of containment, I have also been wondering whether we, as therapists, can increase our capacity to contain. In my opinion, I think that we do become able to digest more and transform things more quickly as we continue our work with clients in a conscious manner. As time goes by I feel that I have already increased my capacity to become conscious of the physical and emotional impact of working with my clients and feel that my ability to contain is being expanded. I am reminded of the dynamic nature of containment and the fact that Symington (1986) feels that it “leads to new understanding and growth in both analyst and patient” (p.293). I think that this is quite beautiful as it becomes a mutual enterprise in which both therapist and client are enabled to change and grow from the interaction.
References


Introduction to the Therapeutic Practice Dossier

This dossier provides a brief account of my clinical experiences during the course of the three years of training. Client studies and process reports (submitted in the Attachment and Appendix to this Portfolio) were written in these settings. This dossier also includes my final clinical paper which outlines my development as a counselling psychologist.

As highlighted in the statement of anonymity, all identifying information relating to clients has been changed in order to preserve confidentiality.
First Year Placement: Employee Assistance Programme
November 2004- August 2005

The placement was in an organisational setting in a company that provided services for the public. The organisation employed around 18,000 staff, and tended to have a greater number of male employees. The workforce predominantly comprised staff who interfaced with members of the public and who could be subjected to a variety of treatments by the public, including assaults and suicides.

The in-house service provided a counselling and trauma unit for its members of staff. It worked on a system of triage, which comprised an initial telephone assessment, and a subsequent 50 minute face to face assessment, followed by a series of counselling sessions. These could be open ended for trauma clients, or a series of 6 sessions for generic clients. The counselling and trauma department was situated in the head office and employed approximately 13 counsellors, although there were only usually around 8 counsellors in the unit at a given time. It was a dedicated unit for counselling with about 10 client rooms, appropriately set out for the sessions, and also with emergency buttons. There was also a drugs and alcohol unit at the same site, which provided individual and group counselling.

I worked in a broadly person centred way here, for six sessions, although I had the opportunity to work with one client for 14 sessions. Although predominantly White British, I also saw a number of Asian and Black British clients here. I felt that this placement gave me a good gentle introduction to the experience of working therapeutically. The clients' issues tended to be less complex and serious than my subsequent placements and the time working together was fairly brief. The clients also tended to be quite new to the world of therapy and for a number of my predominantly male client base; this was the first experience they had had of being listened to therapeutically. Although I was of the view that deeper and longer term work would ultimately be more beneficial, I could also see that for a number of clients the six sessions (or less) had seemed to provide enough for their current needs.
Second Year Placement: NHS Psychotherapy Department
September 2005- July 2006

The placement was in an NHS psychotherapy department within a main hospital. Historically two trusts had amalgamated, and so the department was split between two geographical locations, both attached to hospitals. I saw clients at both locations. The department comprised approximately eight psychotherapists and provided psychotherapy for individuals, couples, and groups. Clients could be referred directly through the GP or from other services in the trust, such as the Brief Intervention Counselling Service (BICS) or the eating disorders unit. Clients were initially asked to complete a questionnaire with general information regarding their family and circumstances and then they were seen for one or more assessment sessions. If both assessor and client were in agreement, the client was placed on a waiting list which could take up to a year. I had the opportunity of working with both couples and individuals whilst in this department. The individual work was with White British female clients and took place once weekly for around a year. The couple therapy was based on a twelve session model devised at the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships and was informed by systemic and psychodynamic theory. I co-facilitated two couples with another counselling psychologist in training.

This was a stimulating and varied placement with a host of activities for me to be involved with, such as weekly business meetings, clinical group supervision meetings, seminars and lectures. It was my first experience of working in the NHS and so provided me with a perfect opportunity to learn about working in such an institution. I am grateful for having had such a rich introduction as I see myself eventually working for the NHS. It was also useful to be so fully involved in the psychotherapy department and to be able to participate in the business meetings and clinical presentations. This helped to provide me with a good understanding of how the department functioned.

I particularly loved the group supervision sessions as they gave me the opportunity to experience the ways of thinking, the concerns and challenges that experienced practitioners were facing. It also facilitated a rich exploration of the issues and
hypotheses concerning a particular client for one and a half hours. I really appreciated being able to contribute to the thinking and discussion in these meetings.

I had three supervisors in this placement and feel that I benefited greatly from experiencing three different ways of working and being supervised. With one supervisor I presented verbatim process reports which, although challenging for its focus upon the specific interventions, also enabled a detailed process oriented understanding of my sessions. With another I tended to talk about both my clients more in terms of the issues and potential challenges that I saw emerging. This helped me grow in confidence in terms of my ability to be 'trusted' as a practitioner. With the couple therapy, my colleague and I would present a summary of the session and processes occurring to the supervisor. These supervision sessions tended to take the form of a rich discussion about the processes that might have been occurring between the couples, between us and between us and the couples, which I found fascinating. The experience of working with a colleague and finding a harmonious way of co-facilitating together was also a useful one for me. However, one of our clients from the couple therapy committed suicide 6 weeks after completion of our sessions. There was a lot for me to process about this but it was in some way made easier as I was able to share my thoughts and feeling with my fellow counselling psychologist. I was also heartened by the willingness of members of the psychotherapy department to engage with my questions and processing of this difficult issue.
The final year placement was in the psychology department of a Community Mental Health Team (CMHT). The CMHT housed a number of services including the Crisis and Home Treatment Team (CATT); Duty (an out-of-hours telephone support service); psychotherapy and psychology. The psychology department comprised four psychologists and offered a variety of therapeutic approaches for adults, but was predominantly integrative and psychodynamic. This was a secondary service so the threshold for the client intake was restricted to those with ‘severe and enduring’ difficulties and the work tended to be long term. Referrals came from GPs or from services within the CMHT.

My clients tended to have fairly complex and deep seated personality issues and so I worked in a long term manner with most of them. My client base comprised both males and females and was predominantly White British. The ages of my clients ranged from mid twenties to sixty. I utilised a variety of approaches, including CBT, Schema therapy, psychodynamic and integrative as seemed most fitting for the client and as discussed with my supervisor. The nature of this placement helped me begin to explore about integration and to get a sense of what each client might need and find most beneficial.

In this placement I saw about seven clients a week in order to ensure that I obtained enough client hours for the training. I had the opportunity to attend a number of Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings and a few psychotherapy meetings but due to the days that I attended I had to miss the business and psychology departmental meetings. I really missed the opportunity to have peer clinical meetings and this has made me realise how important it is for me to be able to share thoughts and understandings with like minded people. I realise that this has the effect of ‘nourishing’ and contributing to me as I find it so fascinating and inspiring. I further realise that this is something that I need to ensure in my future work as a psychologist in order that my work remains as fulfilling as possible.
Final Clinical Paper.
Journey into the Unknown- Becoming a Counselling Psychologist

"We're sailing on a strange boat.
We're heading for a strange shore...
We're sailing on a strange sea
Blown by a strange wind...
We're turning flesh and body into soul"

(Strange Boat, The Waterboys, 1991)

Introduction

As I reflect upon my journey of the past three years, the images that come to me are very much related to water, and I get a picture of some kind of a sea voyage involving a quest and many challenges. Currently, just as I thought I would be ‘home and dry’, I find myself still on the boat, having recently entered ‘strange seas’ (again). This is unexpected, as throughout my training I had been looking forward to writing this paper which I envisaged would encapsulate my way of working, and would have emanated from three years of hard work and exploration. I thought that I would have finally been able to bring it all together within a kind of overarching integrative theory and practice that personally suited me. However, in this last academic year, especially as I explore how to work integratively, it all seems to have become awash with uncertainty, and I find myself in some respects more ‘in the unknown’ than I was three years ago.

Preparation for the Voyage

First let me say a little about my life before this journey. For twenty years I had been working in commerce as a qualitative researcher. Although I initially loved it and counted myself as lucky to have such a rewarding job, after a time I began to question the value of my work in a wider sense. I endeavoured to work for charities, political parties and the Government, clients that I considered had a more worthwhile contribution to
society. However even this began to pall for me as I realised that I was more interested in therapeutic listening rather than information gathering. The thought of giving up a lucrative career to become a therapist felt too risky for me at the time and so I began to pursue the things that really inspired me in my spare time and embarked upon years of personal development work involving seminars, experiential groups and alternative therapies. I also spent one year in a part time course for systemic family therapy and it was on this course that I realised that I wanted to gain some more foundational skills in counselling. As chance would have it I met someone who had trained as a counselling psychologist at Surrey University and from then on everything seemed to gain momentum and I soon found myself signed up for this course. Intuitively I knew I was doing the right thing, but rationally this was quite a surprise to me, as I had not envisaged that I would take on such an academic challenge in my mid forties, with no income and a mortgage to pay.

One more note of importance before ‘setting sail’. A number of years before doing this course I had gone through a phase of withdrawal and ‘going within’. This was a truly remarkable time, as I became aware of another realm or dimension in my life, and had a number of intense spiritual experiences, both blissful and painful. I think the course heralded a ‘return to the world’ for me after spending some years in a more ‘inner’ state.

The Counselling Psychology Training

Each of the years on the course has had a completely different ‘feel’ to it and I think that this is largely due to the different models in which we were being trained. The following sections follow each of the three years in turn and describe my experiences and learnings within each.

Gentle waters

In a general sense my feet did not touch the ground during the first year and it was a sharp learning curve for me to rejoin the academic world after 20 years in business. However,
in terms of the placement itself, the experience was quite a gentle and containing one. The waters were calm and we were setting sail at a gentle, peaceful pace. Partly this may have been due to the placement that I was lucky enough to obtain, which was in an organisational setting working with a six session model with employees of the organisation. I felt at home in this kind of business environment as it had been what I had been used to for most of my working life.

I think however, that much of the gentle experience of this year is owed to the person centred model that we were working with at this stage. The focus upon empathy and acceptance within the person centred approach, founded by Carl Rogers (1951), can foster a deep level of validation for the client, and on reflection I can see how much I enjoyed these aspects of it. The relationship has continually been proven to be the most powerful indicator of change, (Bergin & Lambert, 1978; Hill, 1989; Luborsky, Crits-Christoph, Alexander, Margolis & Cohen, 1983; Sexton and Whiston, 1994) and in fact Rogers initially referred to his approach as ‘relationship therapy’ (Mearns, 1996). I think this model helped to ground me in some fundamental skills in terms of empathy and respect for the client. Further, I have always felt that there is a natural movement towards growth or ‘actualising tendency’ that is innate in people but that they can become misdirected through life circumstances and so this model reflected some of my basic views about people.

However, the aspects that I found challenging were related to the lack of guidance for the client (and therapist) and I sometimes found this lack of direction difficult to accept, wondering whether simply ‘being’ was enough. I felt that in my own experience of personal development, the presence of some kind of guidance had often been useful. So I was firmly of the view that these core conditions were ‘necessary but not sufficient’ (Hargie & Gallagher, 1992; Lazarus, 1993). I also held the view that longer-term work was necessary to promote a deeper level of healing, and wondered what effect only six sessions could have. Now that I am in the process of looking back and reflecting on my journey (and have been struggling with the concept of integration), I am beginning to question some of my previous assumptions, revisit some of the principles of the person
centred model and to value them anew. I realise again the fundamental importance and power of simply ‘being’ and truly accepting the client. In fact although heartening, it is a little humbling to revisit the work with my clients at this time and to acknowledge that for some, there appeared to be such a beneficial outcome with this model working in a short term manner. One young male comes to mind who presented as being lethargic but also angry with himself for ‘still’ struggling to come to terms with the death of his mother two months previously. He had moved back into his family home when she had been diagnosed with a terminal illness to look after her and said that they had “a very close bond”. There was something quite boyish and compliant in his manner although he was in his thirties. I wondered whether something related to his close connection with his mother had in some way kept him at the level of a boy rather than a grown man, and whether some of his ‘conditions of worth’ were about caring for others and pleasing them. Working with this client occurred at the same time that I had been exploring the dying and grieving process for an essay (to be found in the Academic Dossier). It alerted me to the stages that one might go through whilst grieving the death of a loved one (such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance; Kübler-Ross, 1969). I wondered whether the fact that he had been the carer and ‘prepared’ for her death may have caused him to think that he was in control of his emotions and that therefore he wasn’t giving himself the space to allow for his feelings. As we worked together he began to see that he had a lot of strict expectations about how he ‘should’ be managing her death. The fourth session was a very emotional one where a lot of rage emerged. From this point on, he said that he began to gain more energy and felt quite liberated. I felt that this session was really important for him, and I hoped that I was able to give him an experience of being completely accepted, with whatever emotions he had needed to bring to the session.

Through supervision, I became aware that I felt quite motherly towards him, wanting to ‘take care’ of him. However, I saw that if I allowed myself to respond in such a way it might keep him in a position of being a little boy who needed care, giving the power to someone else, rather than enabling him to connect to his own personal power. I attempted to embody the core conditions of empathy and unconditional positive regard and hoped that my validation of him through the listening and reflection might enable him
to begin to access more of his own ‘true self’ especially with an older woman. Overall I felt that he was in a process of ‘letting go’ of his mother. Although I feel that there was a degree of compliance from him in our relationship, in the final session it felt far more equal, and I felt that I got a glimpse of more of the ‘man’ that was there instead of the boy. Oddly I felt quite proud but also sad to see him go. I wondered if that might be a taste of how a mother might feel about her son when she lets him go and be a man in the world.

Some of the feedback from my first year viva concerned a query as to whether my “confident and polished performance in viva might reflect a need to mask doubt or [] underlying uncertainty”. I feel that this assessment captured an issue that has taken me three years to wrestle with and am only now beginning to understand. Having come from twenty years in the world of business in which values of confidence and certainty were ‘de rigueur’, (and alongside the rigorous academic requirements of this course), I thought that this was exactly what was expected. At the time, I really did not know what my examiners meant.

Wild Mysterious Seas

In my second year it felt as if I was entering the depths of uncharted waters, into an unknown place but one of deep mystery and fascination. It was as if I was entering the domain of unconscious processes and was often impacted quite strongly by clients, in an emotional and physical manner. Although sometimes quite frightening and depleting I was also absolutely fascinated by the power of the work and this model resonated with me at a deep level. For me, the nature of this year, consistent with a psychodynamic model was one of experiencing and processing, in terms of client work, supervision, university groupwork and in my private therapy.

Interestingly, I have just begun to read ‘Jung’s Map of the Soul’ (Stein, 1998), and within it I discover that Stein likens immersion in Jung’s work as like diving into a “Sea of Mystery” or “Mare Ignotum” (p.2) which feels completely in tune with my above description of this year.
I chose to work in an NHS psychotherapy setting for my placement because I wanted to experience the model in its most formal sense, to be able to understand it as fully as possible within a year. I was lucky enough to have three supervisors and my supervision hours almost matched my client ones. So although some of the client work was intense and emotional, I generally felt very contained by supervision. Overall, I found it immensely helpful to experience three different styles of working, (the supervisors were Kleinian, Jungian and Tavistock trained) and this helped me explore my own personal style of working within psychodynamic theory. I found that, in a similar to manner to one of the psychotherapists, a more collaborative and encouraging style suited me best. Similar to Kohut’s (1971, 1977) thinking that both understanding and explanation were important for a client, I would share hypotheses and thoughts with clients as I felt appropriate and underline key realisations that had begun to come into their conscious awareness. I would link current behaviour to past events and stress how understandable their reactions and responses were, in the light of their early childhood experiences.

There is much about the psychodynamic model which I continue to work with as I develop myself as an Integrative Counselling Psychologist. The fundamental principles of the impact of childhood events on the development of the person; transference and countertransference; working with the relationship as a vehicle for re experiencing and healing (Gill, 1982) and the therapist as ‘container’ to help to process unprocessed material, all completely resonate with me. Further, I feel that I have experienced their usefulness first hand in my psychodynamic work. I hope the following discussion will give the reader a taste of some of these aspects and how they have become apparent for me in my practice.

Early on I found myself affected quite strongly by working with my clients in this model and so became interested in the concepts of countertransference (Clarkson, 2003; Clarkson & Nuttall, 2000; Khan, 1991) and containment (Bion, 1962; Winnicott, 1971) in order to better understand why this might be happening. I therefore explored the idea of containment in an essay and this can be found in this Portfolio in the Academic Dossier. I found that clients were able to ‘communicate’ their ‘worlds’ to me in a manner beyond
words, which I might experience as powerful and disturbing feelings. Part of my learning process has been to understand what was happening more quickly, to get a sense of what was my own material and what was theirs (Dunn, 1995), and to see how I could use this to enrich my understanding of, and work with, the client (Lemma, 2003).

So, for example, I found it difficult to think clearly, tended to drop papers and forget things around Miss Z, a client in her mid thirties. In her current life she seemed to be infuriated by authority figures and organisations that continually made mistakes at her expense (letters wrongly sent, mistaken appointments etc). Although enraged with others she generally felt quite powerless in terms of her own authority or as to how she might express this. In her childhood it appeared that she had not been adequately contained and guided by her alcoholic parents. They would assert one rule, then not uphold it, yet punish her harshly with little apparent cause about something else. They took little notice of the bullying she received at school, saying that there was nothing that they could do. Kohut (1971, 1977) talks of the importance of the idealising transference as a means by which the child can feel that the parent is capable and powerful and able to look after the child. If this is fulfilled they will develop a sense of personal power and authority in the world. I wondered if Miss Z had never felt adequately protected in her early years, or got a sense of safety from her parents. As forgetfulness and dropping papers is not my usual behaviour, I felt that this must be indicating something of her world, ie that I was behaving like her mother, or the ‘incompetent’ authority figures that she tended to meet. (Fascinatingly, her appointments with me had mistakenly been cancelled by the secretaries twice, so who knows how widely people or organisations can be affected by someone’s countertransference?)

I realise that working with the negative transference within the relationship has been a common feature in my psychodynamic work (Lemma, 2003). To continue with Miss Z, one day she was late for our (early morning) session because, unknown to me, the doors had not been opened in time. During this particular session the subject of the incompetence of others came up and I wondered aloud whether she also might feel that I was incompetent too in some respects. She responded by telling me how she had been
unable to get in and proceeded to tell me how unprofessional this was and that I should have known. I experienced this with the full force of her anger and had to fight hard not to ‘retaliate’ as there were elements of punitiveness in the way in which she spoke to me. Mindful of Winnicott’s thinking as regards the “analyst’s survival of attack” (1971, p.123), I instead endeavoured to acknowledge her for having the courage to say how she really felt to me. I felt that this was really important in showing her that her anger could be contained and talked about. We also began to explore how it must have felt to her being ‘shut out’ with the door locked in that way. Together we saw that the anger could sometimes actually emanate from thwarted or unexpressed feelings of hurt or disappointment. From here on our relationship changed as she became more able to say things to me that she said she had previously found difficult. Our work also seemed to have impacted upon her life outside as she became more able to express disappointment and vulnerability to others, as well as behaving more assertively or authoritatively when appropriate.

There was a parallel process in terms of working with the negative transference and negative affect of my clients and also working with it in myself. My therapist had to bear the brunt of the negative affect that I had previously been unable to express and for that I am deeply grateful. I feel that it was a virtuous circle, in that the more I was able to tolerate the negative affect from my clients, the more I was able to allow it in myself, and the more it was tolerated by my therapist, the more I could tolerate it in both myself and others. I also think that when something is ready to be processed and released in the therapist or psychologist, working with the client on that same issue, with awareness, can serve to move both of them forward. This is similar to Symington’s (1986) assertion that containment is a dynamic process leading to new growth in both parties.

On this second year placement, I also had the opportunity of co-facilitating some couple therapy with another counselling psychologist in training. The husband of the first couple we saw was on a relapse prevention programme for drug and alcohol abuse within the same trust. Their relationship seemed unstable and she had talked of leaving him if things did not change, although he had threatened suicide if she did. We had concerns that there
might be a degree of risk in relation to his reactions if she did leave and indicated as much in our discharge letter to the other services. A couple of months later we learned through the wife that he had committed suicide.

Clearly there was a lot for me to process about this. I felt that I needed to piece together how it had occurred and whether anything could have been done differently. I was shocked that we had not been informed about this by the other services in the trust and so personally visited the other services to talk to them about what had happened. This event has caused me to widen my perspective to begin to explore where the psychologist might fit in relation to other departments in such a large institution. It has highlighted some of the inherent difficulties of inter-departmental communications and raised questions for me in terms of my personal responsibility in this respect. It also had the effect of me reaching out for support from my supervisors, the university staff and colleagues and my friends. I tend to process things on my own or with one trusted confidante, so for me, to reach out to a group and to find that they were strong enough to be there for me was a new and enriching experience.

Research- Tributaries Feeding into the Sea

All the way through this course I have been thrilled that I have been able to study research topics that truly inspired me. It has enabled me to really grapple with ideas of spirituality and growth. I have been able to begin an exploration of what it is that causes growth and how this might sometimes emerge from suffering or spiritual emergency (Grof & Grof, 1989). Although my research concerned former alcoholics, I think that the principles are the same for all people who have been in suffering and then found a way through. I wholeheartedly feel that this is key to our work as counselling psychologists. The more that we can understand how people develop, the more we will be able to get a sense of how we can better be there for them in our work. In a sense I have been trying to see whether there is some kind of overarching means of construing a person’s journey and
development (which also folds into my attempt to understand how it all fits together as a practitioner). It felt as if my research questions were feeding into the rest of the theory and practice within my training, like rivers flowing into the sea. When I discovered the principle of alchemy, I was excited to have discovered something so all-embracing and it caused me to wonder if one might be able to look at an individual’s life through this model. With encouragement from my supervisor, I decided to conduct a single case study for my final year research. A single case study had never been used as a research project on our University course before, so I was eager yet also a little in trepidation to embark upon this venture.

At the end of the second year I felt more sure of who I was as a counselling psychologist; it had been a difficult year and yet quite inspiring and strengthening. I had found a way of working within the psychodynamic model that suited me well. My final year research was, possibly more than ever, on a topic that inspired me. I was in full sail and the wind was blowing sure and steady, excited at the prospect of the next leg of my journey.

Harsh Seas

I knew that I would find the CBT year a challenge, as I had enjoyed the psychodynamic one so much, but I had no idea exactly how difficult it would be. In my water analogy I felt as if the seas were stormy and I was going underwater. I hated the idea of being wrenched out of the ‘being’ with the client into the ‘doing’ and was aghast when I was given the guideline to talk ‘50% of the time’. Looking back, I see now that some of my difficulty was related to a part of myself that I had not yet balanced- the more male, directive, controlling side of me. In the first two years I had put that aside as I was able to ‘be’ and listen to my clients. The CBT model took me back into the more ‘business’ character that I had been. It reawakened my ‘doing’ ‘fixing’ characteristics. It was as if
the male/‘animus’ aspect of myself needed to be revisited and balanced⁵. So for a time I lost focus on the relationship with my clients as I misconstrued what it was to do CBT artfully whilst holding the core conditions. Beginning to understand what it really meant to work collaboratively in this model, and at the client’s pace rather than mine, was really useful for me, albeit quite a humbling experience. I think however, that this struggle in terms of the nature of the relationship in CBT is a fairly common one, judging by the amount of debate on the subject (Gluchoski, 1994: Sanders & Wills, 2005), and is something that I continue to wrestle with.

Overall I have experienced how useful the CBT approach can be with clients who are engaged and willing to tackle a specific aspect of their lives. I feel that using its techniques in a creative and collaborative manner can be rewarding in terms of seeing tangible change in the clients (I give a couple of brief examples below). However I agree with Sanders and Wills (2005) who maintain that CBT operates in “stark contrast” (p.224) to other therapies more concerned with longer term personal growth and personality change. I feel that for clients with more serious or relational deficiencies, a different approach can be more appropriate. So has been useful for me to begin to develop a personal working sense of which approach or style might be most beneficial for a particular person at a given time in their life.

One young girl presented after making a suicide attempt last year when her extended family were staying with them for her sister’s wedding. She said she “felt overwhelmed with no way out”. Using CBT principles, we worked together to create the idea of a personal ‘energy gauge’ that she could monitor each day or each hour in emergency. This has given her a sense of how she becomes depleted with some people and has difficulties setting boundaries. We have role played certain things she might say to them in order to get some much needed space in her life. We have also worked together to create a daily plan for her to follow, which ensures that she has some ‘me time’. She has said that she

⁵ This reminds me of the alchemical process ‘coniunctio’ that I later talk about in my final year research, about the balance of opposites, particularly male/animus and female/anima, and the importance of finding “the middle way” (Miller & Miller, 2003, p. 46).
now feels much more aware of her needs and more able to communicate this to others. With another client, who was repeatedly getting into debt, we were able to explore her core beliefs about herself and her entitlement in life. We visualised a possible future that these core beliefs might lead her to, and once these had been brought to her awareness we were able to shape a more positive alternative future. She ended up creating a piece of artwork that symbolised what she now envisaged her future to be and she is making good progress in terms of paying off her debts and increasing her income.

Within my final year placement I have also had the opportunity of working with schema therapy as outlined by Young, Klosko and Weishaar, (2003). I have enjoyed working at the deeper level of schemas with a person, helping them to link this into current repeated dysfunctional behaviour patterns in order to affect change. Schema therapy has provided me with a sort of bridge between CBT, psychodynamic and more gestalt techniques and I have found it interesting to experience working with an integrative approach in this manner. It has given me the experience of working with experiential and imagery techniques, which I feel are really useful for some clients. In this respect I follow a mix of the Arntz and Weertman's (1999) suggestion on imagery and Young et al's (2003) ideas. The principal elements that I am concerned with are enabling the client to create a changed outcome to a traumatic event in the past, and to ensure that they 're-experience' this as the child. One client in particular found this extremely powerful and subsequently said that it was 'as if the past had actually been rewritten' and that he now could hold onto that new experience and its resolution in his memory. Since this time he appears to have connected with a sense of his self that I had not seen before and appears to be relating to others with a newfound sense of authority.
Integration- Further Into Unknown Waters?

So where am I now? As I explore working integratively, I find that I am still on my voyage, right in the middle of the ‘strange seas’. It is far more challenging than I had realised it would be. I can see that it would be tempting to remain within, for example the psychodynamic model but feel that as a counselling psychologist, I want to use all the skills in my repertoire and that working integratively can provide more for clients than working within the confines of one approach. This is however a far less ‘certain’ place to be as it seems to cast me in the ‘not knowing’ (Casement, 1985). Although toleration of the ‘not knowing’ is considered to be an important aspect of the therapeutic endeavour (Bion, 1974; Winnicott 1965), it can be a less comfortable place for the psychologist to inhabit. Now that I reflect back on the last few years, I think that my drive to find one integrated way of working and understanding the nature of being human might have also been an attempt to make everything understandable and ‘safe’ and that I am finally understanding what they meant in my first year viva about the need to be able to tolerate uncertainty. However although uncomfortable, I am beginning to glimpse the fact that this uncertainty can be embraced rather than feared and that it might be this very aspect that keeps the work fresh and alive for me. It involves really respecting the fact that working with another is a mysterious and unknown process and it involves responding to the uniqueness of a given client in the uniqueness of the moment. Again this reinforces my belief that the more that I can continue to develop myself as a person and therapist, the more that I will be able to be there for the clients (Karasu, 1999). My work on integration will thus be an ongoing process (Hollanders, 2003), but for now I hope that I have conveyed the principles and elements of theory and practice that resonate with me, and that I shall continue working with. I also hope that I have conveyed a sense of the importance that I place upon the therapeutic relationship as a means through which to facilitate growth and transformation.

I am also keen to explore how to integrate my spiritual underpinnings into my work in the future. Although I feel that there have been some transpersonal aspects to my work with
some clients (Clarkson, 2003; Rowan, 1993; Vaughan, 1985) I feel that thus far my focus has been in terms of grounding myself in the foundations of the three models outlined. The future therefore holds a myriad of possibilities, and I am currently particularly drawn to explore more about the transpersonal (including beginning to digest Wilber's 2000 spectrum model,) and psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965), as well as a more relational (DeYoung, 2003; Maroda, 2002) way of working. So many seas to explore! The wind is up, the sea is blue and the sun is out.
References


RESEARCH DOSSIER
Introduction to the Research Dossier

This dossier contains a literature review and two pieces of qualitative research. The literature review explores the idea of spiritual awakening as a mechanism of change within the Alcoholics Anonymous. The second paper is an interpretative phenomenological analytic exploration of the spiritual paths of three former AA/NA members using the case study approach. The third paper is a narrative analytic study of the life path of a former alcoholic utilising a single in-depth case study.
Spiritual Awakening as a Mechanism of Change within Alcoholics Anonymous. What can we as Counselling Psychologists Learn from the Twelve Step Programme?

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of 'spiritual awakening' within Alcoholics Anonymous and considers its contribution to the process of change within the Twelve Step Programme. Definitions of 'spiritual awakening' are discussed and various contributions are synthesised to emerge with a working definition. The process of change and development is explored, including the part that spiritual awakening might play in this, and the way in which this process unfolds in AA. Finally, practices and disciplines for laying the groundwork for change are discussed, followed by a discussion of the implications for counselling psychologists.

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Introduction

The spiritual dimension is increasingly being acknowledged as an important component in contemporary psychotherapy (e.g., Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, and Epp, 1999; Mahohey and Graci, 1999). There is a growing body of literature on this area, particularly in the past two decades, and increasing evidence that spirituality can have positive effects upon clients (Coyle, 2002; Hinterkopf, 1994; Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, and Benson, 1991; Taylor, 1994). It is an area of growing curiosity amongst psychologists, and there are a good number of empirical scales and tools to measure spiritual aspects (e.g., the Spiritual Well-Being Scale, Ellison, 1994; the Spiritual Health Inventory, Veach and Chappel, 1992).

However, it is also an area that is not yet fully understood by psychologists. It still appears to hold an air of mystery about it and a degree of discomfort, perhaps because it occupies a different domain from the rational, empiricist, scientific one (Bowden, 1998). As Bristow-Braiteman (1995) notes “spiritual aspects of recovery may be foreign constructs for the academically trained helping professional” (p.414). It is also a notoriously nebulous area from many respects and difficult to define.

However, I intend to engage in this area, because, however problematic, I feel that it can hold insights for therapists that could be put to good use with our clients. I wish to explore how this dimension works and why and whether there are any learnings that can be applied to counselling psychology in any respect.

I have chosen to look at the area of spirituality and change through the lens of the AA programme and alcohol addiction. This is because there is a substantial amount of evidence indicating that the spiritual dimension plays a particularly important role in the recovery from substance addiction (Bowden, 1998; Brooks and Clifford, 2000; DiLorenzo, Johnson, and Bussey, 2001; Grof, 1993; Miller, 1998; Swora, 2004; Warfield and Goldstein, 1996). Further, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), one of the most commonly used self-help programmes of recovery for alcoholics, holds that spiritual awakening is
integral for a sustained sobriety. By focussing upon AA, we can examine the particular kind of spiritual awakening outlined in AA and the aspects constituting recovery in AA. Examining one defined area may provide a greater clarity and understanding about the way spirituality works in facilitating change.

Personally, I knew from the outset that I wanted to explore the topic of spirituality, because of the importance of this realm in my life. I was brought up in a family with broadly Christian beliefs, although rarely attending Church. In my late teens I moved probably the furthest away from any sense of spirituality in my life. However from my late twenties onwards I began to participate in personal development and encounter groups, which aroused my interest in the spiritual, and my sense of this realm began to reawaken and strengthen. Now spirituality is central to my life, although I have my own unique relationship rather than through an organised religion. In retrospect I can see that I wanted to base my literature review around the concept of spiritual awakening in order to gain a better understanding of my own experiences and explore how this might occur for others.

I have some close friends in the 12 step programme and have witnessed first hand the positive effects it can have. I have also witnessed some of the problems that it can create, such as the difficulties some members have faced in terms of leaving the programme (ie being afraid that leaving would precipitate a relapse). I have a good deal of respect for the achievements of the programme, but also some reservations and questions. So I feel privileged to have this opportunity to examine it in detail from the psychologist’s viewpoint.

This paper will begin with a brief background to AA, its perceived effectiveness, its formation and perceptions of alcoholism as a spiritual malady. Subsequently, definitions of spiritual awakening will be discussed, and various contributions synthesised, to emerge with a working definition. Then follows a brief outline of the 12 Steps and how they might work to produce change. The next section explores the process of change and development, what part the spiritual awakening may play in this and how the process
unfolds in AA. Finally, practices and disciplines for laying the groundwork for change are discussed, followed by a discussion of the implications for counselling psychologists.

The AA Programme

Although the AA 12 step programme has had a somewhat uneasy and ambivalent relationship with the clinical and academic world (Bristow-Braiteman, 1995), its continued popularity has meant that it cannot be ignored. AA is probably the best known self help programme for alcoholics (Fiorentine, 1999) and most treatment programmes are based upon its principles or incorporate them to some degree (Bradley, 1988; Fiorentine, 1999).

Studies assessing the effectiveness of the 12 step programmes yield mixed and inconclusive results (Cloud, Ziegler and Blondel, 2004; Fiorentine, 1999; Gorski and Miller 1986; Lile 2003; Thurstin, Alfano and Nerviano, 1994; Warfield and Goldstein 1996). There is also a substantial body of literature that is critical of the AA programme (eg, Cortright, 1997; Lile, 2003; Walters, 2002). It has been criticised for being “overly religious, inflexible and controlling...[and]...fostering a substitute dependency” (Lile, 2003, p.19). It has also come under criticism for its belief in the disease model (the belief that the alcoholic has a sickness from which there is no cure only complete abstinence). Although this served a very useful purpose at the time of AA’s inception, and helped to destigmatise alcoholics as morally corrupt, it may be the case that it has also created a new stigma of being sick (Walters, 2002). Further, the emphasis on powerlessness and humility, as well as some of the language used such as ‘character defects’, might contribute to a lack of self esteem amongst members. This may be why there is evidence from some studies that a greater level of helplessness and low self esteem can be present for some AA members (Tonigan, Toscova and Connors, 1999).

So it can be seen that the AA programme creates much debate and contention. Perhaps the only indisputable fact is that AA clearly does have value for a proportion of recovering alcoholics (Bradley, 1988). We will now look at the background and
formation of AA in order to attempt to understand this complex phenomenon more clearly.

The Foundation and Philosophy of AA

The personal, very human feel of AA is largely due to its founder Bill Wilson, and the style in which he wrote the *Big Book* (a colloquial term for the main AA book outlining the principles and practices of the AA programme for members) in 1939. The first part of the book is quite simply the personal story of his decline through alcoholism, reaching 'rock bottom' as he realised that "alcohol was my master" (AA, 1939, p.8).

Subsequently, an old friend of his, previously an alcoholic, visited him in the peak of health and having found religion. Although Wilson himself balked at the idea of God, his friend suggested that he could choose his own conception of God and this affected him profoundly. Thereafter he had a profound religious experience as follows-

> "Then like a thunderbolt a great thought came 'who are you to say there is no God?' This man [Wilson] recounts that he tumbled out of his bed to his knees. In a few seconds he was overwhelmed by his convictions of the presence of God. It poured over him and through him…"

(AA, 1939, p.56)

In retrospect, he felt that by hitting rock bottom he had reached the point of ego deflation. He saw that he was powerless over alcohol and was able to surrender his will over to God. Following his conversion he proceeded to take an honest appraisal of his life, taking a new responsibility for his actions and behaviour. He made amends to others for the wrongs he had done them. He saw the change in himself as moving out of self centred behaviour towards a 'God consciousness'. The Twelve Steps are actually an outline of his journey and what worked for him.

One of the criticisms aimed at AA by some is that it is a religious organisation (eg Lang and Kidorf, 1990), although AA and others such as Peck (1993) dispute this. The
founding members of AA were concerned to remain open to all and not to be based within any particular religion. They were only too aware that, like Wilson initially, many currently rejected the idea of God. They thus modified certain phrases such as adding 'as you know him to be' after 'God' and using 'God' interchangeably with the term 'Higher Power'. The meetings are open to anyone who has a sincere wish to become sober, regardless of race, creed or religious beliefs.

The AA philosophy is that the alcoholic has a disease of addiction, from which there is no cure, only complete abstinence. They also view the disease as a spiritual condition, and hold that a spiritual awakening is vital to recovery. Let us now look at this idea of alcoholism as a spiritual malady.

Spiritus Contra Spiritum: Alcoholism as a Disease of the Spirit

Wilson had particular respect for Carl Jung, whom he acknowledges as (unwittingly) instrumental in the beginnings of the AA organisation. (This is because Jung’s alcoholic patient referred to below had an indirect influence upon Bill Wilson’s conversion experience). Jung once spoke to an alcoholic patient of his as follows-

“Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them.”

(AA, 1988, p.27)

Later this man did have the spiritual experience that released him from his alcoholism. Many years later, Wilson and Jung corresponded. Jung explained that he saw alcoholism as-
"an equivalent, on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God....You see, alcohol in Latin is ‘spiritus’ and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: ‘spiritus contra spiritum.’"

(AA, 1988, p.280)

This is a commonly held view amongst many; that alcoholism is in fact a yearning for the spiritual (Peck 1993). Grof (1993) speaks of alcoholism as “a deep thirst for wholeness, our divine source, or God” (p.163). Glasser (1985) similarly spoke of the quest of the alcoholic as being about spiritual well being. But what do we actually mean when we speak of the spiritual? The next section attempts to define a spiritual awakening.

Definitions of Spirituality and Awakening

In this section the inherent difficulties in describing this area are discussed. Starting in a broad manner, definitions of ‘spirituality’ and ‘awakening’ are explored. A synthesised definition is created as a working definition for this paper, and compared with the AA definition.

There are countless papers on the notion of spirituality and much populist literature on the subject, some of whom define the term and others who do not even attempt the task (Cook 2004). This area is multifaceted and to some degree boundless and difficult to comprehend. I have some sympathy with the view that it defies definition and articulation and that, by attempting to find words to define the nebulous, its true essence necessarily must be lost (Clarkson, 2000; DeAcutis, 2004; Smail, 2000; Still, 2000; 6 'Religion' and ‘spirituality’ are often used interchangeably. However, ‘religion’ might be taken to include both the personal experience as well as “the social, historical and cultural institutions, practices and doctrines that provide the particular milieu that grounds and supports personal faith and religious experience” (Moore, Kloos and Rasmussen, 2001, p.490). Spirituality is a broader concept, embracing aspects beyond the confines of organised religion. For this reason, the focus in this paper is upon the more broadly encompassing nature of ‘spirituality’, which may or may not involve an institutionalised religious affiliation.
Suarez, 2002; Whitehouse, 1999). There is a long history of debate and controversy around the definitions of spirituality and related theological concepts, and how to write about God and aspects of divinity in a meaningful way. There is the view, for example, that aspects of divinity and God are unique and inaccessible through the mechanism of ordinary language (Davies, 2004). Others take the empiricist view that anything not measurable and readily accessible to articulation does not exist (Hume, 1975). I shall take the stance that as we continue to explore in this area, the clearer two different aspects will become: those areas which are explicable through language will become clearer and better understood. Accordingly the sense and feel for those aspects which lie outside the realm of language will also become more apparent to us.

In respect of the term ‘awakening’, Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary (1972) defines it as ‘becoming awake: rousing: revivifying: reanimating.-n. a becoming awake, aware, active: a throwing off of indifference or ignorance. Grof and Grof (1989) define an awakening as something that “clearly suggests becoming aware of a new area of experience, the opening of the hitherto closed eyes to an inner reality previously unknown” (p.31).

In terms of a definition of ‘spiritual awakening’, no one definition seemed to account for all the aspects involved, although Elfie Hinterkopf’s (1994) definition came closest for me in many respects. I use her ideas as a frame or foundation from which to modify and synthesise some other aspects, to arrive at a working definition for the purposes of this paper. Hinterkopf (1994) has derived her definition partly from Gendlin’s (1961) theory of experiencing or ‘focussing’ and Shea’s (1987) description of religious experiencing. Her definition of spiritual experience comprises four elements, as follows- “a) presently felt phenomenon, b) involving an awareness of the transcendent dimension, c) bringing new meanings, d) that lead to growth” (p.166).

As Hinterkopf explains it, the presently felt phenomenon refers to a bodily or emotional experience, which can be such as fear and tension or a sense of love or peace. She describes the awareness of the transcendent dimension as “moving beyond one’s former
frame of reference in a direction of higher or broader scope” (p.166). I would understand this as being about a shift in consciousness or awareness of some sort. This experience will bring new meanings, which may not be clear immediately, but may unfold over time. I would understand this as being about coming closer to truth and authenticity. The final element is that these new meanings will be of a higher nature than before and will ultimately lead to growth.

Hinterkopf’s definition feels more encompassing than many that I have read and includes experiential elements as well as an indication of a process of change, leading to growth. The second two points, of new meanings which lead to growth, fit very well with the idea of an awakening as they indicate a movement or change. However, the first point of her definition is very focussed upon the felt sense and experience. I however am looking for a definition of a spiritual awakening, and I suggest that there may not be such an emphasis upon the felt experience for some (see AA, 1973). I would thus see the most important element of these first two points to be about a shift in consciousness, which may or may not involve the presence of a felt sense.

Let us now look at how AA perceives the matter of spiritual awakening and see how it might fit with our developing definition. The AA programme is based on the principle that a spiritual awakening is vital to recovery. ‘Recovery’ is seen as not only about sobriety but as a complete change in outlook, attitudes and behaviours of a person. In fact they have coined the term ‘dry drunk’ as referring to someone who is not drinking but has not yet addressed the reasons behind their alcoholism. The ‘dry drunk’ is described by Prezioso (1987) as being under a negative spirituality, meaning that they are insecure, defensive and with low self-esteem. It is considered necessary for the abstaining alcoholic to ‘work the programme’ by doing the 12 steps in order for a full recovery to occur. So recovery is sobriety plus doing the steps. It is also a continuous process, a lifelong programme of change.

AA defines a ‘spiritual awakening’ as-
"...a profound alteration to his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought about by himself alone. What often takes place in a few months could seldom have been accomplished by years of self-discipline. With few exceptions, our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conceptions of a Power greater that themselves. Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience. Our more religious members call it 'God consciousness'

(1939, p.568)

However, it is also described as- "...the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism" (AA, 1939, p.567); "...personality changes or religious experiences" (AA, 1939, p.567) and "...an entire psychic change" (AA, 1939, p.xxix).

This brings up some interesting aspects. It is as if the concept of spiritual awakening, and the concept of personality change are inseparable, the implication being that the personality change comes about from a spiritual experience or indeed the personality change is the spiritual experience. To me, I found the juxtaposition of 'personality change' and 'religious experience' in the AA literature confusing initially. Surely personality change was only a psychological issue whereas a religious experience or an awareness of a higher power would be a more spiritual issue?

Comparing this with our developing definition, we can see that the elements of personality change or 'profound alteration to his reaction to life' most clearly fit with the latter points: the new meanings that bring about growth and change. The idea of personality change would tend to be a psychological one, and one that will be likely to manifest as a change in outlook and attitudes. However, it may be construed that this change will have come about through some kind of shift in consciousness, which incorporates our modified first point and fits with the AA idea of 'entire psychic change'. So the two definitions are, broadly, in alignment.
However, something lacking from our definition and present in the AA description is still the issue of a spiritual or mystical element. Hinterkopf (1994) simply says that awareness of the divine may or may not be there. But how do we explain this and is it still a spiritual awakening, if there is no explicit awareness of this by the person who has had the shift?

I had initially assumed that any kind of spiritual experience or awakening must include an awareness of higher power or deity. However, there are many stories of AA members (AA, 1973) who have found recovery in AA but have no sense of the spiritual dimension or of a higher power beyond the strength they gain from the group support: eg “In common with many AAs, I never enjoyed the luxury of a large and conscious spiritual experience and I felt a little deprived” (p.41). There is much debate within AA about those who have not got ‘the spiritual angle’ but who have clearly revolutionised their behaviour. The AA take on this is to assert that ‘the best evidence of that reality is in the subsequent fruits’ (AA, 1967, p.182).

Perhaps we can return to some fundamentals in order to answer this. Let us be reminded of the AA assertion that “Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience” (AA, 1939, p.568). Similarly, Fontana (2003) says “The more the spirituality expresses itself, the closer one is to God and to doing God’s will” (p.12). Cortright (1997) further maintains that “people seek the divine unconsciously at first, but at some point the quest becomes conscious and engages the person’s attention” (p.57). Perhaps it is the case that the ongoing spiritual development of a person is to ultimately lead them closer to a power greater than themselves but that, at earlier stages of their development, they are progressing without awareness of the divine. Spiritual awakenings can even occur and transform their attitudes and feelings but the experience is not yet attributed to anything beyond themselves. In AA’s words; “Well that guy is just reeking of the spiritual angle- except that he doesn’t seem to know it yet!” (1988, p.275).

With this in mind, let us complete our working definition of spiritual awakening. In sum,
I would define the actual spiritual awakening as being a shift of some sort in the person's consciousness, awareness or perception, however subtle or incremental. It may or may not involve the presence of a felt sense. It may or may not involve the individual's awareness of something divine. These shifts will bring about new meanings and growth. Ultimately this growth will bring the person closer to an awareness of a higher power.

My personal experiences and views on the topic have obviously impacted the development of this definition. It was very important to me that I found a definition that resonated with me as well as stemming from the literature. However, my views on the subject were also affected and modified throughout the process. I initially thought that spiritual awakening must involve a conscious understanding or awareness of the mystical dimension or the divine. Now I am of the view that the simple awakening and expansion of consciousness is what really constitutes the awakening, whether or not there is an explicit awareness of the divine.

**The Twelve Steps**

The Twelve steps are introduced and outlined in the *Big Book* (1939, p.59) as follows:

"Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery:

1. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Examining the steps in more detail as a process, it can be seen that the first three steps are about getting to a state of readiness to change. It “prepares the groundwork for eventual transcendence of the narrow ego self” (Warfield and Goldstein, 1996 p.198). The first step is about the alcoholic hitting rock bottom and admitting defeat over their alcoholism. The AA literature (1952) maintains that this is the only step that needs to be taken 100% wholeheartedly. Other steps might be begun more tentatively but this one needs to be embraced fully. There is some empirical evidence that bears this out. Gilbert (1991) found that agreement with step 1 correlated with extended periods of abstinence in the first year of sobriety, whereas agreement with the second two steps did not. Further, as Juillard (1995) maintains, the “first step is viewed not as only the portal of entry into a life of recovery but also as an essential ingredient for sobriety” (p.112).

Steps 2 and 3 are about the idea of trying things a new way and beginning to become open to a spiritual path, away from the will of the ego self. They introduce the idea of a higher power and ask the alcoholic to consider the possibility that a higher power or some other form of external help might be the answer.

Steps 4 to 6 are the action steps. These are like a psychological programme of self-exploration by looking at the past. Alcoholics are asked to take an honest objective appraisal of their actions in the past, exposing all their faults or ‘character defects’. The literature suggests that this might be done with a sponsor (or fellow AA member who can be asked by a newer member to mentor them) in order to help balance the tendencies of the individual either to be too hard upon themselves or to avoid a true appraisal of their faults.

Step 4 is the look at the character defects and step 5 is the admission of these faults to another. If all of the steps are designed to deflate the ego, then step 5 is probably “the most ego deflating of them all” (AA, 1952, p56). This is about confession and humility.
through sharing ones faults.

Step 6 is about really acknowledging that the alcoholic wants to be free of their 'character defects' and is ready to let them go. Again the spiritual aspect is interwoven as the means whereby these defects can be “removed” and step 7 introduces humility as a necessary precursor for this to occur.

Steps 8 and 9 are concerned with personal relationships and making amends to those who have been wronged by the alcoholic’s past actions and behaviour. So this continues the process of giving and receiving forgiveness begun in step 5. This might be seen as clearing the past in order to make a fresh beginning.

Steps 10-12 help to develop this new life and put into place practices for everyday life. Recovery and spiritual progress is a lifelong process and this provides a means of integrating discipline and structure in the alcoholic's life. The AA Big Book suggests a daily inventory or balance sheet as a means of reviewing the day’s actions. Prayer and meditations are recommended as a means of continuing this developing spiritual awareness and relationship with God.

The final step guarantees a spiritual awakening as a result of the programme and encourages the recovering alcoholic to carry this message outward to others, sharing and making connections with other suffering alcoholics.

Let us now look more closely at the process of change and see the part that spiritual awakening might play within the AA programme.

The Process of Change

In this section I will explore how change occurs within the AA programme, and what part the spiritual awakening might play in the change, alongside other contributing support mechanisms.
Probably one of the most renowned and respected models of change is Prochaska and Diclemente’s (1983, 1992) ‘transtheoretical model of change’. They developed their model through making observations about the states people went through as they progressed and changed. Their model suggests 10 processes of change that may occur for people and 5 stages that they move through. Progress will probably be of a spiralling nature, sometimes dropping back to a previous stage, but in a less extreme manner. They noted that, broadly speaking, certain processes would be emphasised at each stage. In general, the strategies at the earlier stages are cognitive, affective and evaluative. The first stage is ‘precontemplation’, at which point the person is in denial and not thinking of change. Strategies that can help movement onto the next stage are ‘consciousness raising’, ‘dramatic relief’ and ‘environmental re-evaluation’. (Descriptions of these processes can be found in Appendix 2). The ‘contemplation’ stage is the point at which the person is moving into an awareness of their problem, but has not actually decided to do anything about it. ‘Self re-evaluation’ is emphasised here. The ‘preparation’ stage is characterised by a commitment to change, accompanied by incremental changes in behaviour, with the process of ‘self liberation’ being prevalent. The ‘action’ and ‘maintenance’ stages follow and include more behavioural strategies, such as ‘reinforcement management’, ‘helping relationships’, ‘counter conditioning’ and ‘stimulus control’.

Their model has had a great impact upon the psychology and addictions field, not least because it helped to bring attention to the client’s motivation to change (Heather, 1992). It provides a context of change and suggests various means of helping the client at various stages. It also fits well with the AA programme in terms of the later stages which require more behavioural aspects; the processes involved at the action and maintenance stages are similar to the AA suggestions of going to meetings, surrounding yourself with non drinking people, staying away from non drinking establishments, affirmations and the practice of service in the community. However, where it seems to be less clear is in relation to the earlier stages and also to the spiritual dimension. The model gives no real sense of how or why someone moves on from the pre-contemplation stage, other than describing what happens when they do. Orford, Somers, Daniels and Kirby (1992) found
that the model did not account for those who remained in the early stages, even though their drinking had caused them to be hospitalised. Overall the transtheoretical model provides an excellent "taxonomy or description of dispositional states and tells us nothing about the nature, aetiology and development of addictive behaviour" (Davidson, 1992, p. 822). It provided, for me, no sense of how and why some people may change whilst others drink themselves to death, or the impact of a spiritual awakening upon the process of change.

On a personal level, I was disappointed that this model did not answer for me the question of how change occurs in terms of the real internal change. There is a difference between observable behaviour change and a sense of the internal processes that can lead to behaviour change. I felt quite frustrated that this model, although very thorough and detailed, had not for me got to the heart of the matter. In fact in the end I found the transpersonal, the mystical and religious sources to hold richer and more interesting information for me. However, throughout this research, I kept wondering what I was really trying to answer. I wondered if what I was searching for was in fact answerable. These are the types of questions that have fascinated humans for years and perhaps we can only speculate and debate about the issue, but may never know for sure. I also wondered whether an understanding of such nebulous processes may in some way change or invalidate them. Would understanding an intangible spiritual experience rob it of its beauty in some respect?

Brown (1993) gets closer to the nature of spiritual change in her paper by focussing upon the areas of power, control and the process of long term change. She is very interested in the concept of surrender, which emerges as fundamental in terms of a spiritual shift for the alcoholic. The surrender aspects discussed by Brown and AA helped to explain, for me, what can initiate change in the early stages (although it still does not explain why this occurs for one person and not another). Brown discusses stages of change in terms of Transition, Early Recovery and Ongoing Recovery. She explains that the Transition stage involves surrender and is dependent upon the help and support of others. It involves relinquished control and defences and a fundamental step change in ideas about the self.
These are the first few steps of AA. Other writers are also in agreement that the first two steps of the programme are based on the idea of surrender of personal control and will (Bateson, 1971; Forcehimes, 2004; Kurz, 1979; Tiebout, 1949). Brown says that the Early Recovery phase involves a deep exploration of the self, "awakening unconscious and unknown aspects of self" (p.149) (step 4). So we can see that the importance of raising consciousness and the awakening of what we might call spirituality is key here. The final stage of Ongoing Recovery continues this process, which we might regard as a form of spiritual development.

The idea of surrender preceding transformation and awakening has been widely discussed (AA, 1939; Bateson, 1971; Bowden, 1998; Brown 1993; Forcehimes, 2004; Grof, 1993; James 2002; Tiebout, 1944, 1949; White 2004). The person has to be brought to a point of either destruction or surrender. This point of ego deflation is a commonly discussed phenomenon in terms of spiritual change: the will or ego needs to be broken or the person needs to be in a crisis in order to change. White (2004) has explored this process of change and notes that the former self undergoes a collapse of its defences at such a point.

Two forms of spiritual awakening experiences are usually alluded to in the literature, the more dramatic, quantum change experiences and the more subtle ones. There has been much more written on the more powerful and evocative experiences (AA, 1939; James, 2002; St John of the Cross, 1989), although most people will be more inclined to experience the slower, more subtle 'volitional' (James, 2002; Starbuck, 1901) or 'insightful' (Miller and D'de Baca, 2001) experiences.

So it seems that a form of spiritual awakening through surrender is a precursor to beginning the programme. But I am also interested to assess the role of spiritual awakening beyond the point of entry into the programme. Is this the only spiritual awakening or is it part of a process? I will argue that this is only one of many possible awakenings in the persons continuing development (spiritual and sobriety related), but that the process involves commitment and discipline.

In order to gain further understanding of the process of change, we shall briefly look more widely at some psychospiritual and transpersonal concepts explaining the matter. If the
shifts of awareness are types of spiritual awakenings, how do they occur, and can the ground be prepared in order to help facilitate such a change? Transpersonal psychology talks about levels or structures of human consciousness with the ‘self’ going through “a series of stages in the process of climbing, perceiving itself and reality in different ways as it progresses” (Vaughan 1985, p.5). Others talk of progress upon a spiritual path as involving a process of evolution and development of the self (Assagioli, 1965, Jung, 1933).

In terms of how transitions and breakthroughs occur, Wilber (1977) and Rowan (1993) give the simplest and clearest account that I have read. Wilber talks of a process of growth and learning which mounts up and up with each new piece of information and new experience in an incremental manner. But there comes a point where a complete paradigm shift of consciousness occurs. Rowan describes the “continual process of learning, followed by breakthrough, followed by consolidation, followed by learning and so on” (1993, p.111).

On a personal level, this provided the clarity that I had been looking for. This is actually an incredibly simple explanation, but to me it made absolute sense and was quite a relief after reading countless literature that still hadn’t answered how change occurs to my satisfaction. I wondered if its simplicity and the ‘knowing’ that I felt upon reading it, was akin to the simplicity of a spiritual truth. In the end it appears to be quite simple and straightforward, but it might have taken a long time to get there. This certainly was the case for me, as I could see that I had had to explore many different areas to get to this and had felt at times like I was drowning in literature, but upon reading this, much became clear. Things slotted into place and I felt quite confident about following this argument through to see where it took me.

The Wilber and Rowan ideas on breakthroughs have a number of repercussions as follows. Firstly, the breakthroughs are a form of awakening, given our definition of spiritual awakening as “a shift of some sort in the person’s consciousness, awareness or perception, however subtle or incremental”. Secondly, it may be that there can be
numerous spiritual awakenings in a person’s life. Especially if we take Wilber’s (1977) spectrum model\(^7\) into consideration, it might be supposed that there can be breakthroughs moving on to any of these levels and probably incrementally within a level. I would thus suggest that spiritual awakenings can occur for AA members working the programme on many occasions. In Wilson’s words- ...sobriety is only a bare beginning; it is only the first gift of the first awakening. If more gifts are to be received, our awakening has to go on” (AA, 1973, p.39).

Thirdly, although not known how or when such a breakthrough might occur, it appears that courage and commitment will be involved at some stage. It may involve suffering as various aspects of the self are let go and new aspects come to the fore. Wismer Bowden, 1998, speaks of the trial of the recovering alcoholic and the transformation of character that only occurs after a period of years. In terms of transitions and breakthroughs, Wilber (1977) states that two dimensions are necessary, the creative urge to move forward and the willingness to let go. The letting go can be the painful time as it may feel as if all the old structures and ideas of being have been removed in order to make way for a new set of rules and structures.

Finally, it is likely that a good deal of psychological work and discipline will be necessary in order to build up to the next breakthrough. It seems that psychological work and shifts in consciousness leading to spiritual awakenings are integrally related, although “...precisely how and in what ways this spiritual unfolding is influenced by the more psychological work on the self has yielded no clear agreement yet” (Cortright, 1997, p.41). It also seems likely that this work and discipline is necessary for consolidating and integrating any awakening that has occurred. Rowan (1993) states that “in the field of therapy we say that each breakthrough must be followed by a period of working through to integrate the new material into daily life” (p.109). This need for integration is echoed

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\(^7\) He outlined three stages of the model, prepersonal, personal and transpersonal, which demonstrated different levels of consciousness. Within each of these three stages there are three further developments or phases that need to occur before progression can occur. Wilber matches his stages with developmental models and models of psychopathology. He also indicates which type of therapy would be most appropriate at each stage.
by a number of writers, who speak of the importance of regular spiritual practices to ensure progression on both psychological and spiritual levels (Brown, 2001; Cortright, 1997; Tacey, 2001). Further, Hamel, Leelerc and LeFrancois (2003) assert that peak experiences do not necessarily lead to transcendent actualisation unless there is commitment to integrate; “it depends on the will and the ability of the individuals to keep on developing their psychospiritual potential” (p.5).

Without an accompanied spiritual discipline and some sense of humility, Rowan (1993) warns of the dangers of ‘spiritual inflation’ and the possibility that the experience will not have a lasting positive impact. Likewise, Tacey (2001) discusses at length the importance of overcoming the ego’s inclination to go for the ‘spiritual high’ rather than causing a real and lasting progression of the self through integrating the blissful aspects with measured discipline and wisdom.

So what is the work and discipline involved? The next section explores spiritual disciplines, CBT mechanisms and social interactive aspects that can contribute to change, especially in relation to the AA programme.

**Mechanisms of Change**

There are a number of different practices and techniques that have been suggested as useful in laying the groundwork for change to occur. The work could involve the more traditional spiritual practices and prayer and connecting with a power greater than oneself (AA, 1939; Eck, 2002). It could involve psychotherapy, and an exploration of the self, probably involving a clearing of the unconscious defences and raising awareness of any block present (Cortright, 1997). Within transpersonal therapy and psychosynthesis, this may involve utilising more experiential exercises, such as meditation, guided fantasy, dreamwork and working with symbols (Rowan, 1993).

There has been much research into meditation, some focussing on the physiological effects upon the body, regarding it more as a relaxation technique; (eg Allison, 1971;
Benson, 1975; Wallace, 1970). Research has shown its positive effects upon blood pressure, cholesterol levels, cancer, chronic pain, asthma and migraine (Murphy and Donovan, 1985; Walsh and Vaughan 1993). Other approaches to meditation however, focus upon it either as a form of concentration, or as a form of expanding consciousness (Goleman, 1988; Kornfield, 1993). Cortright (1997) suggests that meditation can serve varying purposes, such as uncovering repressed areas of the unconscious and can work well with interpretative psychotherapy.

Eck (2002) speaks of the renewed interest in spiritual practices amongst (Christian) counsellors, in order to help facilitate change and transformation amongst for their clients. Spiritual disciplines have been variously defined as “activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order” (Willard, 1998, p.68) and “activities that allow the person to do what they cannot presently do for themselves” (Eck, 2002, p.271). Key writers in this field (eg Bass, 1997; Foster, 1988; Ortberg, 1997; Tan and Gregg, 1997; Willard, 1998) have identified a number of different spiritual disciplines, which can be grouped under the broad headings of ‘cognitive’, ‘behavioural’ and ‘interpersonal’ (Eck, 2002). Eck explains that disciplines within each category can facilitate change in certain specific problem areas, as well as having broader reaching effects. The cognitively oriented disciplines, for example, can address a disordered and chaotic life in terms of facilitating more clarity and positive ways of thinking. Practices that can help here are such as meditation and prayer (Ashby and Lenhard, 1994; Dossey, 1993; Magaletta, 1998), as well as ‘listening’, ‘discernment’ and ‘study’.

Eck (2002) suggests that the behaviourally oriented spiritual disciplines can address addictions such as alcoholism. Suggested disciplines here are such as ‘solitude’ and ‘silence’, which can help clients regain a sense of balance and stillness in their lives. ‘Service’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘suffering’ are also suggested as important as they “help one transcend a worldview of narrow self interest or one that does not appreciate the relationship between struggle and growth” (Eck, 2002, p.275). Allender (1999), for example, has written about the positive effects that can emerge through suffering for
The interpersonally oriented disciplines are concerned with promoting healthy
correlations with others and dealing with damaged relationships. The practices involved
are such as ‘confession’, ‘repentance’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘humility’, ‘fellowship’,
‘witnessing’ and ‘guidance’. Clients in one study reported that being encouraged to
forgive others and to forgive God were amongst the most helpful techniques in their
therapy (Worthington, Dupont, Berry and Duncan, 1988).

Viewing the AA programme in the light of these suggested spiritual practices proves
interesting. It can be seen that many of the AA suggestions fit well with the above
religious and spiritual disciplines. For example, reading the AA literature, attending
meetings and the suggested prayer and meditation in step 11 would fit in the cognitive
category of bringing order to a disordered life. The AA programme also focuses quite
heavily on the practices in the interpersonal category. The ideas of confession and
repentance are integral to the step programme. Steps 4-9 are concerned with taking
responsibility for previous actions, admitting these wrongs to another and making amends
to whoever has been affected by the person’s behaviour. The structure of meetings and
membership provides a fellowship and potential for relating to others. The meetings
provide a forum for listening to others and witnessing others stories. The literature and
sponsor can serve to guide and mentor. The behavioural category, however, is interesting
as it only really applies to the service element in AA, heavily promoted as a means to help
take the focus away from self centred thinking towards others. Service is seen in AA as a
means of helping to reinforce the message and behaviour to oneself as well as educating
others about new behaviour. But there is no emphasis upon the stillness or solitude
aspects in AA, in fact almost the opposite, encouraging regular participation at meetings
and inter-relational aspects to avoid being ‘hungry, angry, lonely or tired’.

If AA appears weaker on Eck’s (2002) spiritual behavioural aspects, it is considered to be
strong on more traditional behavioural techniques (McCraday, 1994). There has been
much empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of behavioural therapy in the field of
alcoholism (eg Holder, Longabaugh, Miller and Rubonis, 1991) and McCrady (1994) compares AA to behavioural therapy for the way in which its practices can promote behaviour change. She further speaks of behaviour change as preceding other change, such as cognitive, affective or spiritual, and sees the AA programme as providing “a set of behavioural prescriptions for program involvement and maintaining abstinence” (McCrady, 1994, p.1164). As evidence of this she cites active behavioural coping strategies that AA encourages, such as avoiding drinking environments, attending meetings, the action of writing the personal inventory and the practice of visiting other alcoholics and taking them to meetings.

In terms of cognitive change, AA encourages a fundamental change in attitudes and beliefs through its programme. Initially, the idea of seeing oneself as an alcoholic and embracing the disease concept may require a complete change of thinking. Subsequently, doing the personal inventory and recognising one’s own responsibility in one’s life can require a cognitive and affective change. Further, as Velten (1996) states “many of AA’s famous sayings are cognitive behavioural coping strategies (p.108). He is referring to the many catchphrases that are common in AA circles, such as ‘keep it in the day’; ‘fake it till you make it’; ‘easy does it but do it’; ‘keep coming back’, ‘90 meetings in 90 days’. These can help to remind the member of their distorted cognitive thought processes and build a new way of thinking (Lile 2003).

The AA programme has however, been criticised in terms of its emphasis upon CBT practices without also giving much attention to deeper issues (Cortright, 1997). The importance that depth psychology places on the uncovering of childhood wounds is entirely lacking here. The AA programme “does not have the psychological theory and technology to work through interpersonal blocks, intra-psychic defences, and the earlier wounds behind these defences” (Cortright, 1977, p.217). The recovering alcoholic thus does not get a chance to rebuild a healthy self structure, and may not have a healthy sense of self to underpin his new behaviour.
The community aspect is likely to play a key part in the success of the AA programme. From a relating perspective, there is a ready-made group of like-minded people. Considering that the alcoholic has always felt particularly isolated (Grof, 1993) this in itself can boost their confidence; to feel a part of a community (McCrady, 1994). Lewis, Dana and Blevins (1988) show the importance of the social support elements as predictors in recovery. Longitudinal studies also point to the importance of changes in the social network as having positive outcomes for AA members (Kaskutas and Humphreys, 2003). In fact there seems to be something special about the quality of the support given by AA members compared with other people’s support (Kaskutas, Bond and Humphreys, 2002). This may be related to such as role modelling by other AA members, the 24 hour availability of other members for support and ideas about learning to have fun in sobriety (Kaskutas, Marsh and Kohn, 1998).

So, in sum, it appears that the AA programme provides a package of disciplines that span the spiritual, the psychological and the behavioural. It ultimately promotes a series of processes and practices that contribute towards change on a psychospiritual level; integrating hard work, self exploration, disciplined practice and spiritual practices. All this is within a fixed structure of meetings and social support. It does not, however, emphasise the importance of solitude and stillness, or encourage an exploration of deeper, underlying wounds. The initial surrender, however great or small, seems necessary to begin the programme. This may be considered to be the most fundamental of the spiritual awakenings for an alcoholic in AA. Subsequently, hard work occurs, interspersed with more spiritual awakenings or breakthroughs of consciousness, shifts in thinking. It is an ongoing process of hard work interspersed with ‘gifts’ of breakthroughs and spiritual awakenings. It thus appears that not just one spiritual awakening acts as a mechanism of change within AA, but that in all likelihood a number of spiritual awakenings will contribute to success.
Implications for Counselling Psychologists

I hope that this paper will have shown the importance of spiritual awakening(s) as a mechanism of change within the AA 12 step programme. So what are the implications for counselling psychologists? This section provides a discussion in relation to alcoholism and the AA programme, as well as broader implications in relation to spirituality per se.

Although there are certainly pros and cons within the AA programme, the help that it provides for some people cannot be dismissed, and thus, it would be recommended that the counsellor working with the alcoholic have an open mind towards the programme. Bristow-Braitman (1995) encourages the professional to attend step meetings as a means of helping them become accepting and conversant with the programme’s language and ideas. If the ‘God’ aspect is offputting for the client, I would suggest encouraging them to perceive the Higher Power in any way they wish; at its simplest level, as the power of the group as opposed to the individual. If the client is disinterested in the programme, then I would suggest that the therapist be mindful of some of the principles of change, such as the CBT aspects, the psychological aspects of self discovery and the importance of the social support. Also, rational emotive behaviour therapy is an interesting alternative to AA, with similar techniques but without the spiritual aspects (Velten, 1996).

For a client who is already working the steps, then the impact of the therapy could be highly productive. As previously discussed, Cortright (1997) suggests that the AA programme has a lack in terms of looking more deeply at the unconscious issues that contributed to the problems in the first place. So depth psychotherapy may be able to help to understand these issues and contribute to a rebuilding of a healthy self structure and self esteem.

Another question to bear in mind is how a person might successfully leave AA. Peck (1993) has discussed the idea of different stages of one’s spiritual growth. He has taken these from Fowlers six ‘Stages of Faith’ and simplified them from a lifestage/age...
perspective to a stage model devoid of the person’s age. The first stage is ‘chaotic/antisocial’ where there is little understanding of a spiritual dimension or even true relationships and generosity. The second stage is the ‘formal institutional’, whereby people need the structures of an institution to thrive. They tend to have an image of God as an external being, usually punitive and judgemental. The third stage is the ‘sceptic/individual’ where there is a move away from an organised structured religion towards their own developing concept of spirituality. These might be termed ‘truth seekers.’ They have their own feeling of connection with the divine and are aware of the interconnectedness of internal and external realms. It may be the case that the AA programme fits into the second stage of ‘formal institutional’, whereby people need the structures of an institution to survive. But as the person grows they may want to leave in order to explore a more personal concept of their spirituality and simply to move away from the set structure. However, leaving AA has proved notoriously difficult for some (see for example, Stanton Peele’s website8). AA has provided a complete package of ritual and behaviour, friendships and support and to contemplate going it alone, especially as the AA philosophy has focussed upon the disease concept and powerlessness, must be frightening to say the least (Ragge, 1998; Walters, 2002). From the counselling psychologist’s point of view, anyone wanting to leave would benefit from an explanation and support to manage this change. Research on this issue would interest me greatly: to see how members have successfully negotiated this change and the reasons why they felt it necessary to leave.

More broadly, I would suggest that the spiritual dimension is an area that needs to be acknowledged by practising professionals. As Hinterkopf (1994) maintains, “counsellors who ignore or avoid this essential dimension of human experience can miss opportunities for supporting and fostering psychological growth” (p.165) and as Curtis and Davis (1999) conclude “encouraging clients to discuss their spiritual beliefs can affect counselling positively” (p.200). It appears that this is something that can no longer be ignored and the American Counselling Association maintains that the therapist is ethically bound to create an environment that supports an exploration of any religious or

8 http://www.peele.net
spiritual beliefs that the client feels strongly about (ACA, 1996). How, then, can we ensure that this issue is embraced by therapists?

One core area to address is that of training. Over recent years many have advocated the importance of introducing this aspect into counsellor education programmes (Bullis, 1992; Chandler, Holden and Kolander, 1992; Ivey and Rigazio-DiGilio, Kelly, 1994; 1992; Mathews, 1998; Pate and Bondi, 1992). Hinterkopf (1994) maintains that “training in the spiritual dimension needs to be a part of every graduate counselling programme” (p.170). In fact, the development of the counsellor is considered by some, to be key in their work with clients, not least because “in the realm of spiritual development ... one cannot help another past one’s own level of development” (Chandler et al, 1992, p.174). Karasu, (1999) likewise stated “they can only take their patients as far as they themselves have come” (his italics p.145). Therefore, the need for therapists to continually develop themselves is paramount.

There are also some developments in terms of methods of incorporating spirituality into therapy, such as Hinterkopf’s, ‘focussing’ and ‘multimodal’ therapy (Curtis and Davis, 1999). Further, certain therapists- and especially transpersonal ones- utilise a number of methods to encourage an awareness of the spiritual dimension, from meditation to visualisation, forgiveness techniques etc. (see Assagioli, 1965; Hardy, 1996; Vaughan, 1985). So there are also a number of practical techniques that can help to integrate this dimension into the counselling session.

In sum, the AA programme has both strengths and weaknesses, but certainly warrants attention from practitioners. Likewise the presence of the spiritual dimension can be a useful aspect in promoting change for a client. It is thus recommended that practitioners become familiar with the AA 12 step programme and consider utilising some aspects for clients where appropriate. It is also recommended that practitioners begin to acknowledge the spiritual dimension as one worth exploring for its potentially powerful and fruitful results.
On a personal note, the process of researching and writing this paper has been a journey of growth and development for me. I became so immersed in the subject area and the number of different issues involved, that for a time I felt quite overwhelmed. To some extent it was as if I went through a parallel process of doing some of the steps; I had to get to a point of surrender and a new level of trust that all would be resolved as it was intended. Overall, the process has provided a new level of clarity for me on issues that I have (unconsciously) wrestled with for years. To gain such mental clarity on aspects within the spiritual domain has been immensely satisfying, although it has also revealed a host of new questions to wrestle with. In the end, it feels as if I have explored only one tiny aspect of a vast territory. It indicates to me how little we still really know, in a psychological sense, about the nature of spirituality. However, I suspect that its vastness and ineffable nature is precisely what holds the attraction for me and why I am drawn to an exploration of this realm.
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APPENDICES
Appendices

Appendix 1 - The Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy Submission Guidelines

Appendix 2 - The Processes of Change and their Descriptions
Appendix 1

The Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy Submission Guidelines
The Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy

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Aims and Scope

JCPCP is a journal which values personal experience above professional boundaries and doctrinal jargon. It provides a forum for ideas, experience and views of people working in the psychological world and those who use psychotherapy or receive psychiatric services. The journal encourages a critical, reflexive view of psychology and counselling and is a constant challenge to orthodoxy. Our contributors reflect on their work and experiences in therapy, in relationships and in institutions. The journal embraces philosophical, radical and scientific perspectives in its analysis of psychological, psychiatric and psychotherapeutic systems.

Contributions

Contributions, in the form of short articles and letters on any aspect of psychological or psychotherapeutic theory or practice, are always welcome. Articles should not normally exceed 4000 words. Brief author details and a 25-word summary should be included. Please submit two copies of material to the Editor, typed, double spaced on A4 paper; also include tel/fax and email addresses where possible. Anyone wishing to review books is invited to contact the Book Review Editors. All contributors can be contacted by readers through the Editor: Craig Newnes, Psychology Consultancy Service, 130 Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6AX, UK, e-mail: craignewnes@aol.com

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Appendix 2
The Processes of Change and their Descriptions

Consciousness Raising
Information about the self and the problem are explored and brought to concrete awareness

Self Reevaluation
The self is reevaluated with respect to the antecedents and potential solutions to the problem

Self Liberation
The potential for a desirable outcome and the changes required for it are examined in terms of ability and commitment

Counterconditioning
Alternatives for problem behaviours are constructed and tested

Stimulus Control
Stimuli that are associated with, or encountered before, the activation of the problem behaviours are avoided

Reinforcement Management
Rewards from the self or others become contingent upon changes required to meet goals

Helping Relationships
Interpersonal relationships with people who care are further developed

Dramatic Relief
Affect is experienced and expressed regarding the problems and potential solutions
Environmental Reevaluation
Problems and potential solutions are considered with regard to how they influence the physical environment

Social Liberation
The opportunity for more desirable behaviours becomes increasingly available and valued by society

(Taken from Petrocelli, 2002)
Beyond the Twelve Steps. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analytic Exploration of the Spiritual Paths of Former AA/NA Members.

Abstract

This research explores the spiritual paths of three people who have been through the AA/NA program and subsequently left without relapsing. Interview transcripts were analyzed individually using an interpretative phenomenological approach. The analysis of the spiritual aspects of their journeys through the 12 step program and beyond was informed by Genia’s (1995, 1997) stages of psychospiritual faith. Core themes were related to an earlier disconnection from spirituality, the program serving as an introduction to a more spiritual existence, the program as a transitional ‘holding place’, and a theme of internalizing a sense of self.

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Introduction

The 12 step program is popular as a self help approach for addictions (Riordan & Walsh, 1994), and is also commonly utilized by counselors as a supplement to their work (Riordan & Beggs, 1987). Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was the founding group based on the 12 step philosophy and subsequently other groups such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA) were formed using the same principles. However, studies assessing the effectiveness of the program yield mixed and inconclusive results (Cloud, Ziegler & Blondel, 2004; Thurstin, Alfano & Nerviano, 1994; Warfield & Goldstein, 1996). The program has also been criticized for “fostering a substitute dependency” (Lile, 2003, p.19). It has also come under criticism for its emphasis upon the ‘disease model’ (the belief that the addict has a sickness from which there is no cure only complete abstinence) which may have created a stigma of being sick (Walters, 2002). Further, the emphasis on powerlessness and humility, as well as some of the language used such as ‘character defects’, might contribute to a lack of self esteem amongst members. This may be a reason why there is some evidence that a greater level of helplessness and low self esteem can be present for some AA members (Tonigan, Toscova & Connors, 1999).

The 12 step philosophy views addiction as a spiritual malady, a disease of the spirit. This is a common view amongst many (Booth, 1985; Kurtz, 1979; Peck, 1993; Prezioso, 1987). Jung, quoted in the AA literature, refers to alcoholism as being “the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness...the union with God” (AA, 1988, p.280). Within the 12 step program, it is considered necessary for the recovering addict to initially be in state of ‘surrender’ in order to admit their powerlessness over alcohol/the addictive substance. It is then considered necessary for the person to work through the 12 steps of the program in order for a ‘spiritual awakening’ to occur, which will herald a complete change in their outlook, attitudes and behaviours. The program promotes a series of processes and practices that contribute towards change on a psychospiritual level, integrating hard work, self exploration, discipline and spiritual practices. All this is within a fixed structure of meetings and social support. It does not, however, emphasize the importance of solitude.

9 NB The spelling in this paper follows American conventions as the chosen journal is American.
and stillness, considered to be an important spiritual discipline by some (Eck, 2002; Merton, 2003). Nor does it encourage an exploration of deeper, underlying wounds (Cortright, 1997).

I am interested to explore what might happen to a person beyond the initial ‘spiritual awakening’ of the program and how their continued spiritual journey might manifest. Gravell (2005) has argued that beyond the initial awakening, continued commitment and discipline can facilitate further possible awakenings and progress for a person. In a general sense, this research thus operates within the domain of spiritual growth and the 12 step program. Genia (1995, 1997) has looked at stages of faith development from a psychospiritual perspective. Her model is underpinned by a psychodynamic approach to a person’s development, taking into account the importance of early childhood experiences in their current functioning and positing that inadequacies in early development can play a part in hindering subsequent spiritual development. She suggests phases that a person might go through as they progress in terms of their relationship with spirituality. Her initial (1995) stages were subsequently modified (1997) to incorporate the dimensions of spiritual support (related to conviction, community and commitment), and spiritual openness (feelings of universal connectedness and openness to divergent beliefs). The initial phase is that of ‘egocentric faith’ (1995) or ‘underdeveloped’ (1997) where people experience a punitive God and tend to have low spiritual support and spiritual openness. The ‘dogmatic’ phase is characterized by people with high spiritual support and low spiritual openness and the person needs the more rigid external structures of an institution to survive. Subsequently they might turn away from an organization towards a more internal search for their own unique relationship to spirituality, the stage of ‘transitional faith’. This phase is characterized by high openness and low spiritual support and can leave a person feeling uncertain and confused. Following this, the person moves into a ‘reconstructed faith’ (1995) wherein there is a more internalized sense of personal faith that may or may not be a part of a religious community. This person would score highly in terms of both spiritual openness and support and Genia later termed them ‘growth oriented’ (1997).
So there is a sense of movement and change in terms of someone on a spiritual path. I thus wonder how someone might negotiate growth within the 12 step organization and whether there might come a time that they would need to leave to continue their journey. It may be that they would wish to leave the more rigid structure of the organisation in order to explore a more personal concept of their spirituality. There is however, the view amongst some members that ‘AA is for life’: “no one is a graduate of Alcoholics Anonymous...A.A. is a life-long programme, just as the disease of alcoholism is lifelong” (Delaney, 1981, p. 324) and leaving the 12 step program has proved notoriously difficult for some (Peele, 2005). It has provided a complete package of ritual and behaviour, friendships and support and to contemplate going it alone- especially as the philosophy has focussed upon the disease concept and powerlessness- might understandably appear to be a daunting prospect (Ragge, 1998; Walters, 2002). Also, social environment and pressures are of considerable importance in relapse prevention (Marlatt & Gordon, 1980; Saunders & Allsop, 1991), and it may be that fellow members have become their predominant social network. I am thus interested to explore how people might have negotiated the leaving of the 12 step program and how this might have impacted upon them in terms of their personal and spiritual development.

This research thus aims to explore the spiritual path of former AA/NA members. I am interested to explore their relationship with spirituality and religion before, during and after AA/NA and whether their leaving might also be seen in terms of a further development.

I feel that this will also serve a useful purpose for counseling psychologists, as the spiritual dimension is increasingly being acknowledged as an important component in contemporary psychotherapy (Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts & Epp, 1999; Mahohey & Graci, 1999) and there is increasing evidence that spirituality can have positive effects upon clients (Coyle, 2002; Hinterkopf, 1994; Kass, Friedman Leserman, Zuttermeister & Benson, 1991; Taylor, 1994). An exploration of the spiritual path of former AA/NA members will hopefully broaden our understanding of the elements that can help or hinder such a journey. More specifically, it may highlight how we as
counseling psychologists might assist clients at various stages in their development.

Method

Design
The idiographic approach utilizing case studies was considered particularly appropriate for this research, due to the highly personal nature of the life experiences under investigation (Smith, Harre & van Langenhove, 1995). Although many qualitative studies also examine highly personal life experiences, using a case study approach meant that the analysis could remain at the level of quite specific detail and convey this to the reader. Smith et al further speak of the neglect of this case study method in psychological research, considering that there is “some urgency in the need for projects which take as their task the detailed description of individual human beings” (1995, p.63). The case study approach provides contextual and holistic aspects of the person’s experience, including the psychological, spiritual, social and cultural aspects where relevant. It further enables a temporal understanding, which is of paramount importance when viewing the progress and development of someone’s life (Willig, 2001).

Participants
The participants comprised three white males between the ages of 50-59 years. They had all been through the 12 Step Program (AA and/or NA) and had stopped attending meetings some years previously, without relapse. One was recruited through networking from drug and alcohol counselors and two were from the internet. A number of internet chat groups were contacted, outlining the research and asking for participants. One participant came from an internet group for people who had left the 12 step program, and networking from this source provided another participant.

Interview Schedule
An interview schedule was developed (see Appendix 5). Areas covered included background circumstances leading up to their addiction; experience within the 12 step program; the process of leaving and their view of their journey through the program. A
semi structured interview schedule was used and nature of the questions was open ended, in order that the resulting material covered in each interview could be a dynamic interplay between what the participant brought and also how the interviewer understood and responded (through further questions) to their material. A key informant who was working in the relapse prevention field helped to clarify and refine the schedule and a pilot interview also indicated some minor aspects that could be removed to simplify the schedule.

Procedure
After obtaining ethical approval (see Appendix 1), two participants were interviewed face to face and one was interviewed over the telephone. Prior to the interview, all were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 2) and consent form (see Appendix 3). All were audio taped. The interviews lasted between 1½ and 2 hours, and were transcribed verbatim. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject under discussion, care was taken to monitor the emotional state of the participants during the interview and subsequent to the interview.

Analytic Strategy
In recent years, IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) has become a more popular analytic method of choice within case study research (eg, Bramley & Eatough, 2005; Knudson & Coyle, 2002). It is a phenomenological approach in that its main focus is on the person’s “content of consciousness” (Willig, 2001, p.52), attempting to step into their experience and understanding of the world. It is concerned with making sense of the world from the participant’s own unique perspective (Smith & Osborne, 2003) and endeavors to provide this “insider’s perspective” (Conrad, 1987) by focusing upon the participant’s thoughts, cognitions and feelings. IPA was thus felt to be particularly attuned to the research aim, which was to gain a sense of the nature of the participant’s changing spirituality.

IPA also accepts that as researchers we can only engage with the participant’s account of their experience, rather than the actual lived experience. It further acknowledges that in
order to make some sense of the participant’s accounts, we need to make meaningful interpretations, and that our own conceptions and opinions will both complicate and contribute to these interpretations. The final outcome will thus contain the researcher’s interpretations of the described experience (Willig, 2001). Although all qualitative methods acknowledge this, IPA tends to highlight it, and there is an according emphasis upon the researcher’s reflexivity with this approach.

Taking into account the role of the researcher’s interpretation, as well as the fact that we are engaging with material that is a version rather than a reality, it can be seen that a double hermeneutic or double interpretation process is in operation (Smith & Eatough, forthcoming). That is, participants are attempting to make sense of their worlds and researchers are trying to make sense of these attempts. Smith and Eatough further talk about another way of viewing this double hermeneutic, referring to Ricoer’s (1970) distinction of empathic hermeneutics and critical hermeneutics. They suggest that on the one hand IPA attempts to view the world from the participant’s reality, but on the other there is a more critically questioning stance, attempting to speculate about what else might be occurring for the participant. Thus in my analysis I have endeavored to engage at both levels of interpretation, grounding in participants accounts of their worlds, yet also having a level of curiosity and questioning beyond these accounts.

In contrast to IPA, the social constructionist stance holds that linguistic representations construct rather than reflect reality. It suggests that, rather than having an objective perception of reality, our versions of reality are created through discourse and language. At its extreme, people might be seen as “channels through which socially available discourses flow” (Ashworth, 2003, p.23) rather than as individuals actively making sense of their world. This felt less appropriate for this research, which was endeavoring to explore the nature and quality of the highly personal journeys of the participants, rather than seeking to explore the role of language in constructing their version of experience.

Grounded Theory too, was considered less appropriate for this research. It was originally designed to look at social psychological process rather than being concerned with more
phenomenological explorations. Its rigorous method of deriving and integrating categories of meaning from the data can mean that it is "reduced to a technique for systematic categorization" (Willig, 2001, p. 46), rather than capturing the essence of a particular experience for a person. Its emphasis upon allowing meaning to emerge predominantly from the data can mean that it lacks the dynamism and creativity of the more interpretative IPA. Although some more social constructionist versions of Grounded Theory do acknowledge the input of the researcher (eg. Charmaz, 1990, 1995), it is not fundamental to the integrity of the epistemology as it is with IPA. Further, the emphasis in Grounded Theory is upon theory generation and providing a framework for understanding. The intention of this research was not about constructing a theory but about remaining at the level of the personal experiences of three participants and the unfolding of their individual journeys. It was seeking to explore the phenomenon under investigation, not seeking to derive a theoretical framework. IPA, with its focus more clearly upon the nature of the individual's experience was accordingly felt to be the most appropriate method of choice.

The analysis in this study broadly followed Smith and Eatough’s (forthcoming) suggested stages of IPA analysis. After listening to tapes and transcribing the interviews verbatim, each transcript was read repeatedly and notes were made on each, highlighting initial thoughts and comments. Subsequently the transcripts were reread and more notes were made, attempting to think about the data in terms of more specific themes and psychological constructs. Those potential themes that seemed to be connected together were subsequently clustered into groups and some others were dropped, if they did not fit with the emerging structure or if they appeared to bear less relevance to the research question. Each cluster was given a title to represent the overall theme. Eventually each transcript had a number of main themes comprising a number of sub themes. Due to the rich and interrelated nature of the subject area, there are also some occasions when one of the sub-themes within a main theme was also present in another main theme. This was allowed so as not to detract from the richness within each theme.

During the analysis, Genia’s (1995, 1997) model of psychospiritual faith development
was used as a lens through which to view the participants' journey. A tentative hypothesis was made in terms of where they might most comfortably fit in her model. Further, throughout the analysis, my interpretations also draw upon existing work in the fields of spirituality, psychology and psychodynamic theory in order to attempt to understand more fully the participants' subjectivities.

At the level of individual analysis, I endeavored to keep the main themes highly attuned to the individual, ensuring that the unique and subtle differences of each participant were foregrounded and emanated from their own language or personal story. Subsequently however, in the 'overview' section of the analysis, I looked at commonalities to emerge amongst all four participants viewing the broader, 'bigger picture' of emerging themes.

The research could be evaluated using Elliott, Fischer and Rennie’s (1999) guidelines that are especially pertinent to evaluating qualitative research. Interpretations were checked by an independent researcher and those that were considered too speculative were removed. As a means of grounding in the data, main interpretations are substantiated with quotations, so the readers can judge for themselves the appropriateness of the observation. My interpretations will have been shaped by fact that I am a second year counselling psychology trainee working with the psychodynamic approach, and the fact that I also have friends who are members of the 12 step program. In order to promote transparency, I have elected to weave in my personal reflections within the main body of this report, (placed within square brackets in the main text) endeavoring to show how my views might have impinged upon the analysis.

Analysis

Each of the case studies begins with a brief overview of the participant’s story and then explores a number of key themes to emerge. Due to limitations of word count, only two or three themes are discussed for each participant, and within this only some of the sub themes are included. (See appendix 8 for tables of all themes and subthemes). However
within these constraints I have endeavored to give the reader a sense of the individual journey of each of the participants. Each includes a key theme that was picked to give a sense of their individuality and all of them comprise a final theme that covers a sense of their unfolding journey and tentative hypothesis in relation to Genia’s (1995, 1997) model. The first case study is longer to enable a fuller picture of one of the participants who demonstrated some points subsequently of relevance for the participants as a whole. In the quotations, information within square brackets is used for clarification or indicates omitted material, and three dots … indicate a pause or hesitancy. All names and places have been changed in the interests of confidentiality.

Case Study One: Charlie

Charlie, now in his early sixties, had an alcoholic father and grandfather. He recounted that his upbringing was unstructured and chaotic and had resulted in an inability to trust or relate well to others. He had serious drinking and cannabis problems and finally he went on a drinking binge for three solid months, ending up in a treatment centre where he was introduced to 12 step meetings. He went to both NA and AA but favored NA. He was in the program for eight years and has now been sober and drug free for 18 years. He works as a counselor predominantly focused around drugs and alcohol.

NA as ‘Holding Place’: Learning to Connect

Charlie spoke about the lack of trust in his upbringing, which he felt had affected him in his adult life:

“And it was really about trust. I am an only child, adult child of an alcoholic, who is the adult child of an alcoholic, so there is no trust never, never any trust. And I think that’s really what it was about – a level of trust and faith.”

There appeared to be some sadness or wistfulness conveyed through his tone and repetition of ‘never never’ and I really got a sense of the pain and emptiness that he might have felt as a child. One of the key themes to run through his narrative was the
importance of connecting to others. Yet he had felt quite separate and isolated from people in his earlier years. He felt that he had been left with an inability to take in the good aspects of life:

“I didn’t trust my experience of receiving care, good care I mean in the Kleinian sense; it was really about the good and the bad breast and I had been sucking at the bad one for so long I had no idea what the good one tasted like.”

Interestingly however, he had gravitated towards work that was around groups of people needing help, working and living in community-based housing projects in the city. So although he might have been unable to receive good things himself, he had put himself in the situation where he was contributing to others. Psychoanalytic theory holds that unacceptable aspects of our self can be split off and projected onto others as a way of avoiding having to deal with the pain or discomfort of them. I wonder if Charlie was projecting his feelings of isolation and vulnerability onto these people. Dedicating himself to others might thus have been an unconscious attempt at giving others what he was unable to receive for himself.

However, Charlie recounted that, as soon as he got to the treatment centre, things began to change:

“I experienced a tremendous, I don’t know the first day of working at a treatment centre feeling accepted – I had never ever experienced that before – [] that I fitted somehow and there were answers. [] Life is not about being isolated or on your own it’s about connecting and being with other people.”

“Well just taking down barriers and letting other things, other influences come in and that was that connection.”

Clearly he was beginning to feel that he belonged in this place and that he could feel safe there. This seemed to enable him to begin to risk the experience of lowering his defenses
and letting others in. One might ask what had happened for Charlie that he had finally begun to allow this to occur. AA (1939) talks of the importance of surrender as a precursor to entering the program, which will often come about through a ‘rock bottom’ situation or life becoming so unbearable that the person simply cannot continue in the same way. White (2004) has noted that the defenses of the former self undergo a collapse when there is such a surrender. As Charlie had just had “three months getting pissed, lost the job, lost my home [] and ended up seriously trying to commit suicide at that point”, he was clearly at an extreme and life threatening nadir. Perhaps Charlie was thus so ‘broken’ in terms of his defenses that this enabled him to begin to break down his firmly erected barriers and finally receive some milk from the ‘good breast’, to continue his earlier Kleinian reference.

Further, Charlie came from an insecure childhood, with little sense of structure or containment. He recounted of his upbringing: “my life was always chaotic [] there is no rule book, no education”. It may thus have been that the treatment centre and NA provided for Charlie his first experience of a ‘holding environment’. Winnicott’s (1986) idea of the ‘holding environment’ or Bion’s (1962) idea of ‘containment’ contends that the mother/therapist/ group is able to provide a safe space for the person and process difficult elements for them before they become able to internalize this process for themselves. Charlie acknowledged the importance of the “great framework” of the 12 step program, which provided him with much needed “safety and security and structure until I could find my own.” There is also clearly a sense of it being a temporary place for Charlie, who felt that it enabled him to internalize these aspects and subsequently go out into the world at large.

**Freeing Myself from ‘the Gods of my Fathers’**

Before he went to the treatment centre, Charlie said that he “loathed the idea of religion”. However, once he got there, he began to see the need for having some sort of faith and trust in life. He also saw that his inherited negative perceptions of religion were blocking his access to his spirituality. The treatment centre had given him the task of reading a book that was based on the Scriptures. He consciously committed to go right back into
these texts in order to find his truth.

"But I had to force myself to read that book every day. And I did that because I had to challenge my rigidly. [ ] And I was looking I think for some sort of spiritual dimension. Really looking for it, finding it and the only thing I had was what I regarded as something really fundamentalist and was abhorrent really but it worked in the long run because somewhere in there, it's this thing about you know 'You grow up with the gods of your fathers or the God of your fathers' and then you have to find your own. [ ] I knew what I didn't believe in but I had no idea what I did believe in. So it was actually finding that somewhere and that was quite powerful."

So from a previous position of loathing religion he was actively searching and formulating his own personal sense of spirituality. Within the framework of Genia's (1995, 1997) model, Charlie might be said to have been rejecting the dogmatic schema and was in the transitional stage wherein he was searching for a new way of relating to his faith. The phrase 'Gods of my fathers' is intriguing. It evokes the idea of casting off the confines of his past and the dysfunctions of his upbringing. Maybe he was also freeing himself as much from his inherited tendencies and propensity to alcoholism as the dogma of religion.

Charlie (and another participant, Harry), still appeared to have a fascination with some aspects of religion: "I mean there is some beauty in it and some wonderful attraction". Also Charlie sometimes used Biblical phrases (such as 'epiphany' and 'God given'). Jung (1958) speaks of the power that ritual can have in evoking a sense of the divine. Perhaps there was a sense of loss related to the positive aspects that ritual can have?

[I relate very much to Charlie and his journey of discovery about himself. His analytical nature and constantly looking at himself (sometimes a little too harshly I feel) are very reminiscent of how I am myself. I am also touched by aspects of vulnerability that I see in him, again probably reminding me of myself. I wonder how much of myself I am]
bringing to this analysis, especially in relation to the particular speculations above. The journey back into the Christian teachings is one that I myself have undertaken in a similar way, having to cast off my fear and abhorrence of the dogma of the Old Testament but trying to find my own understanding and relationship to Christianity. I personally regret that the fundamentalism of organized religion has meant that there is no community for me to join, that utilizes ritual and symbolism positively. I was also intrigued that Charlie did use Biblical language on occasion and find myself at times touched by the power of using ancient scriptural language. I feel that it is important to share these reflections in order that the reader has a clearer understanding of how my views on these matters might have shaped my tentative hypotheses in relation to Charlie’s attitude to religion.

The Journey: in the ‘Not Knowing’

Charlie was introduced to a sense of spirituality through the NA structure which encouraged him to engage with some Biblical texts and also through the “talking about spirituality”. The sense of belonging that he experienced in NA served to foster a growing trust and a sense of connection for him. It seemed that his journey had progressed further since then, as he had trained to be a counselor, continually working on himself in terms of encounter groups, personal therapy and supervision. He saw his current relationship to spirituality and religion as follows:

“I don’t see myself seeking out a religions faith of some sort [] because I don’t think I need it. Um, so I have a spiritual dimension in my life, I have trust I have a faith that [] I am connected.”

So Charlie felt that he had an individual sense of spirituality that did not need to be a part of an organized system. It might thus be that over his lifetime he had progressed from an initial complete rejection, onto a transitional stage of searching in the treatment centre, and now was at a point of reconstructed faith (Genia, 1995), having formed an internal sense of his own belief.
However, there was a sense of tension in his current situation; on the one hand free from the desperation of his early quest to find answers, but on the other, still a sense of searching and movement.

“But yeah I don’t know, there is something else yes and that something is ‘I don’t know’ and I don’t need to know, it’s there, I have a...I s’pose I have a belief in life and the process. I am not really sure, I can’t categorize it in that way but the point is I don’t need to.”

“Yes and I am at peace with that and it’s again don’t look for too many answers but yet at the same time it’s not just a behavioral or a cognitive shift I am looking for I am looking for something a bit more...am I? No I am being a fucking intellectual snob with this really ...Yeah it is simple and it does it free me up intellectually in an immense amount of ways because I can either search or not search but at the same time have a basis of trust and faith.”

Here there appeared to be some ambivalence or irritation that he was continuing the quest. He had previously alluded to a propensity (that he felt he needed to resist), to “tear the arse” out of spiritual experiences. I wonder therefore if he had an underlying fear that in continuing his journey, his inclination for mental analysis might in some way diminish or destroy his new found sense of peace. Also perhaps the spiritual path is simply uncomfortable at times and requires a dance between certainty and uncertainty. Oates, 1973, maintains that part of mature faith is being in the paradox and ambivalence, and Allport agrees, explaining that it requires an ability “to be sure and yet not cocksure” (1950, p.81) which seems to be very much Charlie’s experience.

[Personally I feel privileged that these participants have been prepared to tell me their personal stories with such willingness and openness and so I wish to do their stories justice. There is so much to say on each person! I have found it painfully frustrating that the word count does not allow me to represent each person as I would like to. Beyond Charlie’s account, I have had to limit the themes that I discuss so severely that I have]
concerns that the richness of their worlds and experience will not be conveyed to the reader. I think that I feel this so strongly because they are individual case studies — if it were a group-level analysis, it would not be an issue for me — but I am endeavoring to give a flavor of three individuals and I suppose I am very aware that they will be reading these accounts and that I want each person to feel respected and fairly represented by me. It feels quite a responsibility.

**Case Study Two- Harry**

Harry is in his late fifties and married with three children. Harry came from a highly academic and achievement-oriented background. He has always had a drive to achieve and used to drink heavily as part of his high powered job which frequently took him abroad. After an ultimatum from his wife, he sought help in AA. AA served as a reminder of the spiritual life for him and after six months in AA he joined the Quakers and has remained a member ever since. About 6 years ago, after 15 years in AA, feeling that it was no longer serving him but “scared, really scared” of leaving, he joined another recovery group program for a short time, possibly to ease the leaving of AA.

**Learning to think for myself/ Internal vs External influences**

Harry referred a number of times to the importance of being able to think for himself and to be “in charge of your head”. He also talked about his dislike of the dogma in AA and how he felt that this did not encourage thinking for oneself:

“The AA approach seems to me now ridiculously dogmatic and pushy. You know all the things which say ‘you will think this’ or ‘you will do it like this.’”

The key theme here might really about a tension between internal and external influences. Part of Harry’s journey may have been about learning to internalize his own thinking and ‘locus of control’ (Rotter, 1966). There is some evidence to suggest that AA members have greater external locus of control, relative to those in another recovery program (Li, Feiffer & Strohm, 2000), and Harry appeared to agree with this:
"A lot of people do feel powerless [] They look outside. AA is a natural for that kind of personality I suspect."

It may have been that Harry’s locus of control was initially fairly external and that he needed the rigid structure of AA, but as he began to gain a sense of inner strength and discipline, “realizing that I had powers of decision”, he no longer needed such strong external directives. He thus may have needed to move on in order to continue internalizing his sense of self. However he was “frightened as hell” at the prospect of leaving AA, partly he felt due to-

"Some of the things which AA tells you, such as if you stop coming to meetings regularly you are bound to slip sooner or later."

He eventually managed to leave through joining another recovery group for a time and reading some literature that gave an alternative view to AA, giving him the confidence to consider a philosophy other than the 12 step one.

[It is interesting to me that an organisation or structure that was previously so productive for a person, even to the extent of saving their life, can become unhelpful or inappropriate after a time. This subject is of key interest to me, partly as I have witnessed the tension that an AA friend of mine has had between leaving and staying in the 12 step program and partly as I myself have experienced the same thing in relation to a completely different group that I belonged to. In retrospect, I can see that the leaving, although a painful struggle, was a necessary part of my journey. It seems to me that moving on and leaving behind can be a vital part of a person’s development, albeit difficult and painful. However I am also interested in the role of suffering in this. I wonder whether the very nature of the struggle and pain at leaving is also a necessary part of a person’s spiritual development or whether the leaving can be made easier in some respects, as appeared to be the case for the first participant, Charlie.]
The Quakers organization, in contrast, seemed to particularly suit Harry as it supported him in his developing capacity to look within for the answers:

"You have to think things through for yourself. It is not spoon fed to you. [ ] It’s not easy."

"The absence of dogma in Friends [Quakers] but the insistence that what you are talking about and thinking about and doing is important stuff – those are good for me. It's something you have to work out for yourself."

Reconnecting to ‘My Latent Spirituality’

As well as the more psychological journey to an internalized sense of self, there has been a parallel theme of reconnecting back to himself in a more spiritual sense. Previously his sense of spirituality had been completely “nil, vacant, nothing going on”, so it surprised him to find some early letters he had written:

"Expressing thoughts that were so like the Quaker approach it really astonished me to realise that these things had been lurking there and that this yearning for a spiritual life had been latent in me."

Clearly he felt that he had always had spiritual yearnings, but had previously been unaware of them. As he “had great difficulty” with the traditional tenets of Christian doctrine, it may be that for a time his spiritual leanings had nowhere to go to be held and developed. Jung (cited in AA, 1988) suggests that alcoholism is a quest for the divine and that alcoholics have been misdirected in their quest. Is it possible that Harry was at Genia’s (1995) transitional stage of searching but had misdirected his quest into a more self destructive form?

[Hearing Harry talk about the yearning that he had always had and his latent spirituality really resonates with me. I have personally had a sense of being, at one point in my life,
about as far away from my own sense of spirituality and connection that I could possibly be. My path wasn’t through alcoholism but there was still a sense of lack of fulfillment in my life, although I was outwardly successful. It was as if, once I had got to a place so disconnected, there was only one way to go, and there began to be a turning inward, the beginning of a long journey to reconnection. I do believe that it is all within us and that it is just a process of remembering and removing all the confusions and aspects that cover over our natural spirituality.]

AA might have served as a transition point for him, wherein he was able to connect with a group (the group being a main theme for Harry, See Appendix 8.2) and be reminded of the importance of the spiritual way of life. It caused him to seek out a spiritual home which he found in Quakerism. Subsequently he realized that he had “a natural disposition” for the spiritual and that “if you are really good at it all your life is an act of worship”. He clearly has had quite transcendent experiences amongst the group at times: “If it [a Quaker meeting for worship] works it is absolutely magic. There are times when the room just comes alive”. Strunk (1965) considers that such experiences can indicate a more mature religiousness in a person. Harry’s faith felt intrinsic in nature and akin to Genia’s reconstructed faith (1995) or growth oriented stage (1997) wherein he had found his own sense of belonging and reconnection through the group but also in a personal and individual manner.

He had found a place of silence and stillness in the Quakers, perhaps as a counterbalance to his naturally (outward) life embracing tendencies. However, his drive to organize could mean that he sometimes took his focus away from the inner path, so it appeared that Harry faced an ongoing spiritual challenge in relation to internal and external pulls.

“I’m bullshitting really I love it, I like doing it, I like helping move things forward efficiently but it does take a lot of time and energy. But I’m not getting into things that probably would be better for me spiritually. [ ] And it takes a lot of energy. I mean growth takes energy doesn’t it?”
Case Study Three- Jack

Jack is in his forties and is twice divorced with four children. He felt that, as a child, he was “crushed psychologically” by his father, which had contributed to his subsequent drug and alcohol problems. He joined NA/AA when he was about 35 and adhered very rigidly to the program attending both NA and AA meetings. He was diagnosed with ME and Hepatitis C at the age of 39 and subsequently cut down on his rigid adherence to meetings, eventually leaving about 10 years ago. When he left, he began to attend an alternative recovery program, which he still occasionally attends.

My Rigidity

Jack appeared to embrace the program quite rigidly:

“I was a very eager student to the point of pissing a lot of people off. [] I was a bit of a fundamentalist. [] But I was also very critical. I was good at finding fault with the way other people were doing it.”

So he was clearly relating to the program in quite a controlling and dogmatic manner. At this point Jack might have fitted into Genia’s (1995, 1997) dogmatic schema, needing the security of external rules and references and devoid of an internal knowing. In fact, more specifically he would fit into the ‘spiritual crusader’ type she describes as being “zealous and indignant” (1995, p.59), determined to convert as many others to their ideas as possible.

Bearing in mind that Jack had a father whom he experienced as critical and crushing to the point of “psychological abuse”, it appeared that he had taken on the same style of behavior in relation to others. He was also harsh and critical towards himself-

“When I did the steps that were concerned with character defects, this would be my main concern for several years, my character defects, and yet I was somebody who had been psychologically crushed, that wasn’t a healthy focus.”
To look at Jack’s behavior in psychodynamic terms, one might say that he had internalized his father’s critical aspects into his own inner world, resulting in a harsh ‘superego’, constantly criticizing and berating himself (and others). Jack mentioned the term ‘psychologically crushed’ a number of times. It feels a powerful and emotive term and the continued use of it made me wonder if there were still aspects of this not yet healed for him.

**Illness as Shifting Consciousness**

Jack’s diagnoses seemed to shift things for him from two main respects. The first concerned him viewing his childhood in a new light and the second ultimately caused him to leave AA. Both in a sense were connected with him easing up on his inner rigidity. Once diagnosed, Harry recounted that:

> “Something changed in my outlook. I started to see myself in a slightly different light. Somehow getting ill caused me to suddenly click onto the reality of my childhood.”

Something changed for Jack here, which led him to explore aspects of his childhood and caused an eventual lessening of his harsh superego. One might speculate as to why this change occurred at this time. Grof and Grof (1989) discuss how extreme events or emergencies and can cause shifts in consciousness, so perhaps the prospect of his life threatening illnesses caused him to break out of his old patterns of relating to himself.

On a practical level, his illnesses meant that he could no longer attend meetings. This forced him to ease up on his rigid adherence to the program and he started to wonder:

> “Maybe I can ease off a bit. And I did. And I noticed very quickly that the less I did the better I felt. I would still do the stuff but just … do it if it was appropriate and meaningful.”
So it appeared that the more he relaxed about his rigid adherence, the better he felt. He began to become more discerning about what worked for him rather than blindly following external rules. The illnesses might thus be seen as a 'gift' from the respect of enabling him to experiment and ease up on his rigidity and eventually move on from a program that was no longer beneficial for him.

Breaking the Spell

Jack referred to a spell that he felt had bound him most of his life:

“I was ‘enchanted’ makes it sound pleasant and it wasn’t. But I was under a spell that I was somehow convinced that my opinions my own knowing my own sense my own thinking was just useless.”

“When I got ill it all kind of ...my rigid ideas started to soften basically. And so that was the very beginning of the spell undoing itself but it took a while. Basically the spell was that I didn’t trust, that I couldn’t trust, that I couldn’t rely on my own thinking, my own feelings [ ].”

The final breaking of the spell occurred when he broke away from his rigid sponsor whom he had considered “a spiritual giant”. As this man was “very like my father”, it may have been that he unconsciously represented his father and his childhood relationship with him. Confronting this man may thus have symbolized breaking away from father or ‘leaving home’ and asserting himself in his own right. After this-

“The spell had broken in the sense that suddenly I knew that I trusted.”

So we are witness to Jack’s journey of reconnecting back to himself and breaking out of the spell that had bound him. The use of the word ‘spell’ has a magical quality to it and evokes for me a sense of the qualitative difference in consciousness that a person might experience as they progress upon their journey.
[I am fascinated in our internal worlds and our states of consciousness. I know that as I have grown my whole experiencing of the world has changed immeasurably, from a type of haziness to something much clearer. I thus really relate to Jack’s description of being under a spell that seemed to be stopping him thinking clearly, which tends to become clear only as you emerge from it.]

From Genia’s (1995, 1997) dogmatic relating to the world and his spirituality, placing everything outside himself and needing external structure and guidance, it appeared that Jack had moved to a place where his trust was more internally based. He appeared to be very much in the search, exploring esoteric, paranormal and healing techniques. He said:

“*I am currently very interested in the role of thought as it creates or influences reality.*”

“My relationship to spirituality now is relatively healthy in the sense that I am open minded.”

So he was open minded and interested in exploring new ideas and one might thus conjecture that Jack was now in Genia’s (1995, 1997) transitional phase of searching for his own version of spirituality. There was currently however, a sense of insularity about Jack, partly as he was “effectively housebound” through his illness. But he added that his voluntary work on the internet “brings a great deal of satisfaction and dare I say it meaning to my life”. This fits with Genia’s (1997) contention that those in the transitional phase are high on spiritual openness but low on spiritual support. It might also fit with Tacey’s (2001) view, that spirit is related to community and connectedness and I wonder therefore if the way forward for Jack is in the direction of more relatedness at this point.
Overview

Clearly the participants' accounts are highly personal and specific and attempts have been made in the analysis to stay at this level of individuality. However, there were also some similarities between them and some core themes common to all. Firstly, there was a theme of rejection of organized religion and a sense of disconnection from their own sense of spirituality. As Jung (cited in AA, 1988) considers the addiction of alcoholism to be a low level quest for the divine, I wonder if it might be that, in a bigger sense, these participants had been on a quest for the spiritual that had become misguided and become self-destructive through drugs and alcohol. Further, all three participants had got to a fairly intense point of desperation before joining AA/NA. This may bear out the idea, frequently cited in the literature, that it is necessary to get to a point of 'surrender' before transformation can occur (eg AA, 1939; Brown, 1993; Tiebout, 1944).

There was a theme of moving from external to internal structures, in which AA/NA played a part. The 12 step program appeared to serve as an external 'holding place' (Bion, 1962; Winnicott, 1986) providing a structure and social support network that they desperately needed at the point of joining. It also appeared to be a transitional place for them. Thus, as they became more able to internalize their own positive structures, their need for such rigid external structures diminished, and a part of their continued progress was to leave the program. But there was some fear at leaving AA/NA for a couple of the participants, partly as there is a commonly held view that one needs to stay in the program to avoid relapse. These participants found another support group for a time (one that encouraged its members to leave this group when appropriate) to ease the leaving of the 12 step program. It may have been that, although difficult for them, the breaking away from AA/NA was an important part of their development and a strengthening of their internal sense of self. The other participant found the leaving fairly painless, and I wonder if this was related to the fact that he had strong support systems in place and a wider context through which to view his development, as he was training to be a counselor. If so this could have implications for us as counseling psychologists, alerting us to the importance of support and counseling throughout such a change.
Finally, all had found a degree of spirituality in their lives, and it appeared that AA/NA had served as an introduction to a more spiritual existence for them. It provided a context and language to consider the presence of spirituality in their lives. However, it seemed that for all three, it did not provide actual spiritual sustenance for long, and they needed to look elsewhere or within for a continued sense of spirituality.

Value and Limitations of the Study

This study has focused in detail upon the highly individual stories of three participants. It thus needs to be borne in mind that the conclusions are specific only to these three people and cannot be automatically generalized to a wider population. Further, finding participants for this study proved difficult, and so we need to take into account the fact that those who did agree may represent highly motivated individuals. This may have been particularly relevant for those who now viewed the AA program with suspicion (ie Harry and Jack). Finally all the participants were White, so other cultures have not had a voice here.

However, this idiographic approach has hopefully enabled an understanding of the richness and complexity of the lives of these participants and provided a sense of the unfolding of their journeys. It has been suggested that there can be a glimpse of the universal from the particular (Warnock, 1987), and that an intimate understanding of a particular person’s situation and reality can enable a greater understanding of the shared humanity and connection between us all (Smith & Eatough, forthcoming). Further, such a study can lead to further hypotheses and research questions (Al Rubaie, 2002). Finally, although it cannot be considered representative of the wider population, qualitative research can represent a first mapping of a territory. Further studies, using a variety of methodologies, can begin to explore these issues amongst a wider populous, so contributing to the development of a broader framework of understanding.

[As I have analyzed and written up the data, I have had concerns about discussing the participants in terms of ‘stages’ and whether there might be a sense of judgment about
how ‘well’ each is doing compared with the other participants. Perhaps this is one of the limitations of a stage model that implies a progress along fixed stages. Actually, as Peck (1993) says, there can be movement back and forth along stages of faith. My other concern has been related to the intangible nature of spirituality and the fact that I have been trying to gain a sense of their experiences of something so ineffable that it is necessarily limited by language (see Griffith-Dickson, 2000 for a discussion on the difficulty of applying language to the spiritual and religious domain). Overall I feel slightly uneasy at even trying to put their experiences into some type of category, and concerned that it reduces in some way the complexity and uniqueness of their world.

This has also been quite an exercise in trying to become more conscious of the way in which my views impact upon my thinking. I think that conducting academic qualitative research with quite such rigor has pushed me to another level of awareness of self reflexivity and caused me to be more aware about what I might bring to analysis or to the therapy room in the future.

Implications for Counseling Psychology

This study might help provide us, as counseling psychologists, with a better understanding of how some people might use the 12 step program. It may be important to bear in mind that it can be a transitional place for some people and that there could be some fear and concern at the prospect of leaving. Such clients may need us to help them understand the process that they are going through and that the kind of support that they need might change over time as they progress.

There are also some broader issues to consider in terms of counseling psychology. As a society we have moved away from the dogma of organized religion, which means that we no longer have the symbols, rituals or language to engage with our spirituality (Tacey, 2004). However, in spite of this there is some evidence that indicates an awakening of spirituality in the West (Hay & Hunt, 2000; Schneiders, 2000). So it may be that people are searching and beginning to explore issues of faith and spirituality but lack the means
by which to do this. Tacey, (2001) refers to Jung’s ideas about the need for a vessel or ‘temenos’ to contain the sacred forces to facilitate transformation. He suggests that, in the absence of religion providing the ‘holding space’ for this to occur, we need a host of methods, including psychotherapy, to help us in times of spiritual transition. Can we, as counseling psychologists begin to incorporate the spiritual dimension into our practice in order to contain our clients as they progress and transform? Sperry (2001) suggests that consciousness is where psychotherapy and spirituality intersect and that our work might be considered spiritual because we are dealing with expanding consciousness. West (2004) contends that psychology can only go so far before the spiritual context is necessary, and transpersonal psychology certainly incorporates this wider context (Cortright, 1997; Vaughan, 1985). I thus suggest that, if we could begin to engage more comfortably with the language of spirituality in our work, then we might be of greater service to our clients on their journey of growth and development.
References


Gravell, L. (2005). *Spiritual awakening as a mechanism of change within Alcoholics Anonymous.* What can we as counselling psychologists learn from the twelve step programme? Unpublished manuscript submitted as part of doctoral research, held at the University of Surrey, UK.


APPENDICES
Appendices

Appendix 1 - Ethical Approval Letter

Appendix 2 - Information Sheet

Appendix 3 - Consent Form

Appendix 4 - Demographic Information Sheet

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Appendix 7 - Counseling and Values Submission Guidelines

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Appendix 1

Ethical Approval Letter
20 March 2006

Miss Lynne Gravell
Department of Psychology
School of Human Sciences

Dear Miss Gravell

Beyond the Twelve Steps. An Exploration of the Spiritual Path of Former AA Members (EC/2005/139/Psych) – Amendment 2

I am writing to inform you that the Chairman, on behalf of the Ethics Committee, has considered the Amendments requested to the above protocol and has approved them on the understanding that the Ethical Guidelines for Teaching and Research are observed, and with the condition set out below:

- That you obtain participants’ consent prior to the telephone interview.

Date of confirmation of ethical opinion: 27 February 2006
Date of approval of amendment to protocol: 20 March 2006

The list of amended documents reviewed and approved by the Chairman is as follows:

Document Type: Your Letter Requesting Amendments
Dated: 14/03/06
Received: 14/03/06

I would be grateful if you would confirm, in writing, your acceptance of the condition above.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]
Catherine Ashbee (Mrs)
Secretary, University Ethics Committee
Registry

cc: Professor T Desombre, Chairman, Ethics Committee
    Dr A Coyle, Supervisor, Dept of Psychology
Appendix 2
Information Sheet

BEYOND THE TWELVE STEPS
INFORMATION SHEET

I am a Counselling Psychologist in training, and I am carrying out a research project as part of my training course. I would like to thank you very much for agreeing to talk with me about your experiences with AA.

The aim of this research is to explore your experiences whilst in the Twelve Step Programme and after you left. I am interested in how you have seen your 'journey' through life thus far and what part AA might have played in this.

Your responses from your e mail will be printed off for the purposes of analysis. Upon completion of the project they will be destroyed and the e mails deleted. All data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988. Confidentiality will be preserved. Identifying information such as names and locations will be changed in the final report. The final report will comprise of a number of individual case studies. There is the possibility that the report may be published in an academic journal. If you participate in this research, a copy of the completed report will be available to you for feedback and comments.

Please can you now read and complete the consent form included, and feel free to ask any questions. You are entitled to terminate the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue. Likewise, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research that you would like to discuss with me, please contact me by e mail on psm21g@surrey.ac.uk. I will be happy to be in contact via e mail or arrange a time to meet up.

Many thanks again for taking part.

Lynne Gravell
Appendix 3
Consent Form

BEYOND THE TWELVE STEPS
CONSENT FORM

Name of researcher:
Lynne Gravell,
Counselling Psychologist in training

Please initial each box

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study and have had an opportunity to ask questions

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time

I understand that all information gathered will remain confidential. Identifying information such as names and locations will be changed.

Information gathered will appear as an individual case study in a written report. A copy of the report will be available to me for feedback and comments.

I am aware that the interview involved in this research will printed off from the e mail and used for research purposes only

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant Date Signature

Name of researcher Date Signature
Appendix 4
Demographic Information Sheet

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
The following information is useful for providing a sense of the participants in this study. However, none of the information will be used to identify you as this research is completely confidential.

1. How old are you? ____________

2. How would you describe your ethnicity?
(please tick the ethnic group to which you feel you belong)

White-
British
Irish
Any other White background (please specify below)

Black or Black British-
Caribbean
African
Any other Black background (please specify below)

Asian or Asian British-
Indian
Pakistani
Bangladeshi
Any other Asian background (please specify below)

Mixed-
White and Black Caribbean
White and Black African
White and Asian
Any other mixed background (please specify below)

Chinese-

Any other ethnic group (please specify below)
Appendix 5

Interview Schedule

BEYOND THE TWELVE STEPS
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION

Researcher's Introduction
Researcher introduces self and thanks participant for agreeing to participate
Assurance of confidentiality.
Explain that this will be part of a number of case studies submitted for doctoral research, possibly even published in academic journals, but that all names and identifying information will be changed. Check that this is ok.
Explain that if any sensitive areas are touched upon that they do not want to discuss, this is fine, to please indicate and we can move on to another area.
Explain about the tape recorder; the researcher uses to listen back to and transcribe and use for analysis. The researcher may pull out some quotes for the research but these would not be attributed to a person by name.

Ask respondent to sign consent form.

Explain Purpose of Interview
Explain that the interview will be about their experiences in AA and what led up to joining and what happened when they left. Explain that I am interested in how they have seen their spiritual or journey through life thus far and what part AA might have played in this.
MAIN INTERVIEW

Introduction and Current Circumstances
Tell me a little about your current situation; name, family, work age etc.
How would you describe where you are at in your life right now (from any respect)?

Early Circumstances
Tell me a little about your earlier background and circumstances and what you feel led up to your alcohol problems
How did you discover the 12 Step Programme?
What was your attitude to spirituality and religion at this point in your life?

Time in AA
How long were you in AA?
What was it like? Describe your experiences in AA.
What was it like to be a member?
How fully did you embrace the programme? What did you do? (Probe- regularity of meetings attended/ sponsor/ working the steps/ conferences/ friendship networks/ social events)
How would you describe yourself at that time?
Was there anything about AA that you particularly liked? Was there anything you were less happy with? Discuss

Attitudes towards the Principles of AA
How did you feel about certain aspects of the programme-
-How did you feel about the ‘higher power’ aspects of the programme?
-What did you/do you feel about the ‘spiritual awakening’ aspects of the programme?

Overall, what was most important and helpful to you?
Did you change in any way during your time there? If so, in what ways?
What effect did your participation have upon your friends and family?

The Process of Leaving
What made you leave AA?
Was it a conscious decision to leave or did it ‘just happen’?
What was it like to leave? How did you feel?
How did it occur? Was it gradual or distinct?
What effects did it have upon you/ your family or friends?
Did you have any emotions (concerns/anxieties/excitement) about moving away from the programme?
What was the response of your fellow members? What happened to any friends you may have had in AA?
Present Time
How long is it since you stopped going?
What is your relationship to spirituality now and did AA affect this in any way?
How did the leaving of AA affect you?

Summary/Review of their AA ‘Journey’
Looking back on your life so far, what effect would you say that your time in AA has had?
Ask only if the spiritual aspect has relevance for them-
   How did your time in AA affect your attitude or relationship to the more spiritual aspects?
   How did the leaving of AA affect you in relation to more spiritual aspects?
How have you changed over this time? Where do you see yourself now and where do you see yourself going in the future?
Appendix 6
Sample Transcript
Harry Participant 2

Interviewer; P- participant. All names and places have been changed or omitted in the interests of confidentiality. Information within square brackets is used for clarification. Empty square brackets indicate material omitted in the interests of confidentiality. Three dots indicate a pause or hesitancy.

I-So just as a brief background, can you tell me a little about where you are in your life right now?

P-Yes I’m [age]. I’ve been married since I was [age]. We have three children, [] My wife, she was a senior [] doing useful and important stuff and she took a package about five or six years ago and now she’s a freelancer, and now she’s resting and concerned about where the next job is coming from. I’m a [job], and I do investigation and audits and stuff of that kind but over the last few years I have just been plugging away on projects which is useful and interesting. I like the teamwork side of it. Doing a project is really good; people don’t tell kids that [job] is actually very stimulating if you are in the right place, do you know because you actually get to see something quite creative. And I am a member of the Society of Friends and I have been a Quaker since [] I think. And that occupies a good deal of my time. At the moment we are engaged upon a big project to [] in my locality and I am project managing it and so that swallows up whatever time I have left over from nine hour working days and it’s a bit of a pressure...

I -The Quaker side of things?

P-Not the Quaker side of things, the Quaker side of things is fine I love the society and it suits me to a T, the project that I am helping Friends manage is difficult; there are some difficulties at the moment because of complications – [] - so its quite stressful. So I have a useful and rewarding job I have a comfortable and suburban lifestyle and I’ve got two pets who tolerate me and...that is pretty good for me yeah I feel privileged and I know it. I am [] from a middle class academic family. Is this ok I’m just going into the background?

I-Yes

P-It’s almost like giving a chair at AA in one way isn’t it? I was brought up in York and um... phew ...living for a good 16 years of my life there being a good lad and doing what the parents expected, doing a lot of um... reasonable academic work, ended up going to York University um graduating in [subject] and went on to do research for a good PhD and then a post doc and ...one of the things...you are interested in the spiritual aspects...my family is not spiritual at all; wasn’t when I was brought up. My mother had strong um strong leanings but never translated it into actually attaching herself to a
church. My father was completely put off because he was in the forces during the war and he took a 'skunner to military partrage' [?] is the way to put it, he saw military people who he had liked and respected and who he had worked with, trained with going up and being killed. And he saw priests who preached the message of Christ saying this is, this is good stuff and yeah he valued the ethical background of Christianity highly but he didn’t have any time for the religious aspects. And I was grammar schoolboy, do you know its, hymns and the routines of the Church of England in school actually I still like those very much. One of the things about the Society of Friends is the silent worship you miss out on all the musical riches and some of the lovely prayers that you get in the Church of England and....I still enjoy it when I go to structured services, though the Society of Friends is where my heart is, but the other is good too. So um, how did I get into AA?

I-Yes what do you feel led up to your alcohol problems?

P- Never feeling quite good enough, I suspect. Yes my um family’s...my parents were both high achievers, academics, my father was a [job] and my mother, well she was actually she looked after four of us because that was the way it was at the time, but it’s a shame, it was a waste because she was an extremely able woman. Without actually hammering the message home the message got into your head that excelling academically was what it required and I never felt...you know it comes out in AA meetings of course I always suspected that that drive to be a little better than I felt I could be was always something I couldn’t couldn’t fulfil. Always expectations. Its hard I mean these these things are very complicated. I have listened to hundreds of chairs in AA and I’ve never really understood the drives that lead people into addictive behaviour. You know. I understand a good deal more about how to get out of it now which is really what matters but I mean I certainly took to drink very enthusiastically. In fact my mother’s family...feature a fair number of enthusiasts and my my brothers and sister, they are capable of going over the top without really having to think too hard about it. But they control it at any rate. I was um, I married at [age] having met [wife] at Uni and drink it was an early problem and she hated the way I drank, you know it’s a common experience it’s a common story, I didn’t have a stop button you know I, I just went on if I could. And at [age]...I’m, just trying to get to the chronology right I know it doesn’t matter for your purposes- but I moved down to [place] to get a [academic qualification] and um then I went to work for a research lab out in... out in just to the West of [city] and I s’pose by then I wasn’t right out of control. At age [] the place realised that it had more people than it needed, and they made a management decision and booted half the workforce out and I ended up I was phoned actually a couple of days afterwards and was asked if I wanted to train as a [job] and er worked for an outfit that needed that work. It was fairly stressful in terms of running around because once I had been through the initial training I would typically set off from home at 6 o’clock on a Sunday night and go to some damn airport in Europe. I’d pick up a hire car and you know I’d go for 5 days a different city every day you know and staying in hotels all expenses paid. And at the end of the day you’d be tired and you’d go to the restaurant and just have a litre of wine because it was pleasant. And I made my way up that firm...it was interesting actually that work I really liked poking my nose into other peoples business and [] getting my
head around it. It was quite challenging and it was quite interesting and I enjoyed it thoroughly and I threw myself into it. I think I am naturally quite an enthusiastic type; impetuous? Hasty? LIABLE to do things without thinking them through carefully. But the job suited me and my abilities and I went up...you know as I went up in that firm my drinking went up as well and by the time I was seven years there I guess it was, I was I had got to the edge. I was drinking far too much far too regularly you know waking up in the morning with a filthy hangover, popping black coffee and Foxes glacier mints and dragging myself off to a...because with the travelling there were periods in the office, you know it was about week in week out; and our marriage was going rapidly downhill. [Wife] is um...I remember her saying to me afterwards that she would come home and she would find out that I had been home from work for a couple of hours and I would be absolutely ratted you know I would start off on the gin and work up to red wine. And we had er we had two of our children then and I would come home and stuff them into bed so that I could get to the gin as quick as possible. It wasn't nice yeah? And [interruption]

I-So in your mid thirties it was getting quite extreme?

P-Yes mid thirties. It was the classic pattern of establishing myself and coming to a crisis point. Really. And the crisis was, oh one evening, [wife] she told me this, I didn't remember it. She said to me you either sort yourself out or I'm away with the children. And I woke up in the morning and phoned AA basically. I realised that I was damaging myself I realised that my marriage was going downhill very rapidly. And my health was suffering. So I toddled along to AA.

I-And at that point what would you say your relationship with spirituality and religion was?

P-Nil. Vacant. Nothing going on. I would go along to the rituals of the English [inaudible] you know the weddings the burials- not many of those at that time, I've been to a lot more since. And enjoy it but it didn't mean anything to me. I found it interesting that some time later after I had joined the Society of Friends, [wife] fished out a packet of letters that I had written to her at some stage I our early time together. I can't think where they had been written from but I read some of them and I was expressing thoughts that were so like Quaker approach it really astonished me to realise that these things had been lurking there and that this yearning for a spiritual life had been latent in me. Though I didn't express it in that time that I was getting myself into AA.

I- So you were just attending Church just the ceremonies the weddings and funeral?

P-The rituals yes

I- So then you joined AA can you tell me about that?

P-That was in [ ] so I was [age] or so. And I actually had a couple of weeks off the booze before I went in. Why did I do that? Because we went on holiday, yeah? And I found AA helpful. I found it very helpful. I found it...a good welcome, and people who
seemed to have been through similar experiences and some sharp interesting people and some who had trashed their heads through years of dedicated drinking. Yes it was ok and it...I was in the position that I was ready to swallow the messages as I think I told you I left AA and came to suspect those messages deeply and I don't like them much these days. But when I went into AA they were welcome they were helpful and and you know I think the advice was good for someone who's just trying to form new habits and get rid of old habits. Which was to stick with people who have made it and see how they do it.

I-And how long were you in AA?

P-15 years all told. [interruption]
Yes the philosophy of AA is ...as I say I don't care for it now. I think it propels some poison messages into damaged and vulnerable people. I think that it creates dependency which I find unhealthy. I wouldn't recommend the programme to anyone. But I do think that the companionship and the group is valuable. Anyway I stuck with it you know and being the usual competitive [inaudible] I went in there and organised groups and took on as secretary you know all the things that people do in AA and um the sponsorship idea...seemed to be ceding a large measure of control to someone else. And although I had a couple of tries is the way to put it but it didn't work for me really.

I-In terms of having a sponsor?

P-Yes yes. I didn't have a long lasting sponsor. I had one oh after I had been in AA for perhaps 11 years I suppose? I went along to little [name] who is local here actually because all my AA participation was in this area and I actually managed to do three major life changes. One was quitting drinking. Two was going to AA and three was moving house. Oh four was getting a new job of course because I moved out of the job I had been doing into the rather rough and regressive world of [job]

I-All at the same time do you mean?

P-Well no no let me think about how I did it. I went to AA before I started at [job]. We moved six months later or so I guess it must have been. And then our third child J came along. Yes all a lot of things going on and adapting but...I'm just trying to...that first six months I must have been going to AA up in the north of the town where we lived. I'm getting confused. It's a long time ago when you're an old trout like me! [] years I guess.

I-And did you work the steps and go through the...

P-Yes I did I did. I went through the activities that AA recommends. And the reason that I went to the Quakers actually was because of the emphasis that AA puts on the spiritual approach, you know that this has to be a change of life a change of your approach to life and- because its founded in fundamentalist Christianity. It says you know you get yourself along. And I did. And that was a few days after we moved into this house in [year]. And I said to [wife] one morning, why don't we um go to Church in the parish church in [nearby] and she said no I want to go to the Quakers. Cos she had always been
interested in that. And I said well alright you know if...one plague was as good as another- which was the extent of my appreciation. And we went along to the Quaker meeting here and and both of us found it good. We found that it was very satisfying in many ways; that we met thoughtful people who didn’t push you...someone mentioned to me once a publication called ‘beyond anarchy’ [laughs] applicable to Quakers because it is very much you are working your own way through it. But I found that the approach was good that the absence of dogma was very welcome. Do you know if you have spent 10 years being, having your ear bent about how the Steps are the only way and so forth, some of which says well we think you might try it this way...is is good mm? and I knew that many of the tenets of the Church of England were things that I had great difficulty with. You know the classical ones, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the redemption of sins, this that and the other- didn’t say anything to me, they didn’t have any value for me that I could see. Still don’t really. [sighs] Where was I?

I-So how many years had you been in AA when you then went to the Quakers?

P-About a year. Let me get this straight in my head. I went to AA it must have been in May in [] and we went to Quakers, well [daughter] was about 10 days old so it must have been mid January []. I had had six months to think about what was being put to me in AA and the proposition, to go through one or two of the steps- though not properly I would say in retrospect. And to feel that um I was ready to try some...more organised religion.

I-Right so that’s quite interesting to say that you were ready to try more organised religion so it sounds like that 10 months or however long was just AA and then they were in tandem for about 14 years? So what do you feel happened during that time you were just in AA? What effect do you feel it had on you the way they were talking about the spiritual awakening and the surrender, in retrospect now what do you think occurred?

P-1 think it showed me that spiritual approach to your personal life had real meaning and significance and that I was amongst a group of people for whom it- I mean I’d known that anyway you’d have to be an absolute fool people not to think that [inaudible] people who reject all religion are potty- um but being with a group of people of whom a large number actually went through to work on that showed me that it had relevance to me and that it was valuable in terms of your approach to life. The way I see it now is different, I...religion deals with the important stuff, you know the important questions of life, you know why are we here? What are we doing? How should I set about life? These are the things which religion deals with and it does it systematically in different ways of course. But these are questions that any sane adult will be asking him or her self in my opinion. And that of course [mumbles] going through a major change in my approach to life, you look again you are ready to try something different.

I-It sounds as if the first 10 months had a certain effect upon you and then you began to explore outside AA whilst staying in AA

P-Yes I did. I ran the ...the two went in parallel. Yeah I was getting a great deal from being in AA, you know I was establishing my sobriety, I was getting it firm. I was going
through the steps. I was improving the way I dealt with life generally. Um I wasn’t solving a lot of my personal problems of behaviour you know? I wasn’t drinking but I was still angry. I wasn’t much of a pleasure to be around; harsh, judgemental, critical all these things were very much my way of dealing with other people. And I would share about these in AA meetings and I would receive advice, some of which was good and some of which was rubbish and it didn’t really help me much to change my approach. And I went through…I am just trying to work this out….I came to another crisis, which was to do with my response to our eldest who had turbulent teens. She was moderately hellish. I mean I know everybody’s teen children were difficult, but if I compare her to the other three, she really was difficult. She said herself ‘I was a little shit’ and I think it’s a pretty fair description. You know stealing from everybody in the family and vile language you know and she was really unhappy. And I reacted to it very badly. It ended up with me assaulted her you know, it was an early morning job and I discovered that she had lifted two hundred quid from my wallet and went out and confronted her and we ended up with me putting my hands around her throat just outside this house. I was so angry I was unbelievably angry. Money gets to me d’you know? I know where my wallet is at all times. You know [wife] isn’t like that at all. She isn’t naturally careful in that way like I am. But it gets to me, it is getting into my personal space in a way I really really dislike. And [inaudible] the police. And I have this vivid memory of this very pleasant young policewoman sitting on one of those sofas there saying yes and one more report like this and you’ll be down the station on a charge. So it was absolutely, you know it was something which I found deeply deeply difficult. I’m not saying that I was actually justified at all… it was a crime, fair play. And I ended up being out of the house for about a fortnight which I didn’t like at all and none of the kids I’m glad to say. And the other two gave her hell at times, you know/ because they’d say its your fault [name of daughter] and I went along to counselling then because I realised that this, you know outraged emotional violent response showed me that something was really wrong in my head still. You know I might go to AA and go through the motions but it wasn’t changing the important parts of my behaviour. And I would go to Friends and worship there and it was good for me and I went to house groups and weekend and stuff like that but it has to be lived, you know it wasn’t good enough and I, actually in that fortnight I stayed with some Quaker friends and [friend] – he did counselling quite locally he’s a lovely man- and I asked him if he knew anyone who could help me sort this out and he sent me along to a counsellor who was his supervisor and she was good actually. I don’t know what approach she followed but she certainly helped me get to grips with looking at my emotions and how I responded and and became rather easier to live with I think.

I-And did you go to her for quite a long time or

P-Yes, we did, I did. [pause] I guess it must have been 18 months all told once or twice a week. And at the same time the family life wasn’t really working at all well for us. And the reason I stopped that [laughs] we went along to family counselling. [Counsellor] did a great deal for me. I respect her ability to give it me straight when I needed it and her ability to see things in my behaviour which I was unaware of. [sighs] But I came to a point where I was thinking, well where are we going with this? In parallel with this we had this turbulent family stuff you know, [daughters] behaviour was not improving, you
know she had got out of school she had had flaming rows with the ...her strong personality character and intellect made her ideally equipped to be a total pain in the arse to any school that she was in at the time and she did get thrown out for getting all the first years high as kites on a spliff she had taken in [laughs]. It um it just ended up with a blazing row with the headmistress who told her she would now leave the school. She was just running up to her GCSEs but frankly she wasn't putting any work into it. She was suiting herself and being difficult. Anyway we went to family counselling at some stage in this sorry saga and the um psychologist...was he a psychologist or a psychiatrist? I don't know and anyway I don't think it matters. Anyway he was very good um [laughs] there was one stage when we were discussing things and he used a phrase which just bit-he had this gift of simple phrases that just bit in and I was talking about um an argument between myself and [wife] and it was an expression of frustration and irritation and anger and this that and the other and he said to me ‘that wasn’t very emotionally mature of you was it?’ And do you know it's like someone had punched me in the solar plexus. It really made me stop and say are you in charge of your head or not? And I decided that I was in charge of my head and that I thought that I had probably gone as far with [counsellor] as I was going to. Good though she was. I found it inconvenient, you know with three growing kids and a large house it takes a lot of earning and taking a morning off once or twice a week. I didn’t feel that I was getting enough from it to compensate for the lost time and income, was a major part. I felt that I was ready to move on as well. [sighs] Now when would that have been? [pause] About [year] I guess. I had been to AA about 10 years then. I had been through a year and a half of counselling. I continued in Friends from [year] quite comfortably and happily. And then this major upheaval took place. So after that life continued on a similar basis in this house I think I’d say. It wasn’t always comfortable I’d say, you know three teenage kids isn’t always a bed of roses. Well [daughter] was probably seven to eight at the time. Some lively emotional interactions around the dinner table- completely bloody at times and absolutely wonderful at others. Family life. I guess I was cruising in AA and not finding it was doing a great deal for me. And I went- at that time I had also taken on an additional line of work which was investigating []. And I got sent out to [country] to investigate an incident there. It was funny really I went out to the AA meeting in [country], this would have been... I guess it would have been 2000 or so and someone there mentioned this vile book he had read called Alcoholics Anonymous Cult or Cure, do you know it? Yes? And I thought this is absolutely terrible, because I was a diligent and adhering member of AA um I thought this is outrageous, you know you are assaulting something that has done so much good [laughs] I was wondering around this [] in [country]- one of the characteristics of investigation is that very often you are twiddling your thumbs for considerable periods of time- I went into [bookshop] in [country] and I came across this book on the shelf and bought it. [laughs] and made the very grave mistake of reading it and I think it’s a very good book I think its carefully done I think its scholarly it gives references for its assertions, and it really is a demolition job on the philosophy behind AA and I found it quite persuasive um I wasn’t ready to jump yet, I certainly, because I’d swallowed the need to adhere to a group very strongly I found that very worrying, the idea of ducking out of AA, so what I did was to get some of the journal references that are cited in Cult or Cure, and I got them out of the British Library and read them and thought about them and decided that probably he you know his propositions were sound and that you didn’t need
to be dependent you didn’t need to let external concepts rule your life. It’s been so long since I read it now, it seems absolutely ages, but I decided that you know it was time to move on. And what I actually did was to shop around to see the various things that were available and I decided that the [alternative recovery programme] recovery route looked pretty interesting. And there wasn’t any [alternative recovery programme] in the UK at that time as far as I’m aware but there was an active internet presence and I followed that and I found that very helpful you know. Do you know about [alternative recovery programme] recovery have you come across it? I’ve heard it described as a rough and SS version of Cognitive Behavioural therapy, you know it’s tough it’s quite brutal. You know it’s quite surprising how much you can get out of an online chatroom style meeting in terms of of Pierce comments again. You know the methodology which [alternative recovery programme] was showing I found really helpful actually. The tools and tricks and tips and things work very well for me. You know things like avoiding demand language you know things like ‘should ought must’ type of language, they work so well in the home! You know if you say ‘my children ought to be doing the washing up for me, if you convert that to, well I’d be very happy if they did, it takes off so much pressure. And it’s just a straightforward way of improving the relationships in the family. It was really really good. I found [alternative recovery programme] was um worked very well for me. Far better than AA ever had in terms of personal behaviour. I thought that it was showing me ways of understanding my thinking and my reactions to things that seemed realistic that seemed accurate that reflected the way my head worked and which I could change. And probably the reason the [alternative recovery programme] hasn’t taken off is that it tells you you can graduate and I stuck around with [alternative recovery programme] for 2 ½, 3 years I suppose. I started a meeting up in [city]. I’m not a naturally gifted proselytise or publicist and I was extremely busy but I would give up my Sunday afternoons to go along and open a room in the Friends meeting house in [city] and see who came along and there was a modest little attendance but it didn’t take off really. After about six months a chap expressed a willingness to provide space and ...I forget the term used in [alternative recovery programme] ...in AA you have a secretary. Anyway someone who is leading the structure of the meeting. He took that on because he thought that the methodology was good and I went along once and more or less handed it over with a sigh of relief. Because I have a terrible tendency to take on about 50% more than I ought to for my own mental and physical health. And it was putting an extra demand upon me.

I: So [alternative recovery programme] helped you understand your thinking processes more. What did AA do for you?

P: Helped me stop drinking. Showed me the spiritual aspect that was important to some people. The actual spiritual content of AA is pretty slim in my opinion. Its emphasis on the importance of the spiritual life, you know step 11 and all that is fine for many of the people there and they lived very happily and contented under it but it wasn’t taking me anywhere and I didn’t feel that it was showing me ways to understand my behaviour or to behave better. So I think that they say religion asks those important questions, and I wasn’t finding answers inside AA. I was finding some answers in Friends but different ones and that seemed to be a different channel if you like than what went on in the AA
meetings. An awful lot of drunk [inaudible] in AA, an awful lot of boring repetitive rubbish. Not much deep insights or things which will move you deeply. A Quaker meeting still remains for me the best form of worship I have come across. If it works its absolutely magic. There are times when the room just comes alive. And ministry leads on to ministry and you end feeling exalted. And other times it absolute rubbish of course but its always a risk when you’ve got a bunch of loose cannons, well that’s not a Quakerly sort of term but you know what I mean, people who can minister as they wish and sometimes it works very well and other times you find someone who’s ministry seems out of place. But by and large the Quaker ways suit me very well.

I-It sounds like in AA there was almost like there was a reminder or an opening for you of the spiritual?

P-Yes I think that’s right. It was...I think its because the way that AA presents itself the package deal, you know you take these steps and you work them you take your sponsor and you work them its an instruction manual. The individual instructions don’t always make an awful lot of sense but one of the things that was emphasised was the importance of the spiritual life and I agree with it you know. I think that it’s important to me still um...but I didn’t find it there. And I did find help and encouragement and openings in Friends.

I-So what was it that stopped you drinking in AA

P-Group support I would say. The clear evidence that for many people it helped them. AA didn’t stop me drinking, I stopped drinking with the help of AA. AA is just a bunch of people. But it was very helpful going to AA and getting these constant reminders that it was possible, that it was desirable that it was achievable. And some of the things which AA tells you such as if you stop coming to meeting regularly you are bound to slip sooner or later I think are absolute rubbish! You know when you look back you think [inaudible] this is a demands type concept isn’t it...this will happen, this must happen you cannot escape, resistance is futile. Well looking back on it from what 6 years on and I say well actually no.

I-How did you feel about that at the time?

P-[whispers for effect] Frightened as hell! You know I think mentioned my concern about leaving the groups, and one of the reasons I went to [alternative recovery programme] was I wanted some group support. I’ve had 15 years of being told the group is all, you know the programme is critical you must belong to the group. Hearing this three or four times a week if you’re reciting it and repeating it, the, the concept is instilled in your head on autoplay almost um...and also there were a lot of people I liked amongst the groups around here a lot of very pleasant likeable people. I was frightened when I took that decision. I went along actually to this Friend with whom I stayed when I was out of the house for a fortnight and talked it through with him and ...I cannot remember I think it was him who said well if you find that worrying why don’t you find another group of some kind. And he was a perfectly sensible straightforward man he believed that there is
a solution and so I found the [alternative recovery programme] recovery solution which was ok for me.

I-And did you still go to AA?

P-I stopped AA and went to [alternative recovery programme].

I-On the internet? So you weren't physically attending a group?

P-No but there were regular scheduled online meetings and you'd be quite surprised...I was quite surprised...how well they worked and what fun you could have with people you've never met. One of the more enjoyable outings I've had was going across to the [alternative recovery programme] annual conference in [city] in, just north of [city], 3 years back or so. And putting faces to some of these people you know. There was the internet Guru [name] and he was terrific, he was a really nice guy and you know to be able to put a face to the personalities you perceive in a chatroom was very welcome. I liked it, there was a strong group sense there as well.

I-So what happened to your AA friends?

P- I still bump into them. We hobnob, socialise, I might meet one of them...I met...I don't go and seek them out shall I put it like that? And I've had occasion to go into one of the meetings around here, there was one in the Quaker meeting house around here and I was asked to just go in and pop my head around and remind them that they were late with the rental, something of that kind, and I felt chilled actually. You know there were people there that recognised me and knew that I had broken the faith, and you know how I felt was my reaction of course but I didn't have people coming up to me saying how nice to see you how are you doing, lets put it like that. The ones I bump into on the street or in the train that's fine, I've got several people I still see with pleasure and so forth but I don't feel any adhesion to the groups now. And I don't really feel very positive to AA because of [sighs] if someone is trying to stop the stuff it's helpful but as I said earlier I don't think it's a way to solve problems...well it wasn't for me.

I-And just tell me briefly what you meant by being 'chilled' when you went into that meeting?

P-I felt out of place, not part of the group an interloper and I wasn't getting any warm fuzzy feedback from the people there who did know me, no smiles.

I-Can you just sum up what was most important for you in AA what really worked for you within AA?

P-The group support was very helpful, the examples were very helpful of how other people had come out of...you've heard I suppose of the stories of people who are still in AA...there is almost a nakedness about the way people are told to share, you are told to be undefended which I find now somewhat unnatural. Or exhibitionist really. I think
those two things. The examples and the group support are the ones which I would emphasise of being of most value to me. I was just thinking of meeting someone, another Quaker, I cant remember the context but what I do remember was we were discussing, because she was a she had been a ....she had drunk addictively, I am not going to call her an alcoholic, it’s a damn label, its one of the things I like best about the [alternative recovery programme] thing is teaching you to see when you are using labels instead of describing behaviour. But any rate [name] said that she had very much avoided the group thing...because it was for extroverts. She identified herself as strongly introverted and she had sorted it out for herself. She had recognised her ...the damaging nature of what she was doing and that it wasn’t sane or sensible and she didn’t want to go to AA no not at all, the whole approach was alien to her and repugnant I think. She didn’t want to open her soul and talk to complete strangers. She wanted to sort out what was going on in her life.

I-What do you think about the disease concept idea in AA?

P-When I was in AA [pause, sigh] it was part of the group thing, I didn’t reject it. Afterwards I have come to think of it as um um...it doesn’t have any value for me. I think that describing it as an addictive damaging pattern of behaviour works much better for me. But then I would say that if I’ve been in a cognitive style group wouldn’t I?

I-How did it impact on your family and friends when you were in AA?

P-Interesting. They welcomed my continuing sobriety. Um that’s for sure, particularly my wife. She didn’t want anything to do with the bits like Al-anon, she said look its you who’s got this problem not me you go and sort it out you have my entire support I don’t mind you going off to meetings 2 or 3 evenings a week, though I do miss you, which was more than she did when I was drinking. Um the kids? Yes pretty similar, it’s dad’s thing he’ll get on with it. Ands that’s as best as I can sum it up. And one of the things about being a bit didactic in nature is that you try and show other people what you appreciate, it really really annoyed my kids at times! You know its um these habits of speech if I say something or other is really really disagreeable, well I used to but now I say, ‘I don’t like it’. So I am talking about personal reactions rather than labelling something. There is a very interesting little booklet that [alternative recovery programme] peddles which is written entirely without use of the word ‘is’ and if you do avoid that you find yourself talking about things in a different way and it changes your habits of thought. And labelling is difficult. Well I find it difficult anyway to say ‘I am this that or the other’ its rubbish.

I-So what did you have to let go of when you left AA?

P-Smoke filled rooms. Lousy coffee! [laughs]. Two or three evenings a week away from my family. People I liked. You know there’s a sub society there in AA. I think the thing that unites them is not particularly healthy, things that united me with them was not particularly healthy was the continuing emphasis on the past errors on the mistakes on [putting on firm voice] ‘the disease’ the recovering nature. You know after a while I
wasn’t sorry I left any of that.

I-So, before we move on, why did you keep going for 15 years do you think?

P-Never occurred to me to do otherwise. You know I had been shown something that had worked for me and I had plenty of other things to do so I sort of fitted it into my life. When you start reading around a bit ...And suddenly someone says this is actually misleading. That [inaudible] described by the AA literature is not supported by evidence and if you are smart you won’t swallow these messages. I thought wow! Every bit of AA literature is unsupported by research as far as I can tell. And when you start looking at it the whole thing seems to crumble like a pack of cards. As a mental construct it stinks. The activities and the things that I value I think are useful. But the philosophy and the lesson of AA, not for me.

I-So the [alternative recovery programme] enabled you to keep the group support, which was the last remaining thing really, but there was a fear in a sense...

P-Oh yes there’s no ‘in a sense’ at all; it was fear. I was scared, really scared. Yes I had swallowed that message.

I-And now you don’t have the [alternative recovery programme] as the group support. So its like a process to kind of wean you off, even needing the group support?

P-Yes. Its graduating. The difference is that AAs message are very strongly ‘never leave us or you’ll die’. [Alternative recovery programme]’s message is ‘we’ll help you with your recovery, we’ll show you new ways of dealing with life’s ups and downs and difficulties, and help you cope with them. And when you are ready please move on, feel free. You may want to come back and help other people that’s fine. As a matter of fact there are some analogies between [alternative recovery programme] and Quakers in that you have to think things through for your self. It is not spoon fed to you. The emphasis in [alternative recovery programme] is very emphatic, very much on working out who’s going on in your head. Its not easy. And in Quakers as well you know, its your life, your spiritual growth, you do what you feel is right for you. And there’s always a sting in the tale- would you mind taking on these following jobs in the service of the meeting! [laughs]

I-So it sounds like your energies are now focussed on the Quakers in terms of the group and the social would you say?

P-Yes I think that’s right. Yes

I-I know we have talked a bit about the Quakers but tell me a little more about what that provides for you spiritually

P-Ooh [pause] It provides a lot of people who I really like and respect who have things to show me. It provides a group. [laughs] Some people need groups or find them and really
really important part of their life and I’m one of them I guess. It provides an area where my work is really useful to other people. It provides an atmosphere in which spiritual growth and worship are actively encouraged. And I like that very much. But without people expecting any dogma or set beliefs. The absence of dogma in Friends but the insistence that what you are talking about and thinking about and doing is important stuff those are good for me. Its something you have to work out for yourself. You look around Quaker meetings and you’ll find a lot of people in their 40s plus you know after you’ve established yourself you’re working on to where is this life going, it’s a good structure in which to try to find some answers to those questions. There’s a pattern of activities. One of the things I like about Quakers, the word is that it is continuous, you know you don’t suddenly stop practicing the precepts that are suggested to you because you have walked out of the door at 11.30 you know on a Sunday morning that life as a whole, if you’re really good at it all of your life is an act of worship. Certainly Quaker meetings for business are structured that way, I’ve been involved in more of them than I’d like to admit. The Quaker business method is something very particular. The Quaker business method is one that I find excellent and in really difficult times its a strong spiritual experience a well….A Quaker meeting will usually start with a silence to settle yourself. To remind you to think about what you are going to do. To remember that it’s being done in a spirit of worship.

I-So what would you say are the similarities between Quakers and AA and what are the differences?

P-Blimey! Group, spiritual. Are the two which strike me immediately. The AA approach seems to me now ridiculously dogmatic and pushy. You know all the things which say ‘you will think this’ or ‘you will do it like this’. The Quakers much more relaxed, sometimes too….unassertive if you like? Quakers in our style don’t proselytise there are other branches...you would be amazed how many different flavours of Quakers there are. When I learned that Richard Nixon was a Quaker I was startled. But in the United States there’s a deal of...schism.

I-So if you were to sum up the flavour of spirituality in AA and the flavour of spirituality in the Quakers, how would you?

P-[sighs] I think it is, in the Quakers its something that all of us share and are intimately involved in and its something where our practice strengthens each other, that a good meeting for worship is synergistic to a very high degree. The quality of the worship the quality of the ministry can lift it into a realm that is absolutely wonderful to take part in. In AA I feel that the emphasis in upon personal practice, that there is not much sense of spiritual in a room full of people ministering about their drunkalogues. Sometimes you get whiffs of it but I didn’t feel that AA meetings were a spiritual exercise. That the spiritual context to your life was something that AA recommended based on the precepts of Bill W and Dr Bob those two good old preachers of the Oxford movement. And I think that AA recommended spirituality. I think that the 12 steps, although they have the words, don’t have the flavour which I find in Friends. I think that its almost rote spirituality.
I-So its like they are recommending it but its not alive in the room almost?

P- That's exactly right. That's an accurate reflection of what I said and that's how I see it now. I wouldn't go to an AA meeting because I was seeking a spiritual experience. I might go along because I wanted to see some of these lovely people that I hadn't seen for five years but there are better ways of doing it. And I wouldn't go into the room I would wait to buttonhole them outside if I wanted to find some people I am fond of.

I-So how would you now describe your relationship to spirituality and what effect do you think AA had for you overall now that you look back?

P-I think that joining AA at a time when my whole mentality was shifting, I was very receptive to this instruction that you get there, to seriously seek a spiritual a stronger spiritual element in ones life. Its good advice and I think it pushed me in the direction which I was, I hadn't been aware of, but I had a natural disposition for. I think I'm not a natural ascetic or cleric or that kind of thing but I think the spiritual aspect of my life is important. And I am trying to live life as a whole which all of it is part of a same pattern, which is one based on a spiritual life, its something which I find very comfortable.

I-And what effect did the leaving of AA have on your spiritual path do you think?

P-Not much. Because the spiritual element of my life had shifted onto Friends by then and was centred on, as it is still. And that AA had become more or less maintenance for staying sober. But wasn't helping me progress much. As a matter of fact one of the things that bugs me at present is because this project for the Quakers is taking such a lot of time and energy...I'm bullshitting really I love it, I like doing it, I like helping move things forward efficiently but it does take a lot of time and energy. But I'm not getting into things that probably would be better for me spiritually. If you're arguing with a [ ] about the terms of a deal you are not likely to be reading the literature which would open my mind further. And it takes a lot of energy. I mean growth takes energy doesn't it?

I-Where do you see yourself going in the future in this kind of context?

P-Well I see myself as stably sober and likely to stay that way. I have been through the deaths of both of my parents without any temptation to pick up just a little glass of something. But it would be nice to quit the ciggies. I see myself continuing in the society of Friends. I hope that we will get our project through and done and then we can get on with showing a bit more of what Friends is about. We have a small meeting here and we're not drawing people in because...those with the most energy and ability are engrossed in all this [project] which is nonsense. I see myself spending my time in Friends and when I finally go to the oven it will be at a Quaker meeting with all my friends pressing the button as they...and I know exactly what music it's going to be, if [wife] does what I ask for. [laughs]

I-Are there any elements of AA that you still adhere to or kind of live in your life?
P-Do you know I have trouble remembering what they are
[recites the first 5 steps verbatim]

[Sighs]

I have been through it. If you went on to the later steps and I really can't remember them
now the step 11 which is about the emphasis on spiritual life I s'pose you could say that I
am still living inside that. But not inside AA and you don't need to be in AA to do it.

I-What would you recommend to someone who had a drinking problem?

P-Stop.

I-Would you recommend any particular...?

P-I think that AA is a good place to start to break the physical habit, to see the examples,
to get support and encouragement. But boy I would give them powerful warnings against
some of these dependency messages you get in AA and the didactic nature of the
programme. I'd say they can keep you there longer than you need. It won't solve your
mental problems. You may be able to solve them inside the programme, you may need to
go for professional help. It's hard. I still think that AA was very helpful to me, I am very
grateful to the people who helped me stop drinking, but I am ambivalent about it because
I despise the messages you get [inaudible]. So can you say to someone go to AA but
don't believe what they tell you? That's an odd message isn't it? If there were more
[alternative recovery programme] recovery here, I would recommend that to people
because I do think its sensible, I do think that the... many of the people inside [alternative
recovery programme] found it let them through to sober behaviour. And of course that's
not just alcohol because it worked across a wide range of addictive behaviours. But it's
not available. Not really.

I-I wonder what you think of the spiritual aspect for other people that go to AA

P-I don't think there's much spiritual content in an AA meeting. There's a lot of group
togetherness and support. I wouldn't say there's much in it. Go and find it somewhere
else. I think the atmosphere in an AA meeting is one that is not conducive to spiritual
experience. You hear some fairly rough stuff. And it's not very focussed and concentrated at times. You know everyone's waiting to have their word, there's an awful lot of egotists in AA. Who've got the message and want to tell other people, who want to talk about themselves. One of the attractions for AA for some people is this exhibitionist bit, in my opinion, not all. I shared it as well. I jumped at the opportunity of being interviewed by you! [laughs]. You know talking about the most fascinating subject in the world! There's a little self-mockery there but I think there's certain amount of exhibitionism in the AA chair and the sharing that's what they call it, afterwards. But I don't think there is much spiritual.

I-So would you say that some of your journey has been a reconnection back to yourself?
P-Yes. Yes that’s right. [pause] Becoming clear about what moves me. And realising that
I had powers of decision. They are useful messages they really are. That really you have
the power of decision and action is something that a lot of people do feel powerless I
think, they feel unable to actually implement their own decisions. They look outside. AA
is a natural for that kind of personality I suspect. If you want to take charge you take
charge. But AA doesn’t encourage you to take charge of your life.

I- And when you talk about what moves you?

P-Where do I want to be when I am 75 and stuff you know what do I want to have done
by then? I know very well I won’t have done it. [laughs] You know, what makes life
rewarding and delicious for me. Understand those things clearly. And none of them
include going to AA meetings.

I-Is there anything you would like to add before we finish?

P-A random walk in an important area of my life! Thank you for listening patiently and
prompting me

I-Thank you
Appendix 7
Counseling and Values submission Guidelines
Guidelines for Authors

Counseling and Values is a professional journal of theory, research, and informed opinion concerned with the relationships among counseling, ethics, philosophy, psychology, religion, social values, and spirituality. Its mission is to promote free intellectual inquiry across these domains. Its vision is to attract a diverse readership reflective of a growing diversity in the membership of ASERVIC and to effect change leading to the continuing growth and development of a more genuinely civil society. Manuscripts must be submitted in accordance with the guidelines that follow. Manuscripts that do not meet these specifications will be returned to the authors before any review for publication formally takes place.

Articles
- Manuscripts should be well organized and concise so that the development of ideas is clear. Avoid dull, clichéd writing and use of jargon.
- Authors are required to submit a disk of the current revised copy in MS Word.
- Provide an abstract of the article of approximately 100 words.
- Do not use footnotes. Most footnote material can be incorporated into the body of the manuscript.
- Manuscripts are typically between 8 and 20 pages, typewritten, and double-spaced. This does not include title page, abstract, and references.
- Double-space all material, including direct quotations and references.
- Authors' names, positions, and places of employment should appear only on the title page. Authors' names should not appear on the manuscript.
- Manuscript style is that of the fifth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (available from APA, 750 First St. N.E., Washington, DC 20002-4242). All items cited in articles should be listed as references. Reference notes are not used. Provide page numbers for direct quotations.
- Authors should not submit more than three tables or two figures with each manuscript. Include only essential data and combine tables where possible. Tables are to be typed on separate pages. Figures (graphs, illustrations, line drawings) should be supplied as camera-ready art (prepared by a commercial artist). Figure captions should be attached to the art and will be set in the appropriate type.
- Authors should reduce bias in language against persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic group, disability, or age by referring to the guidelines in the fifth edition of the APA Publication Manual.
- Manuscripts must be submitted in the original and two clear copies. If you wish to have your manuscript returned, you must include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.
- Never submit material for concurrent consideration by another periodical. Manuscripts that meet the guidelines and are appropriate for the focus of the journal are ordinarily submitted to a blind review by the Editorial Board members. Two or 3 months may elapse between acknowledgment of receipt of a manuscript and notification of its disposition. After publication of an article, each author receives a copy of the journal.

Forum
- Forum articles will be published in concert with preannounced special topic(s) subject headings. Please consult ACA's newspaper Counseling Today for special topic(s) to be addressed in future issues.
- Reactions to editorials, articles, and other Forum subjects will be considered for publication in this section as space is available. The editor reserves the right to edit and abridge responses published as reactions to original articles.
- All other guidelines for articles apply to Forum.

Issues and Insights
- Philosophical and practical applications of first person narratives that are written in accordance with APA Publication Manual standards for publication will be featured.
- Manuscripts must be clearly referenced and represent an author's attempt to offer fresh information.
- "New" counseling interventions and accompanying "techniques that work" will be considered for publication in this section.
- All other guidelines for articles apply to Issues and Insights.

Send all manuscripts and correspondence to the Editor:
Christopher A. Sink, Professor and Chair, Department of School Counseling, School of Education, Seattle Pacific University, 3307 3rd Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119. Telephone: 206-281-2453, FAX: 206-281-2756, e-mail: csink@spu.edu
Appendix 8
Table of Participant Themes
8.1 Participant one

*Charlie*

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<th><strong>Identity and Narrative as Therapist</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>A natural analytic</td>
<td>“As an only child again you have that sort of grandiosity that goes with that, you end up needless and wantless really so you can’t identify wants”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status and narrative as therapist/consultant</td>
<td>“I work as a consultant for [], with a speciality in drugs and alcohol issues of speciality and I work as a consultant in that field. I do lots of other stuff around expert witness provisions for [inaudible] cases as well, giving opinions about prognosis, diagnosis and likely support necessary for parents who are generally up for adoption or for any care or whatever. So I do that. I am a consultant for a treatment centre and I provide, I do some training and lecturing and stuff as well at different places”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambivalence-career vs energy/still something to prove?</td>
<td>“The thing I’ve got about myself is, suddenly I am getting to live a life which was, up to the age of 41 wiped out by booze and drugs so I am doing now what people would be doing by the age of 30 and I am 60 so I am 30 years behind. But I don’t have the stamina or energy to do it really. And the therapist is saying well why are you bothering? Well I don’t know but the ambition’s creeping in but I haven’t the stamina or energy. Well I’ve got plenty but I don’t know if I can be fucking bothered really.”</td>
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<th><strong>NA as Holding Place: Learning to Connect</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of trust in upbringing</td>
<td>“And it was really about trust. I am an only child, adult child of an alcoholic, who is the adult child of an alcoholic, so there is no trust never, never any trust. And I think that’s really what it was about- a level of trust and faith.”</td>
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Inability to connect/ yearning to connect

“Intellectually and emotionally it was, ‘fucking hell, this is, I’ve been looking for this all my life, that connection’.”

NA providing context/holding place

“Because I needed it and I needed the safety and the security and the …structure, until I could find my own.”

Learning to trust

“I experienced a tremendous, I don’t know the first day of working at a treatment centre feeling accepted- I had never ever experienced that before- [] that I fitted somehow and there were answers. [] Life is not about being isolated or on your own it’s about connecting and being with other people.”

“Well just taking down barriers and letting other things, other influences come in and that was that connection.”

**Freeing myself from the “Gods of my Fathers”**

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<tr>
<th>Anti religion</th>
<th>“I loathed the idea of religion”</th>
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<td>Forcing through his rigidity</td>
<td>“But I had to force myself to read that book every day. And I did that because I had to challenge my rigidity. [] And I was looking I think for some sort of spiritual dimension. Really looking for it, finding it and the only thing I had was what I regarded as something really fundamentalist and was abhorrent really but it worked in the long run because somewhere in there, it’s this thing about you know ‘you grow up with the gods of your fathers or the God of your fathers’ and then you have to find your own. [] I knew what I didn’t believe in but I had no idea what I did believe in. So it was actually finding that somewhere. And that was quite powerful.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Still some attraction of religion?</td>
<td>“I mean there is some beauty in it and some wonderful attraction”</td>
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### Developing Trust in the Process of Life

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<th>Topic</th>
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<td>Process and movement/ no going back</td>
<td>“But for me at the moment I am looking at things differently I am looking at a much deeper therapeutic experience than I would get there so that’s where moving on is going and I think going back is an impossibility. But going back to seeing the same therapist, oh no I would very rarely take clients back because they have moved on and I know they need to go to someone else, they need to broaden their experience.”</td>
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<td>God given flow-something fell into place</td>
<td>“And went straight from there into treatment, it just fitted beautifully I don’t know how, I have no idea how it happened, just one of those things that fell into place. And looking back on it, something makes sense.”</td>
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<td>Moment of clarity</td>
<td>“There was a purity in the loneliness if this makes sense, um because, I wasn’t angry I wasn’t pissed off I wasn’t resentful, I wasn’t anything like that, I was lonely, and I could do something about that and the purity I mean there was a spiritual quality about that, an awareness of myself but it had a context which was something I had never experienced before. It was as I say I didn’t feel desperate, anxious, but just a real sense of loneliness, but being able to do something about it. And also identify the need to do something about it which was more important. So it wasn’t about I want this I want this but I need something. [] It was just one of those things, that sort of moment of clarity.”</td>
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<td>NA as church/guilt at leaving?</td>
<td>“Yah you asked me if I felt uncomfortable or guilty about it. Yes I s’pose to some degree I did because I felt a bit like a hypocrite ‘cos I advocate the policy but I’m not going to church.”</td>
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Some ‘long termers’ have missed spiritual connection

“And I s’pose I find that people who are going long term, there’s... something is missing for them, seriously it’s just that... it’s like going to church I s’pose and its very...they stick with that some sort of narrow structure. Yeah they stick with a narrow interpretation, particularly with AA people. It’s very very very narrow and I find them very irritating.”

The Journey/In the ‘not knowing’

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<th>Having trust, but not needing organised religion</th>
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<td>“I don’t see myself seeking out a religions faith of some sort [] because I don’t think I need it. Um, so I have a spiritual dimension in my life, I have trust I have a faith that [] I am connected.”</td>
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<th>Not having to have answers yet still searching</th>
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<td>“But yeah I don’t know, there is something else yes and that something is ‘I don’t know’ and I don’t need to know, it’s there, I have a...I s’pose I have a belief in life and the process. I am not really sure, I can’t categorize it in that way but the point is I don’t need to.”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambivalence</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Yes and I am at peace with that and its again don’t look for too many answers but yet at the same time its not just a behavioral or a cognitive shift I am looking for I am looking for something a bit more...am I? No I am being a fucking intellectual snob with this really! ...Yeah it is simple and it does it frees me up intellectually in an immense amount of ways. Because I can either search or not search but at the same time have a basis of trust and faith.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
8.2 Participant 2

*Harry*

**Ambition and Drive**

| Drive for ambition and academia | “Yes my um family’s…my parents were both high achievers, academics, my father was a professor. [] Without actually hammering the message home the message got into your head that excelling academically was what it required and I never felt…[] I always suspected that that drive to be a little better than I felt I could be was always something I couldn’t fulfil. Always expectations.” |

**Group**

| Importance of the group- | “Some people need groups or find them a really really important part of their life and I’m one of them I guess.” |

**Terror of leaving AA**

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<th>Terror</th>
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<td>[also in ‘Learning to think for self, p.184]</td>
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<td>[whispers for effect] “Frightened as hell! You know I think I mentioned my concern about leaving the groups, and one of the reasons I went to [alternative recovery programme] was I wanted some group support.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Preparation to leave</th>
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<td>“I found that very worrying, the idea of ducking out of AA, so what I did was to get some of the journal references that are cited in Cult or Cure, and I got them out of the British Library and read them and thought about them and decided that probably he you know his propositions were sound and that you didn’t need to be dependent you didn’t need to let external concepts rule your life. It’s been so long since I read it now, it seems absolutely ages, but I decided that you know it was time to move on. And what I actually did was to shop around to see the various things that were available and I decided that the [alternative recovery programme] recovery route looked pretty interesting.”</td>
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### Crisis Points

**Wife’s ultimatum**

“She told me this, I didn’t remember it. She said to me you either sort yourself out or I’m away with the children. And I woke up in the morning and phoned AA basically. I realised that I was damaging myself I realised that my marriage was going downhill very rapidly. And my health was suffering. So I toddled along to AA.”

**Assault on daughter/AA not enough**

“And went out and confronted her and we ended up with me putting my hands around her throat just outside this house. I was so angry I was unbelievably angry. Because I realised that this, you know outraged emotional violent response showed me that something was really wrong in my head still. You know I might go to AA and go through the motions but it wasn’t changing the important parts of my behaviour.”

**Friend suggested counsellor**

“I stayed with some Quaker friends and [friend] – he did counselling quite locally he’s a lovely man- and I asked him if he knew anyone who could help me sort this out and he sent me along to a counsellor who was his supervisor and she was good actually. I don’t know what approach she followed but she certainly helped me get to grips with looking at my emotions and how I responded and and become rather easier to live with I think.”

**Ending counselling/taking charge/solar plexus moment**

“I was talking about um an argument between myself and [wife] and it was an expression of frustration and irritation and anger and this that and the other and he said to me ‘that wasn’t very emotionally mature of you was it?’ And do you know its like someone had punched me in the solar plexus. It really made me stop and say are you in charge of your head or not? And I decided that I was in charge of my head and that I thought that I had probably gone as far with [counsellor] as I was going to. Good though she was.”
Happened upon a book in [foreign country] “Someone there mentioned this vile book he had read called Alcoholics Anonymous Cult or Cure, do you know it? Yes? And I thought this is absolutely terrible, because I was a diligent and adhering member of AA um I thought this is outrageous, you know you are assaulting something that has done so much good [laughs] I was wondering around this [] in [foreign country]- one of the characteristics of investigation is that very often you are twiddling your thumbs for considerable periods of time- I went into [bookshop] in [foreign country]- and I came across this book on the shelf and bought it. [laughs] and made the very grave mistake of reading it and I think it’s a very good book I think its carefully done I think its scholarly it gives references for its assertions, and it really is a demolition job on the philosophy behind AA and I found it quite persuasive.”

Learning to think for self/ Internal vs External Focus

| Dislike of dogma in AA | “The AA approach seems to me now ridiculously dogmatic and pushy. You know all the things which say ‘you will think this’ or ‘you will do it like this.’” |
| Learning to think for self/ internalising locus of control | “I’ve had 15 years of being told the group is all, you know the programme is critical you must belong to the group. Hearing this 3 or 4 times a week if you’re reciting it and repeating it, the, the concept is instilled in your head on autoplay almost um...[] I was frightened when I took that decision.” “A lot of people do feel powerless [] They look outside. AA is a natural for that kind of personality I suspect.” |
| Quakers as non dogmatic | “You have to think things through for your self. It is not spoon fed to you. [] It’s not easy.” “The absence of dogma in Friends but the insistence that what you are talking about and thinking about and doing is important stuff those are good for me. It’s something you have to work out for yourself. ” |
| Some tension v internal and external pulls | “Because I have a terrible tendency to take on about 50% more than I ought to for my own mental and physical health.”
“I’m bullshitting really I love it, I like doing it, I like helping move things forward efficiently but it does take a lot of time and energy. But I’m not getting into things that probably would be better for me spiritually. [] And it takes a lot of energy. I mean growth takes energy doesn’t it?” |
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<tr>
<td>Terror (at leaving AA) [also in ‘Terror of leaving AA’ p.181]</td>
<td>[whispers for effect] “Frightened as hell! You know I think I mentioned my concern about leaving the groups, and one of the reasons I went to [alternative recovery programme] was I wanted some group support.”</td>
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**Reconnection to Latent Spirituality**

| Previously no awareness of spirituality | “Nil, vacant, nothing going on”, |
| Reconnecting back to self and latent spirituality | “Expressing thoughts that were so like the Quaker approach it really astonished me to realise that these things had been lurking there and that this yearning for a spiritual life had been latent in me”. |
| Natural disposition for spiritual | “I hadn’t been aware of, but I had a natural disposition for. I think I’m not a natural ascetic or cleric or that kind of thing but I think the spiritual aspect of my life is important. And I am trying to live life as a whole which all of it is part of a same pattern, which is one based on a spiritual life, its something which I find very comfortable.” |
| Some tension v internal and external pulls [also in ‘Learning to think for self’ above] | “I’m bullshitting really I love it, I like doing it, I like helping move things forward efficiently but it does take a lot of time and energy. But I’m not getting into things that probably would be better for me spiritually. [] And it takes a lot of energy. I mean growth takes energy doesn’t it?” |
### Crushed Psychologically

| Critical father, crushed psychologically | “Well my parents are both highly intelligent and educated but also highly neurotic. Very critical father and both my mother and father had their own psychological problems so in a sense they were innocent. He would basically try to crush me at various opportunities. He was very critical.” |

### My rigidity

| Embraced programme to obsession | “I embraced the programme more fully than anyone I knew, to the point of obsession.” |
| My rigidity and fundamentalism | “I was a very eager student to the point of pissing a lot of people off. I was a bit of a fundamentalist. But I was also very critical. I was good at finding fault with the way other people were doing it.” |
| Using it to abuse myself | “I continued to abuse myself psychologically by forcing the NA programme on myself.”
“When I did the steps that were concerned with character defects, this would be my main concern for several years, my character defects, and yet I was somebody who had been psychologically crushed, that wasn’t a healthy focus”. |
| Finding most rigid sponsor | “Had a few false starts with sponsors before I found one who was kind of rigid enough and fundamentalist enough to satisfy my desire for ‘the real thing’.” |
### AA kick started then blocked spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encouraged viewing existence as spiritual</th>
<th>“Partly it was positive in encouraging me to see my existence in terms of a spiritual mechanism operating.”</th>
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</table>
| Is not spiritual/ a massive contradiction | “So AA is a huge contradiction really. It talks about spirituality but it isn’t all that spiritual it is actually anti spiritual in many ways.”
“Also AA members are very powerful, undeservedly so in the addictions field and so they act as AA members but without saying so. In various positions to stop more enlightened approaches being utilised. So AA in that form is a major force for evil by stopping more effective and less harmful methods being established.” |
| Using it to abuse myself | “When I did the steps that were concerned with character defects, this would be my main concern for several years, my character defects, and yet I was somebody who had been psychologically crushed, that wasn’t a healthy focus” |
| Changing perceptions of sponsor/ not spiritual | “Basically the man who was my sponsor was generally considered and for a long time by me as well, as quote unquote ‘a spiritual giant’. And he himself considered that he, quote, ‘knew a lot about the programme’. But during that conversation I saw him as a very [pause] non spiritual person lacking almost any understanding at all. And he was parroting this quite offensive philosophy in a very kind of critical and shaming way about me.” |

### Illness as shifting consciousness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Viewing self in different light</th>
<th>“Something changed in my outlook. I started to see myself in a slightly different light. [] Somehow getting ill caused me to suddenly click onto the reality of my childhood”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing means of easing up</td>
<td>“Maybe I can ease off a bit’. And I did. And I noticed very quickly that the less I did the better I felt. [] I would still do the stuff but just … do it if it was appropriate and meaningful”.</td>
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</table>
### Psychological Knowledge, Books and Intellect

| Learning about psychological concepts | “Before I had lost the ability to get out and travel at all I had bought a book called the Serenity Principle by Joe Bailey. This was the addiction book written in a new paradigm which was originally called neo cognitive psychology and is now calling itself health realisation. And for anyone into psychology it is very powerful. It seeks to observe rather than create anything. Because it went against the 12 Step grain I just put it on the shelf. After I became housebound I thought oh I remember and then I got the book and I thought I’m ready to read it now and it made a huge impact and I started to understand all sorts of things about myself addiction, other people; just vast amounts of things clicked into place.” |
| New theories/psychology of mind | “Psychology of mind or health realisation as it now calls itself I believe considers itself to be a modern branch of psychology but it also has a spiritual component. One of its major contributors, there is a man called Sydney Banks who is a theosophist which is a religiously slanted philosopher or I believe.” |

### Breaking the Spell

| Breaking the spell/waking up to reality | “I was- enchanted makes it sound pleasant- and it wasn’t. But I was under a spell that I was somehow convinced that my opinions my own knowing my own sense my own thinking was just useless”. “When I got ill it all kind of ...my rigid ideas started to soften basically. And so that was the very beginning of the spell undoing itself but it took a while. Basically the spell was that I didn’t trust, that I couldn’t trust, that I couldn’t rely on my own thinking, my own feelings []”. |
| Trust in self | “The spell had broken in the sense that suddenly I knew that I trusted” |
| Esoteric interests/healing self | I do I suppose believe that there is more to the functioning of the world and the universe than is immediately apparent. Well most intelligent scientists would agree but that’s not what I mean. There is some research being done, there is a book that’s been published called the Field which seems to describe- I haven’t actually read it I’ve got it on the shelf its one of those books that I should be reading. But it attempts to describe certain situations where things happen that appear to defy traditional scientific explanation but nevertheless are observable. [] There are books written currently,...they use words like manifestation and I am currently very interested in the role of thought as it creates or influences reality. |
| Connection through helping others | “So I do voluntary work for a different organisation that has a completely different approach and I actually find that this brings a great deal of satisfaction and dare I say it meaning to my life. Because of the limitations of my life and my existence due to the health problems it’s great to have something like that to do and thanks to the internet it makes it possible for even somebody that can’t get out much. So what I have done is basically the helping others bit for well about 10 years now but using a modern approach. And so in a sense that’s a spiritual activity.” |

Abstract

This research studies the life story of a former alcoholic through means of an individual case study. It explores the effect that alcoholism and subsequent recovery has had upon his life, especially in terms of psychological and spiritual development. A series of interviews were conducted, including a final feedback session once the participant had read the analysis. The interview transcripts were analysed using narrative analysis and informed by alchemical processes, particularly as described by Edinger (1994) and Miller and Miller (1994). The interviewing process itself served to enrich understanding of the participant as it appeared to parallel a particular challenge for him in terms of the balancing of opposites.

Research Paper submitted to the Transpersonal Psychology Review

Keywords: alchemy; former alcoholic; narrative; psychological development; spiritual development

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Introduction

The link between alcoholism and spirituality has long been acknowledged (Glasser, 1984; Grof, 1993; Peck, 1993). Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), whose principles underpin a large proportion of treatment programmes (Bradley, 1988; Fiorentine, 1999), holds that alcoholism is a spiritual malady, and considers that nothing less than a 'spiritual awakening' is necessary for recovery. Jung, quoted in the AA literature, refers to alcoholism as being "an equivalent, on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God." (AA, 1988, p.280). Grof (1993), as a former alcoholic, speaks of her "unspecific craving for most of my life" (p.52), and considers alcoholism as representing "a deep thirst for our own wholeness, our divine source, or God" (ibid). While it would be unwise to claim an underlying spiritual dimension to all instances of alcoholism, the hypothesised link appears frequently in literature on alcoholism, and consistently in the AA literature. Further, there is a substantial amount of evidence indicating that the spiritual dimension plays a particularly important role in recovery from substance addiction (Bowden, 1998; Brooks & Clifford, 2000; Miller, 1998; Swora, 2004; Warfield & Goldstein, 1996).

It has been suggested that the medieval model of alchemy can be a metaphor for psychological and spiritual progress. At its simplest level, alchemy is concerned with producing the 'philosopher's stone' which enables the 'Prima Materia' (or base metal such as lead) to be transformed into gold. Numerous writers have linked the processes of alchemical transformation to a spiritual path of development (Hauk, 1999; Jung, 1963; Miller & Miller, 1994; von Franz, 1980). Jung in particular considered the process of alchemy to be a possible mirror of the person's journey towards 'individuation' (the attainment of conscious wholeness or selfhood). The 'Prima Materia' is taken to be symbolic of the person in 'raw state' or their unconscious, as yet unexplored. The transmutation of this substance into gold is taken as an analogy for the path of progress towards enlightenment or spiritual transformation. This progress is known as the 'Great Work' and is a slow process involving much work and dedication.
The alchemical domain tends to be rich in symbolism, imagery and complexity, with no agreement in terms of the number of possible processes or the relative order of the journey towards the ‘Ultima Materia’ (the “fully developed and mature Man or Woman”, Miller & Miller, 1994, p.211). Edinger (1994) chooses seven different processes and holds that “coniunctio is the culmination of the opus” (p.211) but also states that “the sequence of operations [...] does not seem to be psychologically significant. Any operation may be the initiating one, and the others may follow in any order” (p.17). Miller and Miller (1994) base their work around 17 engravings from the Book of Lambsprinck, (an alchemical text written by a 16th century Christian Kabbalist) outlining the variety of different processes depicted. For the purposes of this research, the work of Edinger (1994) and Miller and Miller (1994) has been most heavily utilised.

Although there is no common agreement for the order of the specific processes involved, there does however appear to be a sense that the Work involves a process of working through the four colour stages of ‘nigredo’ (blackness), ‘albedo’ (whitening), ‘citrinas’ (yellowing) and ‘rubedo’ (reddening). The nigredo stage is related to the purification of the confused matter of the unconscious, which can also be experienced as a type of spiritual death. The albedo is a cleansing of the matter and the beginning of a reunion with the soul. The citrinas marks the beginning of the Greater Work and there can be another nigredo but at a purer level as the person begins to move into their spirit. The final stage involves a marriage of spirit and matter, as if uniting heaven and earth (taken from Hamilton, 1985; Martin, 2001).

The overall aims of this research are to explore the effect that alcoholism and subsequent recovery might have had upon a person’s life, especially in terms of their psychological and spiritual development. What was the sense that they made out of their alcoholism and how might it have affected their relationship with themselves, others and the Divine? This research also explores whether an understanding of alchemical processes might also contribute to our understanding of this person’s journey.

The existence of the Divine is a core assumption in this research. In monotheistic faiths the ‘Divine’ may refer to the Supreme Being or entity that is central to the given faith, such as Yahweh, Allah or Jehova. It may further refer to a divine force or power (Wikipedia, 2007). As an adjective ‘divine’ is defined,
This subject area is of fundamental relevance to the field of counselling psychology. It concerns the experience of change and growth that might occur for a person, including the challenges and struggles, as well as the achievements. It is concerned with a person’s development in all respects, spiritual, psychological and inter-relational. This is completely attuned to our work as psychologists: a greater understanding of the challenges that a person has undergone can only serve to enrich our understanding of our clients and the ways in which we might help them move towards a life freer of internal conflicts.

Method

Design
A single case study method was used within this research. This took a life story approach (McAdams, 1993; Murray, 2003), looking at the person’s experience over the course of their life thus far. The subject matter of this research is “focussed on the particular and the individual” (Smith, Harre & Langenhove, 1995, p.59). The case study approach is needed in order to provide a sufficiently rich and detailed understanding of the sometimes complex processes that a person might experience during their life. Aveline (2005) argues that “the capacity of [clinical] case studies to communicate complex ideas and processes is unequalled” (p.149). Further, the use of a single case is suggested to be appropriate and necessary, in order to more fully understand the person’s experience, and also to enable an adequate recounting of this understanding. The dedicated attention to one individual’s life experience can help provide a fuller sense of the rich and interrelated aspects of their story. In addition, not only is the idiographic case study method a highly appropriate one for this research, Smith et al further feel that “this domain has been grossly neglected in mainstream psychology” (1995, p.59), so its use might also serve to contribute to its currency as a viable method within research.

amongst other things, as “belonging to or proceeding from a god: holy” (Chambers, 1977). In this study, the Divine is considered to be either an entity or a power which is godlike, mysterious, spiritual, and ineffable: something greater or beyond ourselves in the physical world.
Sample and Recruitment

Three participants were initially identified, two male and one female, aged between 30-55 years. All were former alcoholics who now no longer drank. They were recruited through contacts in the drug and alcohol field, through contacts of a Quaker organisation, and from a spiritual development site on the internet.

Procedure

Two key informants in the transpersonal and alchemical fields were consulted prior to this research in order to provide a deeper understanding of these subject areas. The data collection procedure involved four stages: a written story, two interviews lasting approximately two hours and a final feedback interview once the participant had read a draft analysis of his story. After obtaining ethical approval (Appendix 1) the participants were given information sheets (Appendix 2) and consent forms (Appendix 3). They were asked to write a brief story of their lives and were given only broad guidelines for the way in which to do this (Appendix 4). The guidelines utilised some of the suggestions that Crossley (forthcoming) uses in her exploration of personal narratives, which she herself has developed from McAdams’ (1993) autobiographical method of exploration. Throughout the interviews, the intention was to allow their own narratives to emerge from what was important to them, rather than being guided too strongly from the researcher’s interest. After providing the written narrative, the participants were interviewed and audio-taped. Individualised interview schedules were written based upon their unique narratives and also utilising some of Crossley’s (forthcoming) guidelines. One of the interviews was used as a pilot interview which indicated a minor change to the broad outline. Three participants were taken through the first two stages of the procedure. Care was taken to monitor the emotional state of the participants during and after the interviews. Subsequently the decision was made to continue with one remaining participant, based upon richness of narrative, psychological and spiritual mindedness, and perceived robustness of character. The tape of this participant was transcribed verbatim, and a second interview schedule was written, based upon outstanding questions and avenues not yet fully explored (see Appendix 5 for both interview schedules). This second interview was also transcribed verbatim. The final interview was conducted as a
feedback session after the participant had read the analysis of his story.

**Analytic Strategy**

**Epistemology**

As narrative is seen to be a means whereby we can make sense of our lived experience (Ricoeur, 1985), narrative analysis was felt to be an appropriate method for this study. The concept of narrative fits well with the task that was set for the participants, which was in effect to tell the story of their life thus far. Central to the concern of narrative analysis is the idea of self and identity and the ways in which a person comes to explore and understand who they are in relation to the world. The narrative approach places particular emphasis upon the role that language plays in constructing identity, and a number of narrative analytic methods focus upon the use of language and the structures through which narrators create their personal accounts (for example, Labov’s (1972) structural categories, Bell’s (1988) specific and detailed study of linguistics and Gee’s (1985) analysis in terms of poetic stanzas). Crossley (2000) considers that its focus upon linguistic and cultural structures means that narrative psychology “can be classified as broadly social constructionist” (2000, p.527). However whilst embracing its social constructionist underpinnings, she also argues for the inclusion of more realist aspects within narrative psychology in order to incorporate the “phenomenological and experiential realities” (ibid) of a person. She thus takes a decidedly critical realist position and this is the stance that this research follows. Crossley likens her epistemology to that of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) developed by Jonathan Smith (1996). Thus as well as “a commitment to the importance of language” (Crossley, forthcoming) there is also an emphasis upon the person’s own experience as it is lived and “an assumption of a chain of connection between language and the experiencing self” (Crossley forthcoming). So as well as acknowledging the part that language can play in conveying experience, it also operates under the realist assumptions that there is an objective knowable world of experience that can be understood by others (Augoustinos & Walker 1995). It does not then, suggest that the ways in which a person

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1Crossley herself actually terms her position (and IPA’s) a ‘realist epistemology’ but as this stance endeavours to encapsulate both realist and social constructionist elements, I feel that the term ‘critical realist’ more precisely conveys the epistemological orientation.
has come to terms with, or made sense of their life and the world may not also be part of a wider universal truth. The very use of the alchemical idea in this research demonstrates the researcher’s assumption that there is a sense of spiritual or universal truth that underpins our lives.

IPA would also have been appropriate for this study as it examines the phenomena of the person’s life and experience and attempts to gain an “insider’s perspective” (Conrad, 1987) of their experience. However the narrative method was chosen as it fits well with the idea of the life story approach and the changing experiences that the person may have had. Ultimately it was intended that this method would contribute to an understanding of the ways in which they have experienced their ‘story’ over time, how they have been able to make sense of aspects such as their alcoholism and how their sense of self has changed over time.

This research was also informed by transpersonal research methods of qualitative enquiry (as outlined by Braud & Anderson, 1998) in that the researcher was open to allow the nature of the interviews and interview schedules to emerge from the data as presented, and to respond to intuitive experiences when working with the material (Anderson, 1998). The stance was to regard the participants as ‘co researchers’ (Braud, 1998) rather than interviewees and so interpretations were shared along the way and in a final session the participant was encouraged to talk about his experience and his view of the analysis.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

The analysis in this research broadly followed Crossley’s (2000; forthcoming) method, based upon McAdams’ (1993) autobiographical method of exploration and analysis. Thus the analysis was focussed around identifying central concepts of narrative tone, imagery and themes.

Specifically, I read the transcripts a number of times and noted thoughts occurring and dominant themes to emerge, writing notes on the transcripts. Subsequently I began to think about how the participant had arranged his story, which tended to have a
chronological bias, and used this as a means of laying out the material. I then linked this with any bigger themes and processes emerging and merged these with the temporal events so that there were broadly around ten ‘chapters’ in his life. These chapters were used as headings for the analysis tables. The tables were used to look in detail at a number of different issues or events in terms of theme, imagery and tone also with a section for my personal thoughts. An example of the tables can be found in Appendix 8.

Riessman (1993) asserts that we “do not have direct access to another’s experience” (p.8) and so clearly the research process is one in which the participant’s account of their experience and the researcher’s interpretation will impact upon the final product. Certainly the themes and processes that I felt to be emerging have my personal biases within them, so that the chapter headings referred to above are a mix of temporal events, the participant’s own words, and processes that I felt were occurring. It needs to be borne in mind that I am a counselling psychologist in my third year of training, with a particular interest in psychodynamic processes and the spiritual dimension of life. I have woven my personal views and reflections within the main body of this research (placed within square brackets) in an effort to promote transparency.

As regards the application of a theoretical model within the analysis, there are differing views within narrative research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) are wary of applying a structure through which to view a person’s story, as they feel that this can detract from the unique unfolding of an individual’s story. However, they also note the drive from ‘formalistic traditions’ to apply a theory to narrative enquiry. Broader frameworks for understanding are certainly used by researchers within the narrative domain (eg Czarniawska, 1997; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988) and it is suggested here that there is also place for a ‘metanarrative’ (Omer & Strenger, 1992, cited in McLeod, 1997) or ‘bigger picture’ view of the overall story. Thus the individual’s story and way in which it was conveyed were the fundamental foci of attention in the analysis but I have also made an attempt at exploring whether this might be integrated with components of the alchemical model as a useful addition to our understanding of this person’s progress.
Yardley's (2000) research evaluation criteria can be used as guidelines to evaluate the research. Interpretations were checked by an independent researcher and those that were considered too speculative were removed. Main interpretations are substantiated by quotations so that the relevance of the observation can be assessed by the reader.

**Analysis**

The following analysis of Michael's story endeavours to weave temporal elements and key themes together throughout the narrative where possible, so that there is a sense of his unfolding journey. Due to space restrictions, not all of the possible phases or sections have been included, although the most pertinent aspects are addressed.

**Background**

Michael is in his thirties and has recently trained as a counsellor, working part time in his own practice and part time in his job as an insurance broker. He is the eldest of four siblings and was brought up by Irish parents living in England.

**Childhood- Losing Myself**

On a number of occasions, Michael alluded to his 'true nature' as a child as free, spontaneous, happy and inquisitive. There was however, also a sense of sadness and loss in his narrative as he felt that his natural self had been 'kicked out of him' through the abuses of his upbringing, in terms of culture, family, school and society. He talked about how, due to conflicting external demands, he had started to lose connection with his true self and that this was really where his confusion began. He would often talk about his part in violence, for example, as feeling not 'natural' or not 'feeling right':

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“I lost who I was when I was a small child. [That] me and me went separate ways. And for years and for year and for years um I had lost total, um lost myself totally” (1)  
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12In the quotations, information within square brackets is used for clarification, empty square brackets indicate omitted material, and three dots...indicate a pause or hesitancy. The number one (1) indicates a
"I felt like as a small child I was very inquisitive, I felt I was very curious, I felt very in tune with the world to tell you the truth no matter all the things that I got up to I don’t think I ever felt natural, although I was going to say ‘very good at it’ but it never ever felt um um good."(1)

Michael’s descriptions of his early home environment conveyed a place of contradictory extremes, which left him confused and conflicted internally. His written story itself begins with an experience of these extremes:

“I feel that although very scary and sometimes brutal, I had a very loving home and I always felt totally loved by both parents. I was never cold or hungry.” (w/s)

Throughout his story there was a sense of Michael’s attempts to be fair when talking about his parents, particularly his father. As the above quotation demonstrates, his sense of loyalty towards them could sometimes result in almost contradictory statements which could leave the listener themselves a little confused and wondering how he really felt. (This might also link to an aspect of ‘hiddenness’, which is a key theme to emerge from this story and is outlined subsequently).

Michael explained that in his home, emotions other than overt happiness were unacceptable, although, paradoxically, this might be expressed to him through anger and shouting, even violence. He thus felt that there was no outlet to express his less positive emotions.

“…if you ever showed anger as a child you know like hitting out or shouting you would soon be [laughs] in no doubt that it wasn’t allowed, you would be first of all shouted at, screamed at and if that didn’t sort you [laughs] then you would be um slapped or put in fear.”(1)

quote from the first interview, (2) from the second, (3) from the final discussion and (w/s) indicates that it came from his initial written story.
Psychodynamic theory asserts the importance of enabling the child to experience the parent surviving an angry destructive attack from them (Winnicott 1971). If anger is not tolerated or is thrown back with full force at the child, this can disrupt the process of development and integration for the child, leaving them fearful of the power of their negative emotions. Michael has consistently had problems in terms of harnessing his power and controlling his anger throughout his life and I wonder if its roots might be traced back to the family’s response in this respect.

However, it seemed that sport and fighting were the culturally acceptable ways to express anger and aggression, both at which he excelled. Michael described a fight that his father and uncle set up between him at the age of around seven and a boy a couple of years older:

“The bloke was a lot bigger than me and he kept on punching me in the face and they kept saying ‘get up and get him’ so I had to keep on going back and back and back and the boy was too big and he kept throwing me down, [...] um there was the feeling that I had to keep on going and going and going and that the boy, he did say to me ‘I don’t want to, I don’t want to...’ [laughs]. But I had to keep on and on and on until I got the better of him, until there was some kind of stalemate where I had him on the floor [...] it didn’t feel very good, it didn’t feel very natural for me.” (1)

[Each time I read this quotation I feel moved at this little boy trying to do what his father wanted and that at each stage where he repeats the same word three times he is losing ‘more and more and more’ of himself and what was really natural to him, denying his true self, in order to please his father. It feels as if this might have created a deep wound for him and that it might have been a key point at which “me and me went separate ways”]

This provides us with an example of the kind of pressure that Michael felt to conform to his father and cultural mores at the expense of his own nature and authenticity. This might have been a key incident contributing to him conceding his own nature in favour of
violence as "the language of communication" and towards his ultimate path to addiction. Miller and Miller (1994) talk of the importance of "finding the core of the trauma, the original abandonment of soul" (p.100), and link this abandonment to addictions which they see as an attempt to escape these feelings.

Certainly he became set on a course of defending himself through fighting, and of using this as a way of dealing with feelings of vulnerability. It seems that it was much needed in his upbringing as he was bullied at school both by pupils and teachers alike. He recounted how he was beaten by a sportsmaster for fighting-

"I threatened to kill him there and then and was aware how scared I was but also how frightening I could be, I was never touched again at school by a teacher. Every now and again someone would try and bully me and I would dish out a hiding beyond proportion."(w/s)

This quotation also gives a sense of being out of control when he was fighting, as if in this mode he surrendered to primitive urges and was no longer consciously aware of his actions.

Entering the Abyss

When his first love relationship ended in his late teens, Michael was devastated. He had found a relationship where he could be "open, honest and vulnerable" and he experienced the loss of this as further proof that this kind of relating did not work. This was the point at which it seems he turned to alcohol as a "home free from pain". He described his feelings at that time:

"I'm not going to let anybody else in, you know I've learned throughout childhood it's not safe to let anybody in, because your feelings are not allowed, [] like you have opened yourself up to this young girl and she's ripped your heart to bits so you know, get a bit of sense, go to the pub, we have got a mistress here who doesn't, who's going to love you and is going to keep you warm.'"(1)
His language here, as often, is highly emotive, and possibly denotes the extremes of emotions he was feeling. As he notes, alcohol and the pub environment provided a place for him to be ‘himself’ for a time, a kind of freedom from the emotional pain and internal conflicts outlined earlier. The lifestyle of heavy drinking and ‘partying’ also provided other rewards which must have pandered to a young male ego. In his early twenties he recounts:

“I lived the life of Reilly. I also started to get up to all aspects of crime and found a place for my intelligence to prosper. I found the joys of Ecstasy and Cocaine and this was the heyday of my partying for the next five years I felt like a king, I was off my head all the time, I was partying and raving, shagging loads of birds, and was a right boy to all the local gangsters.”

This excerpt from his written story here is dominated by language of bravado and drama. Michael was asked to think of an image that encapsulated himself at this stage. He said:

“It’s a picture of a little cherub who’s got a hammer behind its back. My hair used to be bleached blonde, cherub, so, podgy face that looks very loving and soft but there’s something very dangerous behind. And something hidden away as well. Something not totally on show.”

The theme of ‘hiddenness’ as outlined in this evocative imagery is a key one to emerge for Michael. It may be that this is a result of the internal conflict of having to ‘hide’ his true feelings back in childhood, so that hiding his real self became a way of being for him, becoming unsure what he really felt, what he could show and what he should hide.

Michael met the second ‘love of his life’ when he was 24, and managed to stay ‘clean’ for a time. But when his parents separated two years later, he blamed himself and turned back to alcohol. There was then a rapid descent over the following year, involving suicide attempts, an increase in violence and an angry attack on his father that left his father in hospital. His description of his descent is filled with violent and combative
There is a sense of chaos and being completely out of control. As Michael reflected upon this phase of his life in the second interview, he said that it felt like an ‘abyss’:

“I think it was an abyss of being totally lost. Of um... of... of totally losing oneself and one’s soul even. [] I have picture of floating in space of, and nobody or nothing being around.”(2)

“The feeling is really really sad. It’s a real, like a bereavement I s’pose. And an angry bereavement, [] a real ‘fuck the world’ sort of like, sad and angry at the loss of myself and then I am in this abyss [] a real powerful emotion churning whirlwind kind of place.” (2)

This seems strongly to echo Miller and Miller’s (1994) description of “the alienated soul [which] is sucked down into the abyss of primal unconscious until it reaches the bottom” (p.99). They are referring to the internal conflict within the psyche between spirit and matter, and that childhood traumas and wounds can cut the person off from their own connection with both body and spirit. This can lead to urges to escape the pain of this self abandonment through addictive behaviours.

**Surrender: Reconnecting with Himself and God**

Before turning to help in his late twenties, the tone of his narrative changes from violence to one of quiet desperation and helplessness:
“There were bottles of vodka and I was trying to get over to take the cocaine off the coffee table [] and I fell on the floor, really beautiful house and [rueful laugh] the French doors were open and [] I can remember lying there and crying and saying I don’t want to be here, [] I was totally isolated, crying, alone []. And that was my rock bottom, I think emotionally I was absolutely exhausted, spiritually exhausted there was nothing left in the tank.”(1)

It is as if he had stopped externalising his desperation through fighting others and had finally allowed himself to become present to his inner anguish, culminating in a type of surrender. This fits with the common assertion that a sense of surrender is a precursor to change and transformation (AA, 1939; Brown, 1993; James, 2002; Tiebout, 1944, 1949). This ‘rock bottom’ caused the realisation that he needed to change, and might be seen as a ‘spiritual awakening’ as defined by Gravell (2005)13. This is the point at which he began to seek help from a drug and alcohol programme.

From here on, it appeared that he was set on a course of recovery and, as shall be seen, it might be considered that this involved a process of reconnection to the self that he had left behind as a child. Gravell (2005) has argued that if the first spiritual awakening is followed by work on the self, then this exploration can be interspersed with more spiritual awakenings, shifts in consciousness allowing a deeper level of understanding and relating to oneself and others. This certainly seems to fit with Michael’s experience because as he continued to recount his story, it became apparent that there had been a number of different levels of connecting with himself and with God, through surrendering, which have occurred in the past six years. One of these was in the recovery centre where he realised:

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13 The spiritual awakening is defined as being a shift of some sort in the person’s consciousness, awareness or perception, however subtle or incremental. It may or may not involve the presence of a felt sense [a bodily or emotional experience]. It may or may not involve the individual’s awareness of something divine. These shifts will bring about new meanings and growth. Ultimately this growth will bring the person closer to an awareness of a higher power (Gravell, 2005, p.15). (See ‘Definitions of Spirituality and Awakening in the Literature Review in this Portfolio, p.75.)
“When I really connected [to God] was when I went away to [recovery centre] I am fucked big time here, I thought I need help, I am not going to make it at all without some, well without God’s help. [] The big Michael I had been fighting for years and years, on the outside winning, was pretty much done for, and that this time I had to surrender.” (1)

Two months after leaving the centre, his partner of six and a half years left him and, devastated, he “immediately went on a 72 hr binge and drank & snorted for the whole time” which subsequently brought him to another deeper point of surrender and realisation:

“I was crying and I said ‘I want some guidance, I want some guidance, I don’t know what to do’. And I think that it was at that point, that, if I am really honest that I knew that it had to be a real effort to look at myself, that [before] I was doing a lot of the talk, but the real action wasn’t there.”(2)

In an overall sense, as he looks back now at the different stages that he went through during his journey of recovery, he feels that the process was “about having faith again and regaining faith”.

The Dream of the Knight- Embracing the Shadow
This section concerns a recurring dream that Michael has had all of his life, and how this same dream had a different outcome a few years ago during a time in his life when he felt he was making significant internal changes. Michael explained that he had always “suffered from terrible nightmares” since he was a child, of “this white knight on a white charger in full armour bearing down on me with a lance”. He also added “I don’t know if this was when I started to think I was bad”. However three years ago the same dream had a different outcome. This time another part of him, a “big giant of a man”, came and protected him from the knight. This dream occurred at a time in his life when he had begun to work with a new therapist, and in retrospect he feels that this was the point at which another shift was made and he really became committed to the work. Before, he
admitted, he had “taken quite a pleasure in giving people the runaround, therapists you know?” This is reminiscent again of the cherub with the hammer- appearing to be one thing but hiding something or keeping something back, possibly in this case his more manipulative streak or his covert anger at authority figures.

Michael felt this was a highly significant dream and understood it as:

“Accepting the dark side, knowing the dark side, and it’s ok. And I think that that’s what the dream was about, a real embrace of parts of me coming together, a real big...big giant of a man and a real small, small child, and the joining of that. [] There’s no knight going to run me down because when I am together I am quite big and powerful as a spiritual being.” (1)

Miller and Miller (1994) would consider this whole process to indicate a moving through the nigredo phase of alchemy towards albedo. They say that the nigredo “corresponds to an encounter with the shadow. The ego and the shadow must eventually be reconciled []. The Self, symbolised as a dragon devours itself and dies, only to rise again when the work is perfected” (pp.36/37). In his previous recurring dream, the knight might have represented a part of himself, attempting to destroy or transform his unconscious, unformed elements (perhaps signified as the child). The nigredo represents going into the darkness of the unconscious, and beginning to own the parts of one’s self that were previously denied on the path to individuation (Miller & Miller, 1994). The subsequent moving into albedo can signify “a sort of peace” (von Franz, 1980, p. 222). Overall, it appears that Michael’s deepening points of honesty and surrender indicate a willingness to go more fully into an exploration of his unconscious and embrace what might be termed his shadow elements and disowned parts of himself, in order to bring himself together as a whole (signified within the new dream). Certainly Michael’s experience now is that:
The part of me that stayed hidden or suppressed for many many years is the part of me that allows me to do so many wonderful positive things now in my life. [...]
The aspects that I really shied away from or I kept hidden are very wonderful to me and I embrace them now."(1)

Reconnecting Inside and Outside
Michael is now a number of years into recovery and has used this time to continually explore himself, partly through training to be a counsellor. He appears to have been growing in confidence and building a sense of pride in himself and his achievements as he took the "courage to start my own small private practice". Due to his father's alcoholism and financial difficulties, he has moved back into his parents' home, paying for the mortgage and spending time with his parents.

There was a theme of reconnecting not just to himself and with his spirituality as outlined previously, but also in terms of revisiting his family, his Irish roots and culture and his Catholic religion. This might be about accepting disowned parts both internally and externally. He had, for example, previously completely rejected his Irish roots but more recently had been returning to them to find some positive aspects:

"Recently I have gone back into the Irish literature, because for years I tried to stay away or tried to steer clear of anything Irish, I denied my culture, I was quite angry with it, until I started to, to, there is a whole other part of culture, literature, stuff that uh I can be really proud of, so I have connected with that." (1)

In relation to his alcoholic father too, it seemed that he had previously identified quite strongly with him, but had been in a process of separating and reconciling himself to their differences:

"I want to use the word 'empathise' but [...] 'identification' seems more- my dad's dad was a brutal man." (2)
“I went back and looked at a lot of my father’s upbringing and um I show a lot of compassion for him now.” (2)

“I can also understand exactly how difficult it was for my dad [] who has never had the benefits or the capacity to take psychotherapy [] the only thing that has ever been available for him for his pain is alcohol.” (2)

It appeared that his greater understanding was enabling him to find out more fully who he was, separate from his father and his culture, and to be able to leave behind the parts that were not him or that were not life affirming for him. This feels highly attuned to the alchemical process of ‘separatio’ which is “the letting go of the self-inflicted restraints to our true nature and saving the hidden essence” (Hauk, 1999, p.159). Edinger (1994) describes it as the separation of previously merged and undifferentiated parts. He explains that the immature ego is in a state of ‘participation mystique’ with both inner and outer worlds, in which the “opposites remain unconscious and unseparated” (p.187) and that the ego “must go through a prolonged process of differentiation between subject and object” (p.188) to progress. The process of separation is necessary before the ‘coniunctio'14 phase can occur, which heralds a unification of opposites by finding the middle way between them.

There has been a similar process in relation to his relationship with his religion. Again he had rejected his Catholic roots for a time but was now able to go back to church, knowing that he disagreed with some aspects:

“But there is enough space in a big building for me, for God, and for everyone else that’s there. [] I see God in people every day, and the stuff that people are

14 There is a greater and a lesser coniunctio. Although there are varying opinions on the final stage of alchemy, Edinger (1994) states that the greater coniunctio is the final stage of the alchemical work and is “produced by a union of the purified opposites” (p.215). The lesser coniunctio refers to “the union of opposites that have been imperfectly separated” (Edinger, 1994, p.212). This has occurred because the ego has remained identified with certain of the separated aspects. This will mean that a further separation and a further ‘mortificatio’ (death) will need to occur in order to continue purifying the Self before another stage of coniunctio becomes possible.
doing. It's just that I had to open my eyes to it and that's been quite a long process.” (1)

This sounds very much akin to Genia's (1995) stage of 'reconstructed' or 'growth oriented' (1997) faith, wherein the person finds their own individual relationship with the Divine and does not need the structures of organised religion but is able to be a part of it if they choose.

**Yin Yang: The Quest for Balance**

Michael feels that the symbol that represents his life now is the Yin Yang symbol, which represents balance to him, surrounded by fire which he sees as symbolising passion. He said that a part of his challenge had been in learning to tame the fire from its destructive tendencies, “so it’s not a fire that’s going to burn your house down”. His endeavour was not to quench the fire but to allow it to be there “radiating out like the warmth of the sun”. He currently felt that his aspiration towards balance was so much better controlled than before but also admitted that when he was angry he could be knocked off balance:

“Yeah I think that I am aspiring for balance. I am aspiring for wholeness. I want to see the darker sides to me I want to see the lighter sides, which I have, I have looked at an awful lot.” (2)

“When I am really really angry or rageful [] that’s when I find that I lose balance, but I find that there is enough awareness about me now that I can redress it and it is pretty fast.” (2)

In alchemical terms the union of opposites is of key importance in the journey to the Self. Miller and Miller (1994) explain that “the Middle Way” is the path through the opposites and concepts such as Yin and Yang represent this path or union. This is represented in alchemy through the process of 'coniunctio', which symbolises an internal union or 'sacred marriage'. This union also needs to incorporate both masculine and feminine aspects. For a man this means that he needs to embrace his anima or feminine side in
order to help to tame his wilder, more aggressive urges (Miller & Miller, 1994).

It seems that Michael has struggled to incorporate his tempering anima aspects as a means of controlling his aggressive outbursts. The struggle to balance masculine/feminine, power/vulnerability and sensitivity has been evident throughout his story and is well represented in his symbol of yin yang. He said that it was now feeling “ok to be vulnerable” but that it had taken him “a long while to feel comfortable in that vulnerability”. His current narrative was littered with allusions to softness and sensitivity, such as when he referred to a current male mentor he had:

“There is a real attractiveness of this, of somebody who is soft, sensitive, really strong man and sort of like me looking in a mirror of what I want to aspire to.” (2)

However, in finding the middle way it can often be the case that there is a pendulum swing from one polarity to the other or ‘enantiodromia’ (the psychological description of this oscillation phenomenon within the alchemical framework) before ultimately finding a balance (Miller & Miller, 1994). This manifested within the research process itself. The tone of the written story had much more of the harshness and brutality of his life, recounting a fast paced and chaotic descent into violence and addiction. The first interview featured Michael as thoughtful, softly spoken and gentle-paced and presenting quite a positive picture. The second interview found us going deeper into some of his story. He found it a more challenging session and it indicated a less cut and dried picture but probably more of a realistic sense of his continuing struggles. This may indicate that throughout the process of our interviews there has also been a process of rebalancing, from the harshness of the first written story, through the overtly positive presentation of the first interview and to the more reflective and balanced second (and the third ‘completion’) interviews. I feel that this might be indicative of Michael’s continuing struggle to find balance, and endeavouring to transcend aspects of ‘hiddenness’. I think that this also indicates the importance of this deeper single case study research and how temporal aspects and repeated sessions with a variety of forms of data gathering can give a fuller, richer picture than if it had been a single interview utilising only spoken data.
After reading his fairly extreme and violent account in his written story, I was surprised that the voice I spoke to on the telephone was extremely soft and unassuming. At my first meeting with Michael, I was again surprised to be met with a strong stocky male, with, I felt, quite a powerful presence but juxtaposed with a sweet soft manner. After the tape was turned off at the end of the first interview, Michael wondered whether he had come over as ‘arrogant’ as we had not particularly focussed upon the ‘darker’ aspects of his life: he was concerned lest I might not have received a balanced picture of his story. That night I had dreams related to violence and aggression and for a few days was left uneasy and overwhelmed by these powerful feelings. Whilst there is no way of knowing exactly what this was about, and how much of this was my own material, I wonder if this was a form of redressing the balance: he had been concerned that I had not heard about the ‘darker’ sides so maybe I was given an experience of them. Further, following the second interview I was beset with strong feelings which can best be described as shame. Although, as subsequently outlined, this might have been my own material, the following day he said that the interview had brought up some feelings of regret and shame the previous evening.

It had been my intention to quietly focus upon or meditate upon the data in order to access a different level of listening and better understand the phenomenology of my participant. However this no longer felt necessary after the experiences described above. Anderson (1998) includes the use of dreams as an important source of information in her ‘intuitive inquiry’ approach to transpersonal research and I felt that the dreams and powerful feelings had given me, in an unexpected and unplanned way, what I needed to ‘know’ in order to understand the participant’s world more experientially. This might also fit with Anderson’s (1998) description of ‘trickstering’ being an important part of intuitive research inquiry and how the unexpected and confusing can ultimately provide valuable information.

Reflections
Michael is highly reflective and continually questioning and exploring himself in his efforts to grow and to contribute to others. His story is redemptive or ‘anithetical’
(McAdams, 1993) in that he feels that his difficulties have contributed to or even made possible his learning and growth. It also has some aspects of the 'Drunk-A-Log', the therapeutic form of storytelling within AA (Humphries, 2000). However there is still a tone of sadness, regret and at times bewilderment for him at how painful and difficult it has been. He struggles with the question “did it have to be so painful?” In his typical style of wrestling with and answering his own question, he concludes:

“The cost I paid for what I have got now makes [it] so so precious, [] and I think well if it wasn’t so painful would I appreciate it now, and knowing myself I can honestly say ‘no’ because of my nature [] never to appreciate anything that’s come easy.” (2)

The Final Meeting
A copy of the draft analysis was sent to Michael to read before we met for the last time. Overall he said -

“I thought well that’s not a bad interpretation of you. And it was quite accurate. And there were some points that were really spot on, like the hiddenness which is quite a big thing.” (3)

Rather than insights or revelations, he felt that he had gained an experience of something-

“It feels like something’s been added. It’s not like a thought process, but a feeling process, a feeling of growth.” (3)

[Anderson (1998) contends that the participant and researcher are changed from the research process and for my own part I feel that this has been the case. I have felt quite a connection with Michael and have been surprised at how many similar feelings and parallel processes there have seemed to be. The involvement and transparency required from me was also quite confronting, although I also feel that I have grown through the experience.]
In response to reading my ethical concerns that we were straying into the area of quasi counselling (see ‘Value and Limitations of Study’) he found himself feeling quite angry as “I never saw it as counselling or therapy” and felt that, after the difficulties he had surmounted in his life he didn’t require “looking after” by me.

[I was surprised that he felt so strongly about this. Alert to aspects of ‘hiddenness’, I wondered if there were other things he had felt angry about and not shared. I also wondered if this reflected some ambivalence about being so open and vulnerable with a woman.]

Finally, he said that he felt that this final session had ensured that “the whole process feels whole or complete.” I suggest that this indicates the importance of a final interview to enable a respectful completion or “honourable closure” (Anderson, 1998) of the research process.

**Overview**

This narrative analytic account of Michael’s life has taken us on a journey from his early childhood loss of himself through to his descent into the ‘abyss’, exacerbated through alcohol and drugs, until he finally reached a point of spiritual exhaustion and ‘surrender’. It appears that the surrender heralded a form of ‘spiritual awakening’ (Gravell, 2005) and the beginnings of a return to himself, to God and to others. Thereafter he seems to have experienced a number of different points of surrender and reconnection at deeper levels as he began to accept himself and embrace his darker or ‘shadow’ aspects. Over time he has also revisited his relationship with his culture, his father and his religion with a new kind of acceptance. There appears to have been an ongoing struggle in terms of the balance of opposites, or what might be seen in alchemical terms as a striving for ‘coniunctio’. This is especially in terms of his more masculine/animus/ power aspects and his feminine/anima/ softer more vulnerable parts. This struggle for balance was also played out during the course of our interviews as a kind of parallel process, swinging from one extreme to another and ending with a more balanced recounting of his story. To enrich
our understanding of his narrative, the alchemical processes of nigredo/albedo, separatio, and coniunctio have been considered as possibly occurring. In alchemical terms we have witnessed one man’s commitment and dedication to his ‘Great Work’, attempting to transform the ‘Prima Materia’ of his unexplored unconscious into ‘gold’ through bringing greater awareness and understanding to his unconscious processes.

Value and Limitations of Study

The use of a single case study utilising repeated interviews has enabled a detailed and prolonged engagement with the participant’s material and thus has contributed to the commitment and rigour of the study (Yardley, 2000). The process of repeated interviews over time has been especially important as it served to parallel a particular struggle for this participant and thus helped to enrich our experience and understanding of this aspect of his nature. The use of the idiographic design and narrative analytic method fit well with the research question concerning one person’s life story and thus helped to promote a more coherent study (Yardley, 2000). Further, I would also suggest that the use of the alchemical model worked well as a ‘lens’ through which to view the progress of the participant.

The research process was experienced by both researcher and participant alike as challenging and requiring a good degree of insight and self reflection. The findings of this study thus relate to one unique, highly motivated and insightful individual and cannot necessarily be generalised to the wider population. However, the idiographic method can help to generate further hypotheses to be tested by other methods so a study such as this can be the ‘first cut’ at a broader enquiry (Al Rubaie, 2002). Further, the idiographic approach is considered by some to be representative of universal themes. Anderson and Braud (1998) maintain that “the themes and variations of individual lives do reflect, mirror, and instantiate more general universal principles and laws” and that “the universal becomes known through the deep and intensive study of the particular” (p.240). Likewise, Edinger (1994) contends that “the realisation of the individual as the whole world” (p.9) is important for us to remember in our work with clients. Finally, there can
also be a sense of shared understanding through such rich descriptions of human experience, and thus Anderson (1998) states that “speaking our personal truths [] transcends our sense of separateness” (p. 75) and helps unite us in a common humanity.

[During this research project I endeavoured to be sensitive to socio-cultural and contextual issues (Yardley, 2000) such as the fact that this male participant was talking about intimate and vulnerable issues to a woman (especially as some of his material was related to vulnerability). I also attempted to be as open and transparent with Michael as I could, and I hope that the experience of the process will have been a useful and healing one for him (Braud, 1998). However, after the first interview, I began to become quite concerned about the ethics of this work in terms of what a participant might expect from the final report. The main issue that gave me concern was in terms of the interpretative aspects of the analysis. How ethical was it, I began to feel, to dissect his narrative and make interpretations of his experience? Crossley (forthcoming) refers to a similar dilemma when she raises the issue of respecting the integrity of the participants view whilst at the same time analysing their narrative. Due to this dilemma, I made the second interview far more interpretative in style, sharing my hypotheses and questions with him so that it could become much more of a shared process. (Perhaps too, I was also quite conscious of the ‘hiddenness’ aspects of Michael’s story and I wanted to work quite hard at ensuring the process between us was transparent). Partly because of this, the interview had a quasi clinical tone in keeping with the ideas of Braud (1998). However, this too caused me some concern, as I felt that Michael had not explicitly agreed to a quasi counselling session but to a research interview, and wondered what right did I have to ask him to ‘work’ so hard in our session and to look again at his material. The fact that he subsequently said he had found it quite challenging added to my unease and I found myself beset with feelings of shame that night (as previously discussed). This has caused me to feel that, ethically, case study participants should be informed more explicitly at the outset about the type of analysis and interpretation that will occur and be shown an example of the type of report that might be written.]
Implications for Counselling Psychology

The style of the single case study used in this research is highly attuned to our one to one work with clients, and of course clinical case studies contribute widely to our learnings (Aveline, 2005). I thus feel that we can equally learn from research case studies that provide us with rich and detailed accounts of a person’s struggles and achievements.

[As this research involved a single case study and also utilised more transpersonal methods, it can lead one to question where the boundaries between research and therapy might lie. Certainly judging by Michael’s response to my self reflections, it was apparent that he did not want me to stray into the territory of counselling. However, Rowan (2001) feels that psychotherapy can be considered a research process, and as clients are involved in the shared understanding of their lives within a counselling session, do the client and therapist become ‘coresearchers’ together?]

I would suggest that the use of the alchemical model in particular can be a useful tool for counselling psychologists in our work with clients. Knowledge of the processes involved in alchemy can provide us with a frame for understanding powerful and distressing processes that clients might be experiencing and confronting. Henderson and Sherwood (2003) maintain that alchemy can help us in our endeavour to “translate an internal problem that would be hopelessly obscure and confusing into one we can interact with and reflect upon” (p.2). This is echoed by Edinger (1994) who states- “what makes alchemy so valuable for psychotherapy is that its images concretise the experiences of transformation that one undergoes in psychotherapy” (p.2). Understanding that their experience is a part of a universal and identified process might thus help a person as they traverse new internal territory. In this way alchemy can help serve as a type of container or ‘temenos’ (Jung cited in Tacey, 2001) for people as they undergo spiritual and psychological transformation.
More specifically, the use of symbols and dreams can provide us with insight about experiences that might be difficult to convey verbally. Henderson and Sherwood (2003) contend that the alchemists used symbolic language to more effectively convey the "phenomenology of inner experience" (p.3). Jung (1953) suggested that alchemists were aware that symbols can express "what the written word could express only imperfectly, or not at all" (p.x). Further, he noted that the symbols in the dreams occurring amongst patients in psychological therapy bore a "striking similarity both in form and in content" (Jung, 1953, p.x) to alchemical symbols. I thus feel that a greater understanding of the imagery and symbolism of alchemy can provide us with a more effective means of understanding particular processes that clients might be experiencing, and so help us in our endeavours to be of greater service to them.
References


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Appendix 1

Ethical Approval Letter
Lynne Gravell  
Department of Psychology – PsychD  
University of Surrey  

15 November 2006  

Dear Lynne  

Reference: 76-PSY-06  
Spiritual and psychological development as an alchemical process. A narrative analytic study of the life story of a former alcoholic  

Thank you for your submission of the above proposal.  

The School of Human Sciences Ethics Committee has given a favourable ethical opinion.  

If there are any significant changes to this proposal you may need to consider requesting scrutiny by the School Ethics Committee.  

Yours sincerely  

Dr Kate Davidson
Appendix 2
Information Sheet
A LIFE STORY
INFORMATION SHEET

I am a Counselling Psychologist in training, and I am carrying out a research project as part of my training course. I would like to thank you very much for agreeing to talk with me about your life story.

I am interested in talking to people who have at one time been an alcoholic and now are no longer an alcoholic. I am interested in talking to people who would consider that they are on a path of development in some respects and who possibly have a spiritual dimension to their lives. I am interested in exploring how you might have seen your ‘journey’ through life thus far and what part your alcoholism and subsequent recovery might have played in this.

There will be three or possibly four stages to the interviewing process. I am going to speak to three people initially who meet the criteria I need for recruitment. I will ask all three to do the first two stages of my interviews. Subsequently I will ask only one person to do the remaining one or two interviews and use only the remaining participant’s material for my case study.

The first ‘interview’ will take the form of you writing a little about your life. The remaining interviews will be face to face and will last between 1-1 ½ hours. They will be audio taped so that I can type up the transcription of what is discussed and analyse the data afterwards. The tapes with be destroyed upon completion of the project. All data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988. All names and other identifying information will be changed in the final report to maintain your anonymity. The final report will comprise one individual anonymised case study. There is the possibility that the report may be published in an academic journal. If you participate in this research, a copy of the completed report will be available to you for feedback and comments.

Please can you now read and complete the consent form included, and feel free to ask any questions. You are entitled to terminate the interviews at any time if you do not wish to continue. Likewise, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research that you would like to discuss with me, please contact me by e mail on psm21g@surrey.ac.uk. I will be happy to be in contact via e mail or arrange a time to meet up.

Many thanks again for taking part.

Lynne Gravell
Appendix 3
Consent Form
A LIFE STORY
CONSENT FORM

Name of researcher: Lynne Gravell, Counselling Psychologist in training

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study and have had an opportunity to ask questions  

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time  

I understand that there will be three or possibly four stages to the interviewing process  

I understand that all information gathered will remain confidential, but will be included in an anonymised form as an individual case study in a written report. There is also the possibility that it may be published in an academic journal  

I am aware that the interviews involved in this research will be audio taped and transcribed for research purposes only  

I agree to take part in the above project

________________________________________  ______________________________  __________________________
Name of participant            Date                        Signature

________________________________________  ______________________________  __________________________
Name of researcher             Date                        Signature
Appendix 4

Life Story Guidelines

**Guidelines for writing your ‘Life Story’**

Imagine you were going to write the story of your life thus far. Think about how you might divide it into chapters; what would the title of these chapters be? I would like you to sketch out some of the content of your ‘life story’. It doesn’t have to be too long at this stage, but is intended to give me an overview of some of the experiences of your life that we can talk about later in the interviews.

You might want to bear in mind some of the following features. They can be used as guidelines if you find them useful but you don’t have to follow them.

- key events (high points, low points, turning points)
- effect of alcoholism and subsequently surmounting this
- significant people
- personal beliefs, values and spirituality. How this might have changed over time
- how you might see your path of development over time
- future possibilities
- looking at your story as a whole, can you discern a life theme or idea that runs through your story? Is there an object or an image that might represent you in some way? If so, what would it be and in what ways might it represent you?

Thank you for your time.
Appendix 5
Interview Schedules

A LIFE STORY
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE ONE

Thank participant for agreeing to participate.
Assurance of confidentiality
Reiterate the fact that they are one of three going through the first interview stage and subsequently the chosen participant will be asked to interview two more times.
Explain that if any sensitive areas are touched upon that they do not want to discuss, this is fine and to indicate so that we can move on to another area.
Explain that this will be a single case study submitted for doctoral research, possibly even published in academic journals, but that all names and identifying information will be changed. They will also be given a chance to read over the document and make comments once it has been completed.

Explain that I am interested in their life journey and the part that their alcoholism and subsequent recovery might have had upon them, especially in terms of their personal and spiritual development.

Main Interview

Thank for written life story and explain that a large part of this first interview will be around this as well as some broader themes.

NB-Allow this interview to largely flow from what the participant brings. The following are only for broad guidelines and to give some guidance and structure if and when needed.

Broader themes to bear in mind-

-key events (high points, low points, turning points)
-effect of alcoholism and subsequently surmounting this
-significant people
-personal beliefs, values and spirituality. How this might have changed over time
-how you might see your path of development over time
-future possibilities
-looking at your story as a whole, can you discern a life theme or idea that runs through your story? Is there an object or an image that might represent you in some way? If so, what would it be and in what ways might it represent you?

Specifics for participant three from written life story-
- explore his dream about a knight on a white charger
- explore about the teacher who was significant influence
- explore about "I would dish out a hiding beyond proportion"
- what was the fantasy world about he alludes to as a child?
- what did he feel the "shameful sex" was related to?
- in relation to his alcoholism, what was the point at which there was a shift and why does he think this may have occurred at that time?
- Explore more about the "72 hour binge"
- What did he mean by "all my heroes were people who knew no better themselves"?
- Explore more fully about his image of yin yang that he feels represents him now.
A LIFE STORY
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE TWO

Thank participant for agreeing to continue to with the research.
Assure once again of confidentiality and that that if any sensitive areas are touched upon
that they do not want to discus, this is fine and to indicate so that we can move on to
another area.

In this second interview, make more links and tentative hypotheses, so that we can work
together to understand his story and also give participant a taste of what the report and
third interview will be like.

After the last interview he said that he wondered if it had been balanced as it had not gone
into his more shameful past in much detail, and that he wondered if it had been 'balanced'
in this respect- ask him a little about this and explore what this might be about.
Also ask what else he feels needs to be addressed in this interview in order to give a fair
representation of his life.

Also explore and clarify-
Is there a sense of 'chapters' or phases that his story tends to fit into?
Significant people in his life
Explore the difference in tone between his written story (harsher?) and his first interview
What were the 'brutal' aspects of his upbringing?
What was the hammer behind the cherub's back representing?
Explore a little more, if he is willing, about the violent incident with his father
Ask about his high IQ but that "nothing ever came of it"
What does he feel this 'getting one over' on authority is about?
Where does he feel he is in terms of the balance between masculine qualities and
vulnerability?
In terms of his yin yang life theme of balance, where does he feel he is now? To what is
he still aspiring?

Thank him for the interview
Ask how he feels now
Explain that he will be sent the analysis of the report and that the final interview will be
about discussing what he felt and thought about the report. Explain that the report will
include interpretations, rather like the style of the interview today and will also contain
my self reflections.
Appendix 6
Sample Transcript
First Interview

I-Interviewer, P- Participant. All names and places have been changed for the purposes of confidentiality. Information within square brackets is used for clarification. Empty square brackets indicate material omitted for the purposes of confidentiality. Three dots indicate a pause.

I-Thank you for sending me this detailed representation of your life story. And you mentioned at some point that you were trying to write something about your life, what was that about?

P-I tried before a few years ago just to start getting some stuff down er, people who’d known me all my life said uh you should really get down on paper your story because it’s uh it’s quite uh amazing path I’ve lived. So I have tried in the past to get stuff down but it always felt um quite difficult to do. It’s like I’d get to some point and just leave it and find other stuff to do, always like some sort of distraction or moving away from getting it down. So when you said would I mind putting something down I thought yeah time to get something down. And once I started it flowed quite easily sort of like just being exactly [down?] obviously lots and lots of other things but these are the things that came up.

I-And had you taken it from previous things that you had written?

P-No, No, straight of the, just sat down and started writing whatever popped in. So I just tried to make it as free an experience as possible, so sat at the computer and whatever came in went out and in fact it was quite different from the stuff I wrote in the past, um different experiences, different views as well so, and and a lot more connected to it when I was writing. In the past when I was writing stuff it’s probably been a little bit more distanced but it felt very natural to write.

I-What and you felt more kind of connected to what you were writing?

P-Very much yeah. Um I didn’t do a lot of thinking about it. It just...more felt it.

I-And would you say that what came over from this than the previous things that you had written, are there any things that you can see are different this time?

P-Only within myself. I remember writing before a lot about the violence that happened, well a lot of the violence that I experienced growing up. And when I wrote it previously it was probably done from more of a bravado type place, more of a macho state and this time around it felt more of a reflective place, so, within myself, so... it it it’s felt it was a lot more trying to understand about what was going on, whereas before I might have been writing it was very much well this is what happened, this is what the way it was. Very
little understanding or even questioning.

I- Right. And the bravado thing, would there have been a slightly, um um I don’t know what word to use you know would the stance have been a bit...

P-Yeah it would have been a stance of of of ‘I was a tough tough man’ that would have been the stance back then. And not really shown the vulnerability; I hope that’s what came out because I felt quite vulnerable writing it but in a very safe way. It felt ok to be vulnerable. And I think in previous, in the past it possibly hasn’t been ok to be vulnerable.

I-Mmm. And what’s made that change do you think for you?

P-Um. Probably being more settled in myself. Really really questioning, I, I am in a thinking profession, I analyse, I self reflect all the time and I think its starting to get to know what I am about now, or what I was about then. And um very much knowing that the part of me that stayed hidden or suppressed for many many years is is the part of me that allows me to do so many wonderful positive things now in my life. And that that that just um the knowledge of that is sort of like in this part of my life now, the aspects that I really shied away from or I kept hidden are very wonderful to me and I embrace them now. And it’s ok, in my room and in my laptop and it’s ok when I am here. And I’m not in as many well I’m not in, very very few um places where I need to be violent or or, it just doesn’t happen any more, so so its quite a training of moving really along, of progress.

I-So you are saying that in a sense being able to be vulnerable has enabled you to access a lot of things in your life that you have been able to...

P-It has yeah its taken quite a long while to be, to feel comfortable in that vulnerability. I think um it’s like a questioning all the time, is it ok to be vulnerable? And the answer...and that’s been constant question over the years but now the answer comes back more and more yes it’s ok and that’s who you are. Someone soft someone um caring sensitive and and yeah it feels ok to say that now whereas it never did before... or or there wasn’t the space to you felt or circumstance didn’t allow.

I-And so in fact you have alluded to the violence and I wanted to ask you about some things to do with that, what you feel now that that was about? You know you said somewhere about being bullied and that you would retaliate and ‘dish out beyond proportion’ you know...

P-I think it was, well now I think it was about keeping everybody away. It was about saying stay away from me, don’t hurt me, don’t pick on me, don’t um um , yeah don’t come near me. It was a block to intimacy I feel. I didn’t want anyone coming into my space and I didn’t particularly want to be anyone else’s space. But it was a very, um, I wouldn’t say laddish, boyish thing to do, but it was a very acceptable way to deal with things, when I was growing up, it was um, and my peers as well, it was like drinking a
cup of tea or something it would be very acceptable to hit somebody or to stab somebody or anything, so that was just the world it was.

I-So it was almost like the language of communication?

P-That was exactly what it was. It was, I think I wrote down there it was one of the the [smiles] especially between girlfriends over the years I really struggled with communication, or honest communication anyway, but but it could be said to the same effect with boys and with men, with everybody really, not having a language with which to communicate. Not being able to feel, I do believe that um I wasn’t allowed my emotions growing up, very much I was told how to feel, I was told um that I was over sensitive, I was told I wasn’t allowed to be angry, I wasn’t allowed to be sad, ‘boys don’t cry’, so very much my training was you don’t show your emotions, all emotions are unacceptable, so, so you’re not allowed to be scared, you’re not allowed to be sad, you’re not allowed to be angry, um the only emotions that um parents and my teachers wanted to see was somebody who was happy and that was pretty much the only emotion that was allowed. So to feel scared and vulnerable being bullied, being or or or a a perceived threat, the only language I knew how to communicate was with my fists.

I-And how did they tell you, in what ways did they communicate to you that these things weren’t acceptable?

P-Um, anger wasn’t acceptable. I think that both my parents were very angry growing up, I think looking back now, I think things were very difficult, I think circumstances um um money wise, my dad doing stuff, going to work he didn’t particularly want to, my mum having to do um a couple of cleaning jobs as well as bringing up the three of us at the time, three children, three small children, all in a very small um small flat, living on the top of each other. I do think I look back and I think the feeling, the emotions were enmeshed, so it was as if, if one of us is feeling happy we are all happy, but if one of us is feeling angry or sad then we are all angry or sad, and the emotions that happened to be very difficult for my mother and my father to take were, fear with my father especially and anger with my mother. So very very negative connotations, and we were, I am trying to think back to how um, if you ever showed anger as a child you know like hitting out or shouting you would soon be [laughs] in no doubt that it wasn’t allowed, you would be um slapped or put in fear.

I-So there was a bit of an inconsistency there, kind of they are telling you it’s not acceptable by using the same kind of means to show you?

P-Yeah it was a total inconsistency. And with the um fact of growing up, the feelings of being loved and cared for were that I think that were so extreme as to with the feelings of fear and um anger. So like the inconsistency for a small child growing up, well its hard for an adult to comprehend, but it was virtually impossible to understand how you were, I was allowed to be very free with certain feelings like um feeling excited or happy or, well these were very much welcomed, but the other feelings were very much shunned so, hard
to get a... and inconsistency is a way that I would describe my um my upbringing. I don't blame, I don't, nobody knew any better.

I-And yet you were quite, you said you felt full of fear about your father? So you felt some extreme feelings, and again like the inconsistency, on the one hand adoring him, and on the other hand...

P-Yeah pretty much still now, as it goes. But but it feels like um, its not so much fear now although I can get quite, he's one of the only people that can get me quite riled, who can um, I am quite a uh how shall we say I am quite placid now I am quite chilled out, but the one person who can get me going is sort of like my father, because of the inconsistency, the absolute adoration, um, I don't know if I wrote this, but he calls me 'darling', did I write...?

I-Mmm, mmm.

P-And he still does to this day but as a child he would be to the total extreme of being so loving and caring and um supportive and quite um, [searching for word] how, of really, of pushing you to achieve, to try stuff, too. But on the other hand being extremely angry or um, fear yeah, he was very frightening he was quite a frightening man.

I-In what way?

P-He would resort to, to hands, to hitting to whacking. Very much the old uh, it used to be sort of [clears throat] wait until your father gets home, if we were mucking around as kids it was very much oh you wait until your dad gets home, and we would be[laughs] mouthing... I feel as the oldest as well I took quite a lot of the...cos my sister was next and of course my sister was the apple of my dad's eye so she never of course she never got hit but um...

I-So you think you took a lot of...

P-Yeah I took quite a lot of uh...

I-What, his anger? His violence?

P-Yeah I think his frustration, his own inability to communicate. And I think that he still has it to this day. Without drink he couldn't communicate anything, so um he couldn't tell you he was angry he couldn't tell you he was sad, he couldn't tell you he was happy. He couldn't communicate anything. But when he had a drink then he could uh, he seemed to be free. Very similar to my own experience really with alcohol.

I-And the fact that he still calls you 'darling', what does that mean to you?

P-Um, this is where its really confusing to me because um, I have always been in no doubt that um that this man loves me, there is no doubt about that, but signals that come
are very very mixed. So it its um for me its like there is quite a sense of loss as to why
couldn't it be like that all the time you know. Because if it was like that all the time it
would have been...when it's like that its quite special, but they are only um quite
fleeting...when you are growing up

I-Ah I see, so actually, the two extremes, it was actually the more angry, frustrated
extreme than the 'darling'?

P-Well that was the strange, until recently he ran his own business but when we were
growing up he was an insurance clerk and he just said he absolutely hated it, so from
Monday to Friday he was murder, but Friday he used to finish early on a Friday, so
Friday lunchtime till he had to go back on Monday it was like a totally different person, it
was like somebody who was full of fun you know, um very free very...so we used to look
forward to Fridays, so...[trails off]

I-So there has been a kind of theme hasn't there, of the opposites in a way, the extremes,
him in the week and then him in the weekend, kind of thing and you with your emotions
and he with his emotions kind of, this is acceptable, this isn't acceptable...

P-Yeah. It is, you see I do think that that's what addiction is about, extreme behaviour,
whether it's positive or its negative, so...[trails off]

I-So what do you think you did with that as a child when you were growing up? How did
you cope with those extremes, the fact that you were allowed to be like this but not like
that? What happened?

P-I think that I went out quite a lot by myself, um I think I didn't stay in my house very
often and when I was there I very much isolated myself. I feel I went into a world of
fantasy as well. I made my own reality, I let my imagination run wild when I was a child.

I-And tell me about that, what kind of fantasy world did you create and retreat to?

P-[smiling] I can remember that um I used to um always think that I was some kind of uh
serviceman, so a soldier or a sailor or-I haven't spoken to anybody about this for years- so
I used to be in charge of a submarine, or or attacking Entebbe or being a commando or
stuff like this, being a real 'boys own' type adventure. But in my head, so.

I-And what did it feel like for you to be in that reality?

P-Um, it it felt like action I suppose looking back now. That I was able to do something I
suppose.

I-Yeah like you were in action and something quite positive and concrete about it?

P-Yeah.
I-And now that you reflect back on it, what do you think that it was about, that it was that kind of fantasy you were having rather than you know a whole host of other...

P-Yeah um I think it was about about having some kind of relationship with the male part of myself, looking back, so the, possibly because there was no kind of real concrete relationship with my father.

I-So that almost, is that to do with the fact that the more aggression kind of emotions weren’t allowed in a way and that can be tied up with the more male part?

P-Well aggression was allowed in my fantasy, and school as well, come to think of it, school was a big big thing when I was growing up and I was expected to be um aggression and anger were very much, I wouldn’t say not accepted but they were very much promoted, in fact, you were, I remember everyone shouting at everyone I wasn’t aggressive enough [laughs]

I-In what way?

P-Sports, football uh boxing uh rugby [laughs] everything, cricket, everything I played it was very much you know you were... I can remember when I was playing football they used to say ‘go on really get stuck in, you’re not [laughs] hard enough, you know harder [inaudible] the person or...so it was very much uh...[trails off]

I-So in that place, in that box of things you’ve really got to go for it, but not in the other? So how was that for you?

P-Um until a few years ago I was always competitive with everything but I would say I am not, I have still got it with me I would say, you know whatever I do I still have a level of competitiveness about me but it seems a bit more, um healthy now, when I was growing up it was win at all costs it was er it felt as if putting in an amount of energy or aggression, that you were praised for, I was praised for it, so it was um like a validation of the feelings I suppose. Its felt like it was ok to be like that, it felt like normal um, when I was playing sports, it felt like I was being quite true to myself.

I-Right. And how did you process the ‘go on harder, hit them harder, really go for it’, was that just ok for you, was it like ‘yeah ok I can do this now’ or was it a bit confusing...?

P-I can remember that they tried to make me fight a bigger boy once, this was my dad and my uncle I remember. The bloke was a lot bigger than me and he kept on punching me in the face and they kept saying ‘get up and get him’ so I had to keep on going back and back and back and the boy was too big and he kept throwing me down, so, and they kept saying ‘get him, get him’ but they were standing by the side sort of really really... you know? And um...um there was the feeling that I had to keep on going and going and going and that the boy, he did say to me ‘I don’t want to, I don’t want to...’ [laughs]. But I had to keep on and on and on until I got the better of him, until there was some kind of
stalemate where I had him on the floor and I can remember, I can remember [half laughs] standing on his toes, on his feet and pushing him because that felt like the only thing I could do, so...and it felt about doing it, it didn’t feel very good, it didn’t feel very natural for me..

I-It didn’t feel good but it felt natural?

P-It didn’t feel natural. It felt like um, I felt like, I felt like as a small child I was very inquisitive, I felt I was very curious, I felt that I was quite a friendly child as well, quite, always wanted to have friends and to be, to be liked I suppose, very in tune with the world and being violent and aggressive didn’t really sit too well um even when I was young. I think at some point along the way, to tell you the truth I don’t think it ever, no matter all the things that I got up to I don’t think I even felt natural, although I was- I was going to say ‘very good at it’ but quite um [pause] I was very handy or aggressive but it never ever felt um um good.

I-Yeah that’s really interesting isn’t it? And so that time when you were in that situation in that fight, that boxing fight with that boy, what kind of age were you?

P-I was probably eightish.

I-Right, young, really young.

P-[smiles] Possibly even younger that that. And he was about two years older than me, um very young. I was possibly even younger, six, seven I suppose.

I-So there you were in this fight with your parents condoning in fact pushing in fact you are on your knees really and they are telling you...I wonder what effect that episode had on you?

P-I think that um I [laughs] I very much had the feeling that I won’t be beaten, I don’t know if it comes from there but it has been a recurring theme throughout my life that I um I am going back years now because that’s not the way it is now but um, if three or four, two or three people started on me, in my mind I would have no um sense that I would lose. And that could possibly come from it, but that’s a standard sort of uh pattern over the years that’s been built up that...

I-Like no fear about that, it doesn’t matter how many people you are taking on you would just go for it.

P-Yeah very much.

I-And its interesting to me that you say the violence and the fighting doesn’t feel natural, doesn’t feel good to you, and I am wondering if that event had an effect in terms of you taking that as a choice in your life rather than not being a choice, do you know what I mean? That violence can be a choice because your dad was saying go for it?
P- It was like from my culture or where I came from it was very very acceptable.

I-Right, 'boys fight'?

P-Boys fight [laughs] and an Irish boy as well, so very much it was, it was expected to be a bit of fight or passion in you or, they call it 'passion' but I'd say 'aggression' or...you know.

I-Right so is that quite an Irish cultural thing is it?

P-Yeah very much, and together with drinking as well, hard drinking but very, strike first think later, it is also a very manly or male ego type as well, but with the added extras of Irishness and [laughs] yeah.

I-So in the Irish culture then, what do you think that means, what is that about then- the 'strike first think later', the hard drinking, fighting?

P-Hard hard men, I think its um um the Irish have a problem with vulnerability, um, communication I think, um I think it comes from years of hist...or years of fought in the mind of history, of being put upon, siege mentality maybe. I don't particularly agree to that but I think it might have been- that is my sense of where it comes from.

I-A bit like the underdog having to fight the corner?

P-Yes um very much, you hear it in Northern Ireland especially the 'no surrender' type of mentality. And I think it has part of that.

I-What was it about do you think that your dad and uncle had you pitted against a boy two years older than you?

P-I think it was a race thing as well because the boy was Black, so I think there was racial undertones there, which was, where we come from, I have always said that I feel very very lucky in terms of where we were brought up, in one of the poorest areas of Liverpool, so when I was growing up as a kid, my school, there was kids from every race every nationality, so sort of like multiculturalism now, but that was all I ever knew, and I think about it now, when nobody's got any money everyone's quite, people don't really see colour when no-one's got any money. So it felt like a lot of my friends were Asian, Black, Pakistani, it was just a mix in our little neck of the woods, so. But, I feel there was a racial undertone to my dad and my uncle pushing me towards fighting this Black boy. Which didn't sit with the way I was, the way I am.

I-So how did that feel for you, in a sense you are saying it didn't sit with who I am but this is happening, how does a boy make sense of that do you think?

P-You just get on with it and just have to, I think the pay off was trying to please one's parents, ones elders.
I: And was it within the rules of boxing, did you have boxing gloves?

P: No [smiles] just in the street. It was just punching, fighting. Have a fight let's see, in the middle of the street. It wasn't a competition it was just about fighting each other. It was unusual but there was always fighting on the street, there was always people fighting each other, but older boys. I can remember there being punch ups and people running out of houses, sorting out their troubles. But very [pause] very [with him and the boy] it wasn't normal, it was quite abusive for both of us, both children. [Pause] Its hard to see how um- I don’t want to vilify my father, there was a lot of good parts about him but it was a lot, it was a different time as well, I suppose going back to their generation of childhood it would be normal for people to be fighting. And there was I suppose a sense of toughening up a child, preparing him for life.

I: And there's a whole cultural thing isn't there that leads to that situation, a whole thing about the Irish culture

P: Yeah. Recently I have gone back into the Irish literature, because for years I tried to stay away or tried to steer clear of anything Irish, I denied my culture, I was quite angry with it, until I started to, to, there is a whole other part of, er culture, literature, stuff that uh I can be really proud of, so I have connected with that. And I was reading some Irish fairy tales and legends and the stuff of er Athenians who were the ancient guards of the king. And how they were trained is they were put in a big hole and people would run around them and they would be up to their waist and they would have to defend themselves being attacked by people with big sticks, and if they um if they could fend off this attack by these six people, without getting hurt, they were able to join and become a guard to the king, to the ancient king of Ireland. And I am just saying that because this would have been the the the...This would have been the nursery tales that my dad and his brothers would have been told growing up, so it gives me an understanding of the mentality.

I: Yeah. And what are the things do you think that you turned your back on and didn’t want to know about?

P: I didn't and I still struggle when I see the drinking, the especially the drinking I think, seeing drunk Irish people, gambling I suppose, which isn’t, the Irish don’t have a monopoly on that, but, um, betting shops, um [pause] the quite simple life of the, just avoiding Irish people in general I suppose. Being quite ashamed of seeing the way that some Irish act and thinking that that was the way everybody acted but it's not the case.

I: And what are the things now you are beginning to embrace now about it and the strengths.

P: The real strengths are the hard work, the real hard work, the pride, sense of pride, I come from a culture that has been put upon and that has been affected over generations, there is a kind of standing up for yourself and of being counted [pause] and one thing that springs to mind, you know Michael Collins who was a rebellion leader? There was a big
movie made about him, and one of the things he said that even if didn’t have any money in their pockets he said but they were always dressed as well as they could so that they could stand up with their heads held high and that real pride of being able to walk with your head held high and knowing that I come from that as well, along with the aggressiveness there has been in the past, that is part of my culture as well.

I-Yes thank you that is really interesting [Pause] [Looking at ‘life story’] I am now thinking how best to use our remaining time. Yes you said this before, you said ‘oversensitive’, and you said it today as well and you said ‘something I agree to’. I wonder what that means to you, being ‘oversensitive’?

P-I think that um, now, its one of the words that still, um that I hear now. My mother said to me a couple of months ago, she said ‘You know your problem Michael, you were always too oversensitive’ and I said to her, and I just stopped, and I could feel myself shaking in my hands, and I said ‘I can never be too oversensitive, can’t you understand that I can’t be too oversensitive, in fact nobody can ever be too oversensitive’ and I feel quite angry when I hear something like that. I agree with it totally I am sensitive, I am a sensitive being and um its like denying a part of myself or taking away a part of me to say its a bad thing to be oversensitive, when in a way I think now quite the opposite, its probably one of the most, uh one of the biggest strengths I have, is the ability to be sensitive. And the more sensitive I am the better my ability is. But I didn’t understand as a child growing up, its sort of, well I do think its about trying to please everybody and trying to do what you thought was right. I suppose that in my journey now its about not trying to do what I think is right but doing exactly what I feel or what I know is right in my heart, so its about, if God’s made me a sensitive soul then that’s the way it is.

I-So instead of denying it in yourself or trying to change it you are saying yeah that’s what I am.

P-Yeah and I am really happy to be oversensitive.

I-And what about you getting quite angry in that moment, what was that about do you think?

P-I think it was about putting of imposing her views on me, or anybody’s views. And not knowing the amount of damage that was done growing up. And that wasn’t just my parents, but society, my school, I grew up in a time I was very young when Mrs Thatcher came to power so that was the old ethos, nobody cared for anyone so it was very much, school was difficult, home was difficult. So it was a whole denial of the self through the formative years and especially from 11 to when I stopped drinking, stopped using.

I-So it was almost like you were denying yourself?

P-Yeah yeah, which never ever, I totally believe now is that when I deny my true self that’s when I feel, that’s when things start to... conflicts caused inside of me. When I have been true to myself when I am being me that’s when I feel content, serene, that’s
when I feel soft, calm, warm, protecting.

I-So what do you see the part that alcohol played in your life, what did it do for you?

P-I think it allowed me to be a part, to join back in with society, and to communicate as well, um I feel that I had been drinking, I can't remember when my first drink, it was probably eleven or younger um possibly younger than that but it was very much it was acceptable for younger children to be drinking that's the culture, if you were at a christening or a wedding or funeral, or, we always had lots of parties [end of tape]...so a part of that world, it felt very natural, and after a few drinks I could talk I could really let the emotions out, which at that time was of, as a kid of sixteen, being quite excited with the world, just having a laugh and joking.

I-I get this sense of you as this very spontaneous energetic child and then these other things were happening that were beginning to have you feel not acceptable in a sense...

P-...Yes

I-So there is a part of the drinking that was able to provide this kind of window again, into just flowing and being yourself.

P-A total release it was. A total release. I could be just exactly who I wanted. But be free. I think that is the thing with alcohol, it does offer a freedom. There's a saying in AA, when you go to AA, there's a 'freedom from bondage'. But it feels very um paradoxical that there was, when I first started drinking it was a freedom from my bondage of denying myself.

I-So the denying yourself really came from what we talked about before, these emotions aren't acceptable, its has to be only channelled there and yet your family environment was quite violent at times and then it could be loving and it was all a bit confusing? So somewhere within that what was the choice you made, what do you think you were trying to be?

P-I think that I was trying to be a man I think. I was trying to be accepted. I was trying to please um, I know that I was always looking for guidance from somebody. And always wanted to be liked. That's what I was trying, I was just trying to be liked.

I-And what parts of your self did you feel weren't acceptable?'

P-Um Um. [pause] In the pub I s'pose every part of me was acceptable, that it was ok to be violent, if if that's what it required. It was ok to steal, it was ok to to be up to no good, it was ok womanise, it was ok to-all of it was acceptable.

I-Is that also a bit a part of the Irish as well, the kind of the high jinx and womanising and even to stealing and things like that, can that be a part of...?
P-No I don’t think so. I think that was quite, I think that was a bit of a rebellion for me, is that my dad would not be- or my mum- um were very much law abiding, so so, and that was the culture, was very much like the rules are you can’t steal. I remember being dragged back to Woolworths for stealing a batman car when I was little and I had to go into the manager and give back the car and get a bollocking, and after a bit given a hiding, so it was, yeah, so.

I-When you said when you first turned to drink was [looking at written story] oh yes Julie’s brother, when you said ‘it was seventeen where I drew the line, I found a home free from pain within alcohol’. What did you mean when you said ‘drew the line’?

P-Yeah, it was like um um, I didn’t think of Julie until I wrote that, I was a little bit older than that, about a year and a half or two years, I cant remember exactly, but I was very much allowed to be, well I still am, I am very much the romantic or or, but I was very much allowed to be, for a short period of time, I was allowed to be very loving and caring and sweet and and all of that. And that felt ok, and then uh so so, and being really vulnerable and showing who I was and what I was about. And of course we were kids and she found somebody else and moved on and of course I was devastated but I think the drawing the line was, I’m not going to let anybody else in, you know I’ve learned throughout childhood its not safe to let anybody in, because your feelings are not allowed, um and if you needed any um um thinking that this is ok, like you have opened yourself up to to this young girl and she’s ripped your heart to bits so you know, get a bit of sense you know, go to the pub, we have got a mistress here who doesn’t, who’s going to love you and is going to keep you warm and is not going to hurt you and, well that was the thinking at the time because obviously you don’t realise what the huge cost of addiction is at the time. But it felt that for that period of life it felt that it was, it was like a painkiller, it was a painkiller.

I-So what was the journey of you know the drinking and the alcoholism? When did — you know they talk about ‘rock bottom’ don’t they? - did you have a ‘rock bottom’ or were there quite a few times when it got really rough?

P-I think there were quite a few times when it got really rough. I think all of the times I put down were the triggers of um when my rock bottoms were. I remember being, I did love, I realise now, but I might not have communicated, I was very much in love with Linda, who was my long term partner, and um, but the power that alcohol had over me was like um totally devastating. I don’t know if I put down, I was lying, I remember putting out all of my cocaine on the table, because I knew that if I didn’t, then within a couple of hours I would be too smashed to do things, so I would have to just have enough to move myself to the sofa to the table or to crawl and um, my ex partner, she was very supportive of me but she didn’t have a clue about addiction and about what was going on, it was just a matter of um of um, I was [bound?] to be like a child again so I was left money, I used to smoke so I was left money for ten cigarettes um and my lunch was put out for me before she went to work. And she’s had quite a few responsible jobs so and she was a lot younger than me as well so I think she was in her early twenties, and we got together when she was about eighteen and she was in her early twenties at this stage and
she was as I would say a 'proper job', so she left to go out and pretty much earn the living. So she would leave everything to one side and I would *swear*, I would say to her, I am not going to do anything today I promise you, and when you come home I'll have washed up and cleaned everything and I'll make it look lovely. Cooking was a big hobby of mine but I'd tell her I'll make you a roast dinner and um the um, probably about an hour after she had gone I'd be, I'd have supplies of where I could get alcohol and where I could get cocaine um and I would have um

I-So were you playing a game kind of that you weren't going to be doing that and that's why she gave you ten cigarettes, is that what you mean?

P-I think that I wasn't playing, I think that I totally believed that I wouldn't, but I think that the compulsion, the real compulsion, and that was my rock bottom, was knowing that um- I can still visualise it- there was a, I'd got some DVDs, 'cos I was going to watch a DVD and I put the Matrix on- I have still never watched it to this day its too painful- but uh, it was on the telly and I was lying slumped on the sofa and there was bottles of vodka and I was trying to get over to take the cocaine off the coffee table and my head was feeling, I couldn't roll up the notes and I couldn't roll up the note I was so smashed and I fell on the floor, really beautiful house and [rueful laugh] the French doors were open and it was just, I can remember lying there and crying and saying I don't want to be here but I don't want to be by myself because addiction is about loneliness... well about isolation and I was totally isolated um, crying, alone, couldn't even manage, you know the old song 'the drugs don't', the alcohol weren't working, the alcohol weren't working, the clock’s ticking and she’s going to be back in a few hours and there’s no possibility of me ever being clean or sober, so. And that was my rock bottom, I think emotionally I was absolutely exhausted, spiritually exhausted there was nothing left in the tank. That was for me my rock bottom. There were a few other things, dealing with court and work and that were like indicators or warnings, but that was my total rock bottom.

I-Right. And was that when you first telephoned...

P-I don't think it was that day, I think it was about that time, and when I called them I didn't have enough credit on my phone so I got through and it was cut off and... but it was it was, I think that was when I did call them. But a few things had happened previous to that, so...

I-Yes I was trying to, because I knew there the thing about the fight and the parole with the guy, but I wasn't quite sure how the shift occurred, when Fred said 'do you think the problem could be alcohol and something became clear for you...

P- I had been up to court, the court was going on I think, and that was one of my days... I think there was a period of days like that exactly the same, that was my rock bottom when I was lying slumped on the floor, but there was like a period of days that were pretty much no different, so it could have been one of them days that I called.
I: So what was it about that day do you think that made something change for you?

P: I think that it was um um just that I had been so isolated, so lonely I think and just not being able to take it. I think it was, yeah thinking back, thinking that I couldn’t do it any more.

I: And the loneliness and isolation, even with your relationship with Linda who you clearly loved, there was still something that wasn’t working...

P: Yeah there was still something missing inside.

I: And what do you see that as?

P: Now I see that as a total absence of myself, of who I really was. That I lost who I was when I was a small child. That me and me went separate ways. And for years and for years and for years um I had lost total, um lost myself totally. And that was about, the missing part was was me, I was the thing that was missing. The oversensitive, or the sensitive Michael, the Michael who was inquisitive or who was happy to be making friends, not the Michael who was pushed to be fighting or felt that he had to fight. And I believe that that was what was missing.

I: Yeah. And so, then it felt like making the call and going to see Fred and things like...I don’t know, what was that like for you then doing that?

P: It was like um, I am quite sharp, it is one of the things I have always been throughout life I have been very very - I can remember being told ‘you are too clever’, [laughs] ‘you are too clever for your own good’, that’s a good thing but.... I can remember thinking and within seconds of Fred talking, that me saying something, yes I can understand that this geezer knows something, that that he’s got something there that I need, you know? And it was within seconds and of course, as an active addict or alcoholic the manipulative side says to me ‘now how can I get this off him?’ Not realising, now I realise, you don’t need to [laughs] manipulate because he was giving it, its something that they give for nothing so. But at that time I remember thinking ‘now ok he’s got something now how do I get it?’

I: Mmm. So how did the realisation occur then to realise that you didn’t have to manipulate to get that thing?

P: I think it comes over a period of time. I think it did, and still does. I do think now that people are willing to give you, if they have got it they are willing to, well there are some people out there willing, but that department is very willing to give you whatever you ask for. But it was um it was, oh I could see a way out as well. I had no doubt; we talked about this the last time I met Fred was probably Christmas and he said to me ‘you would have been dead’. And I said I know. I would definitely have been dead or banged up I think. I might have been one of the two. But I have got no doubt though, he said ‘you would have’ I said ‘yeah'.
I-And how do you feel about that?

P- Um [pause] Its it feels [pause] What do I feel about that? [pause] I think I feel a bit sad that I had to go through that. That I had to go through so much pain, through so much, and it was, it was uh it was uh traumatic. Even getting up to, just getting into the [works department]. Pretty much my whole adult life and a lot of my childhood as well was, why did it have to be so painful? That’s what I am thinking now but its [pause] hmm [pause] and I don’t know. That’s what I question, did it have to be like that? I don’t know. Possibly. I really empathise or identify with people’s pain now so or or I can be really sympathetic with people now so. And I’m in the pain business of course. So it seems to be something I know really really well. In one sense it’s really sad to think about myself back then as someone, did they have to go through that? But when I come back to the present I think, yeah you you did have to go through that. And it was ok it was quite painful at the time but...

I-And you had to go through it because...?

P-Um. Because of what it makes me now as a person. Because its added to me. There are very very few like me. I am a man of total substance, of of some describe ‘big’. And I would use the word ‘big’ and ‘tough’. I am a big tough strong man. But not in the sense of aggressive or violent. In the sense of emotionally, spiritually very much is that I know exactly where I am now. And that I think has come from a whole process of of- if I didn’t have, if I wasn’t in pain then I never would have started searching for for myself. It could have been quite happy going back and thinking well you could have got a girl pregnant at sixteen, got stuck with me job in a building society and my pint every night in the week and...you know? And run through the whole of your life and got to 65 and then got me pension and gone to the post office every day, or get me pension every day so...

I-And who would that Michael have been compared to the Michael of today?

P-Oh I don’t think that Michael would have been anything compared to who I am now. It’s about, I don’t know its a Saturday afternoon, the Michael of the past would have been well oiled by now, probably a football match I would have been watching or been well on my way to causing some destructiveness at the worst and at the best having total ambivalence to everybody and the world. And today I have seen six people I think I have seen this morning and offered some support and that’s the Michael today who’s looking out for people and who’s supporting people and willing to do it and very happy to do it.

I-Yeah, yeah. If you had to think of ah image of the Michael of the past, if you had to think of an image or something that would represent that Michael, compared to this Michael now, what would the image of the old Michael be compared to the Michael now?

P-I am going to say just exactly what’s come into my head, because as you said it it just came in. It’s a picture of a little cherub who’s got a hammer behind its back. My hair used to be bleached blonde, cherub, so podgy face that looks very loving and soft but there’s something very dangerous behind, um, and that would be an image of the past,
which would go with my [?], I used to be a charmer as well, so.

I-So an image of this very innocent, sweet, lovely loving cherub, but behind him something quite dangerous?

P-Yeah very. And something hidden away as well. Something not totally on show.

I-And now?

P-Now, I've got my yin yang balance, fire, you know quite passionate about, but passionate in a different way, um, something really soft, well that would be the sense. I feel my skin, I've got really soft skin for a man, so something really soft. That's the image I have.

I-And you said something about the fire as well?

P-That's really about the passion. I think it very much used to be anger and aggression, I think that it still is, but it's channelled in a lot more positive way. Its something I never want to have extinguished. I couldn't say but throughout all of my drinking, it felt like drinking was like trying to put out a fire that was inside of me. And that was, I can remember saying lots and lots of times is that you lot will never push me, break me down, its too, that power that fire is too big inside, but the alcohol used to quench it down a bit so it never put it out but it used to be...

I-And what was the fire? How would you see that?

P-That was me inside I think, that was my soul or you know, that was me trying to get a voice. I think that that fire is still there but its um, I don't use the word control but its radiating out, there's a warmth there that is something useful, you know like the warmth of the sun or. So its not a fire that's going to burn your house down or its not going to be destructive, its going to be very productive.

I-So its sounds like there's been a kind of harmonisation hasn't there, rather than the fire having to be a separate thing that could be all consuming because its not been given any kind of air or something, its now just there radiating?

P-Yeah. There's more harmony. There is more harmony.

I-Mmm. Mmm. [pause] And you said at one point that you had a dream about a knight on a white charger coming to get you. Can you tell me about that?

P-Yeah. I used to have that, that was a recurring thing, I used to wake up in tears as a very small child about five or six and I used to remember being a, like the cherub thing, because that was what I was like, blonde haired blue eyed very small and this white knight on a white charger in full armour bearing down on me with a lance and me being, you know, he's coming to get me. And just before he was coming to get me I would
wake up screaming. And that would be recurring when I was a child. I think that I revisited it in later life, in my recovery. And I can remember, I can remember sort of like um, awoken a big part of myself and being enveloped as a small child and a bigger part of me, having the same dream a few years ago, but me coming and putting an arm around this small child and taking this knight off.

I- This was in a dream that you had?

P- This was in a dream I had.

I- So the knight was there again?

P- He was there, but it was, it was overcome. And that felt like a really big massive, real significant thing to me at the time. It was so powerful, it was like, it was like a part of me saying you don’t have to be afraid any more, you know.

I- And what did you see the knight on a white charger representing?

P- I always thought that it would represent that I was bad, white was good and I was bad. White of course being the, white is pure and is good and I was bad. And I think um he was coming to get me because I was bad.

I- So what do you see the dream a few years ago, the change that felt so powerful for you, how do you understand that, or have you not got to an understanding of...?

P- No I’ve got to an understanding. My understanding is that part of me is bad, like everybody I have my shadow side and that’s ok, it’s ok to be bad but it’s uh its what I do with the actions that’s probably more important. So it’s more that, about yeah, accepting the dark side, knowing the dark side, and its ok. And I think that that’s what the dream was about, a real embrace of parts of me coming together, a real big...big giant of a man and a real small, small child, and the joining of that. I never saw the significance of it all together, that its ok there’s no one going to come and get me. There’s no knight going to run me down because when I am together I am quite big and powerful as a spiritual being.

I- Very powerful dream.

P- They used to pick from me as a child, and my saviour would be my dad coming in. And we would talk about balloons ’cos balloons were my favourite thing when I was a small child. And he would have to go and get me a balloon to help me go back to sleep.

I- So you had this change dream about three years ago? Was there anything particular happening, I know it was about six years ago you started to...

P- I think just really going into myself I think. This constant um um evaluation, re-evaluation of getting to know me. I think that up until three years ago, three years ago would have been the time when I stopped using and drinking and then um I got quite
heavily into recovery and AA.

I-This was three years ago not six?

P-No six years ago, sorry. So so and then what happened was after approximately two and a half three years I started to want to feel that I wanted to go off and do my own self discovery so...AA is very much about ‘us, we’ - and me being the narcissist and being interested in me said no I want to learn about me, and I think there was a calling of a part of me saying yeah ok I am very happy to be involved with AA and its done me a great deal of good but I really want to know about who Michael is. And I didn’t know it at the time but it was about finding the part of me that was missing or finding the bits that were missing and starting to get them back together.

I-So what did you do, did you start having individual therapy?

P-I have always had individual therapy, I have done lots of groups I had been away as well to [treatment centre] um so I have always had a real sense of therapy and I think about three years ago it would have been that I was er that I really engaged with my current therapist, um that I first started to, I think we first started together. Its got to be over three years now but it was around that time. I think that I really did engage then. I think that before even though I had lots of therapy, that that -even before the six years- that I had taken quite a pleasure in giving people the runabout, therapists you know? I think there were weird sick games going on about me, well not weird sick games, but just games going on with me thinking to myself that this is how clever I am and I am going to bring this person up the garden path and you know, somebody sitting in front of you who is a bit clever and got all these certificates on the wall, lets really give you the muck around, and then I think it sort of three years ago, I met my current therapist who I am still with and I get on really well with, and I feel that I was ready to- we talked about this not so long ago, well the other day, and she said to me, when you first came she said there was a lot about you that, she said I had to let you muck around I had to let you play, yeah, she said because that was your, and I think that once I allowed you to play then you settled in to start the work, and she said ever since its been, that’s it, I’m all about work and anything that arises I want to get into. So the dream was probably the same time. There was probably significance on that dream and me going into therapy as well, as being afraid of looking at myself and the dream signified that things would be ok. And that’s the way they have turned out so far.

I-I am really aware that we have gone over time, I wanted to ask you one more chunk of things but only if that’s ok with you, is that ok?

P-Yeah of course yeah.

I-Thank you. So I am interested in your relationship with spirituality and religion and how you see that it’s changed over time. And what you feel the alcoholism, did that have an effect. There’s loads of questions! Let’s start off with your relationship with spirituality.
P-My relationship with spirituality. I was brought up Catholic. I am Catholic now. [Laughs] You never get out- it’s like the mafia! No, I was brought up a, it was very much a ritual Irish Catholic... you just did it, you had to go to Church every Sunday. It was very much a forced thing, so all the children, we didn’t want to put on our best clothes and we didn’t want to go to church and we didn’t want to walk up the hill to church, we wanted to be playing, and we didn’t want to do our um um confession or our communion or our confirmation. They used to bribe us of course, I used to get presents after you’d completed every stage of the doctrine, but um and I think it was when I was fifteen or sixteen that I really just went away from organised religion. In fact being quite clever I could always find arguments to totally destroy every aspect of Catholicism or Christianity or Islam or whatever it is, but I think I very much did that on my own religion. I think that like I don’t agree with not allowing homosexuality in the thing, they just don’t agree with it, and you look through the Bible and Jesus said this and said this happened, so very much dissecting the religion and very much the human aspect of religion and priests molesting children and so how could this be right, how can, and I think I did that at that stage of my life. I believe though and I always have that God’s always been with me through, from when I was a small small child- as far as I can remember -I have felt protected, so, and sometimes I have lost focus on that but its always been central to my core belief is that- the saying that comes out- ‘there are two things you need to know about God, and one is there is a God, and number two, it’s not me’. That’s always been my core belief, is that there is a God and it ain’t me, but I know that there is a God. That’s all that- I don’t need to question that aspect and I never have. I have questioned religion, I have questioned the human side of um, and power and control, the issues of power and control and I feel that um- the sayings are coming up for me- to do with alcohol, and they said that, an old saying that there is no devil, its only God when he’s drunk- have you ever heard of that? That’s an Irish saying. ‘There is no devil, there is only God when he is drunk’. So my relationship with alcohol would be that I totally abandoned um um God at that time, I felt that vice versa, God has abandoned me. We know that he’s there, but but...when I was in one of my darkest times I constantly prayed to God, ‘you’ve got to get me out of this you know and it was very much a thing of bargaining, I’m in deep trouble here, you know, so can you, I need out and I need out now. Looking back now thinking well it didn’t go to my pace, but, looking back I asked for salvation and it was, I was, for the time being [smiles], I was saved. It took a lot longer than I thought but it was, I think that in my time in a way of my drinking I intellectualised religion, lots of different religions, and I like the aspects of Buddhism and I still do, I still like the aspects of Buddhism, I understand life is a struggle [laughs] and I know that truth, I like that. I have looked at lots of different aspects of Christianity and always felt, even this was when I first stopped drinking, I always felt it was, there were too many things that I disagreed with, that I didn’t want to get involved with. I felt apart from, but always had a relationship all the way through recovery, I would get on my knees every day to give thanks and gratitude about where I am today, about how so much has been given to me. I feel very lucky. I’d started to get into Buddhism quite a bit and what happened was, I started to, ‘cos I question everything, I question myself I question everything about everything and if something doesn’t sit right with me I will say hmm I don’t, I want to question that I want to...and I think that is the true me from years ago, from being a really inquisitive child, what’s going on, you know? And I found that the
more I was questioning Buddhism the more I was moving back to Catholicism, to a universal Christianity. And the more I would think, I'd think well you know I really like the teachings of Christ, of Jesus you know. Pretty much like everything that is said like the Ten Commandments, I pretty much agree with pretty wholeheartedly—'don't kill me' well I could agree with that. Even though I have been a bit wayward in the past I do believe that, don't sleep with the neighbours wife or don't nick off them or so pretty much in questioning one aspect of Buddhism it pushed me back to my own beliefs, to my own core beliefs. And umm yeah, I did think- I met an old friend, he was from AA, he saw me coming out of Church and he said 'what are you doing here?' and I said 'I am giving gratitude I think' I said I am just, 'God can have an hour of my week, I can afford that' and he said 'how have you been able to...to get the past, not the past, how have you been able to sit in a Catholic church that is totally against homosexuality'- my best friends are gay- and he said 'how can you sit in a church where, totally...' Because I said 'well the thing is I don't agree. But there is enough space in a big building for me, for God, and for everyone else that's there.' And I said that's it, I think the important thing for me to have a relationship with the spiritual father of someone that has protected me. That I see God in people every day, and the stuff that people are doing. It's just that I had to open my eyes to it and that's been quite a long process. I find that's a real sense of strength that I don't have to fear anything, I don't have to, I don't really have to worry about too much so.

I-Ok. And just the last thing I will ask you today is, in terms of, you know there was a thing about you felt that you had abandoned God and God had abandoned you, and when you started on your path of recovery I am wondering what was the effect in terms of your relationship with God.

P-I think when I really connected was when I went away to [recovery centre]. I think I really connected, it was such a hard experience, it was probably the hardest thing I ever did, anyone who completes a treatment program is uh its quite a special thing. When I arrived and was dropped off, its quite surreal experience, its um...and I think that I thought I am fucked big time here, I thought I need help, I am not going to make it at all without God's help. And I think that that was one of the big things about it, the first three steps are all about you know, or the first one is about we admitted we were powerless over alcohol...

[end of tape]

P-...so I pretty much felt that it was probably my last chance of life. I'd learned that, I admitted to myself that I couldn't do it by myself and I learned that the big Michael I had been fighting for years and years, on the outside winning, was pretty much done for, and that this time I had to surrender I suppose and to admit. And there was a girl that I met, about the Footsteps poem- have you every heard of it? Well she had it on her chain- I carry a St Christopher you know and a crucifix- well she had a foot and I said 'what's that all about, that foot?' and she said 'oh its that Footsteps, or footprints, footsteps. She said you must have heard of 'Footprints in the Sand' and I said 'never' and when she recounted the story of 'I only saw one set of footsteps' and I said 'yeah that's been me'
and then she said 'that's when God replies 'it was, that was when I was carrying you.' And I thought that was so significant over my story of alcoholism, is that the abandonment I thought He had abandoned me because I was walking along and I could only see one set of footprints but, well the way I believe the situation is, when I look back, I wasn't walking at all, I was being carried for that period of life. But that makes sense to me now. I'm not as proud or arrogant to say, well I'm humble enough to say now, that was probably true.

I-And the going into [treatment centre] and the change that occurred for you, what then happened for you in terms of your relationship with God? What then changed?

P-I think it was about having faith again, regaining faith for me, and I think that sense...my mantra nowadays is do my best and let God do all the rest, everything else, and think that everything will be ok. And that's very much how life is for me these days. I'll give all I can give and that's all I can do, and leave everything else up to God. And I think that's what I started to realise, that I wasn't all powerful or all controlling. Well I was in certain aspects of life but that was just an illusion or a fantasy.

I-Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to say before we finish?

P-I'd just like to say about now being in my recovery at this stage of life now. My father's still very very ill, but my mother has been completely supportive throughout my recovery, and I think there's a real sense of, although the things that were really difficult as I was growing up have turned out to be quite positive in the sense of working really hard and...that's probably been the best part of the payoff is having to be there for my family. Which I never would have been able to. My brother was involved in a really bad accident a few years ago and to be there for both of them [dad and brother]. Now that the Michael that needs to be here, if I had been the old Michael I would have been down the pub telling everyone how awful it was and my dad's very ill and my brother was involved in a massive accident and how I haven't got any money. So it would be very much about talking about the problems instead of, well not dealing with them, but just being there and being supportive, which is what I am about I suppose.

I-Thank you. Thank you very much

P-Thank you.
Appendix 7

Transpersonal Psychology Review Submission Guidelines
Notes for Contributors

The Editorial Board of the British Journal of Psychology is prepared to consider for publication:

(a) reports of empirical studies likely to further our understanding of psychology
(b) critical reviews of the literature
(c) theoretical contributions

Papers will be evaluated by the Editorial Board and referees in terms of scientific merit, readability, and interest to a general readership.

1. Circulation

The circulation of the Journal is worldwide. Papers are invited and encouraged from authors throughout the world.

2. Length

Papers should normally be no more than 8000 words, although the Editor retains discretion to publish papers beyond this length in cases where the clear and concise expression of the scientific content requires greater length.

3. Reviewing

The Journal operates a policy of anonymous peer review. Papers will normally be scrutinised and commented on by at least two independent expert referees (in addition to the Editor) although the Editor may process a paper at his or her discretion. The referees will not be aware of the identity of the author. All information about authorship (including personal acknowledgements and institutional affiliations) should be confined to the title page (and the text should be free of such clues as identifiable self-citations, e.g. 'In our earlier work...').

4. Online submission process

1) All manuscripts must be submitted online at http://bip.edmgr.com. 
   **First-time users:** Click the REGISTER button from the menu and enter in your details as instructed. On successful registration, an email will be sent informing you of your user name and password. Please keep this email for future reference and proceed to LOGIN. (You do not need to re-register if your status changes e.g. author, reviewer or editor).
   **Registered users:** Click the LOGIN button from the menu and enter your user name and password for immediate access. Click 'Author Login'.

2) Follow the step-by-step instructions to submit your manuscript.

3) The submission must include the following as separate files:
   - Title page consisting of manuscript title, authors' full names and affiliations, name and address for corresponding author - 
     A title page template is available to download.
   - Abstract
   - Full manuscript omitting authors' names and affiliations. Figures and
4) If you require further help in submitting your manuscript, please consult the Tutorial for Authors - Editorial Manager Tutorial for Authors

Authors can log on at any time to check the status of the manuscript.

5. Manuscript requirements

- Contributions must be typed in double spacing with wide margins and on only one side of each sheet. All sheets must be numbered.
- Tables should be typed in double spacing, each on a separate page with a self-explanatory title. Tables should be comprehensible without reference to the text. They should be placed at the end of the manuscript with their approximate locations indicated in the text.
- Figures can be included at the end of the document or attached as separate files, carefully labelled in initial capital/lower case lettering with symbols in a form consistent with text use. Unnecessary background patterns, lines and shading should be avoided. Captions should be listed on a separate sheet. The resolution of digital images must be at least 300 dpi.
- All articles should be preceded by an Abstract of between 100 and 200 words, giving a concise statement of the intention, results or conclusions of the article.
- For reference citations, please use APA style. Particular care should be taken to ensure that references are accurate and complete. Give all journal titles in full.
- SI units must be used for all measurements, rounded off to practical values if appropriate, with the imperial equivalent in parentheses.
- In normal circumstances, effect size should be incorporated.
- Authors are requested to avoid the use of sexist language.
- Authors are responsible for acquiring written permission to publish lengthy quotations, illustrations, etc. for which they do not own copyright.

For guidelines on editorial style, please consult the APA Publication Manual published by the American Psychological Association, Washington DC, USA (http://www.apastyle.org)

6. Publication ethics

Code of Conduct -

Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines
Principles of Publishing -

Principles of Publishing

7. Supplementary data

Supplementary data too extensive for publication may be deposited with the British Library Document Supply Centre. Such material includes numerical data, computer programs, fuller details of case studies and experimental techniques. The material should be submitted to the Editor together with the article, for simultaneous refereeing.

8. Post acceptance

PDF page proofs are sent to authors via email for correction of print but not for rewriting or the introduction of new material. Authors will be provided with a PDF file of their article prior to publication.

9. Copyright
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10. Checklist of requirements

- Abstract (100-200 words)
- Title page (include title, authors' names, affiliations, full contact details)
- Full article text (double-spaced with numbered pages and anonymised)
- References (APA style). Authors are responsible for bibliographic accuracy and must check every reference in the manuscript and proofread again in the page proofs
- Tables, figures, captions placed at the end of the article or attached as a separate file

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The Review is published with the aim of disseminating material relevant to transpersonal and humanistic psychology (including the relationship between these and other branches of psychology). Submissions may take any of the forms shown below. Authors who are in doubt as to whether their work falls within the remit of the Review are invited to send brief preliminary details to the Editors for advice. Accepted papers may have to wait for a subsequent issue for publication.

Individual papers

Individual papers are welcomed in all areas of transpersonal and humanistic psychology. Papers will be subject to peer review. Authors are asked to provide a brief abstract. Papers may be of a theoretical or empirical nature, and should be up to 5000 words in length.

Book, article and conference reviews

The Editors will from time to time commission reviews, but Section members are also invited to submit reviews of books which they feel are relevant to the interests of the Section. Reviews should normally be between 500 and 1000 words, but longer review articles will be considered. Where possible, authors will be given the opportunity to reply to reviews.

Personal notes (informal contributions)

Members are invited to send in short comments or notes of personal experiences of relevance to transpersonal psychology. These will not be refereed but will be subject to editorial scrutiny. Normally such submissions should not exceed 500 words. As many contributions as possible will be published in this section, but pressure of space may be a limiting factor. Letters for publication will also be included.

Submission of material

Two typed and double-spaced copies should be submitted to the executive editor, with clear indication of the section of the Review targeted. A copy of the submission on disc should also be included (see below for details of the required format). The format of individual papers and book reviews, together with accompanying references, should follow Society guidelines for journal submission. References should conform to the APA format used in all Society journals, and should be presented alphabetically rather than enumerated.

A short abstract should be provided at the top of each paper and, if wished, an address for correspondence at the foot. The use of appropriate sub-headings is recommended.

Most material submitted to the Transpersonal Psychology Review has been prepared on a wordprocessor, but often we merely receive a printed copy. This means that the text either has to be re-typed or scanned in electronically – which is expensive, takes time, and increases the risk of mistakes. So, when sending in items, please:

- Provide a clear, up-to-date printed copy.
- Enclose a 3.5" disk (either DOS or Mac format) with the document saved both in its original wordprocessing format and as an ASCII or RTF file.
- Save diagrams and other illustrations in their original format and as a TIFF or an EPS file.

If you require any further information, please contact Geoff Ellis at the Society's Leicester office (0116 254 9568).

Send contributions directly to Ingrid Slack, Dept. of Psychology, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA.
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| True nature as a child               | A naturally happy, inquisitive nature, freedom, liberation, which was “kicked out of me” | “Feeling so free”  
“Being quite excited with the world”  
“I felt like as a small child I was very inquisitive, I felt I was very curious, I felt I was very in tune with the world [] to tell you the truth I don’t think it ever, no matter all the things that I got up to I don’t think I ever felt natural, although I was- I was going to say ‘very good at it’ [] but it never ever felt um um good.”(1) | Excitement, spontaneity | Remembering his natural state  
Natural state of ‘communion’ with world? Before he is forced into ‘agency’? |
| Losing his natural self              | Loss of his natural self  
Losing himself at an early age  
Things becoming confusing and going wrong as he is not in touch with true self any more | “I lost who I was when I was a small child. [That] me and me went separate ways. And for years and for year and for years um I had lost total, um lost myself totally”(1) | Regretful, sadness, loss | Loss of innocence?  
Does this have to occur anyway to re-find oneself with wisdom? |
| Emotions other than ‘happiness’ unacceptable | Confusion, conflict. No outlet to express emotions other than fighting. Parents’ contradictory behaviour. | “...if you ever showed anger as a child you know like hitting out or shouting you would soon be [laughs] in no doubt that it wasn’t allowed, you would be first of all shouted at, screamed at and if that didn’t sort you [laughs] then you would be um slapped or put in fear.”(1) | Rueful, pragmatic  
Endeavouring to understand | Having to suppress his natural expression.  
Anger not contained by family. Confusing for a child. No wonder it begins to be expressed in another way |