

THERAPEUTIC SOUL SEARCHING

by

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Abstract

Personal identity is an important theme that often comes up in therapeutic endeavours, especially in societies that are saturated with free market capitalism and mass media culture. I begin the thesis by describing a foundational ethos that guides my practice as a counsellor. I then describe a process of therapeutic engagement that I call therapeutic soul searching and suggest how it can be applied to working with the theme of personal identity. For this purpose, I outline the ideas that have inspired my views on the craft of counselling. These ideas come from a variety of voices from differing fields, including the practice of counselling, and the world of art and literature. I explain how our modern-day culture industry impacts stories of personal identity. After outlining my foundational beliefs, I then provide an overview of some therapeutic possibilities that have been inspired by the narrative metaphor tradition and spiritual-based therapeutic traditions. I explain why these two therapeutic traditions work well with struggles relating to personal identity. Lastly, I suggest that further research and literature needs to focus on how personal identity differs across Canada's multicultural spectrum.

Keywords: counselling, foundational ethos, narrative therapy, spiritual-based therapy, culture industry, personal identity

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Chapter I: Introduction

Therapy is a “sacred act, a form of bearing witness” (Sanders, 2013, p. 16) often as another human is experiencing disparaging feelings or thoughts about themselves. There is a tradition, especially in the lineage of psychotherapeutic thinking, where individuals can alleviate dilemmas or problems in their lives by empowering themselves through engagement in therapeutic processes. Within this way of thinking, therapy is viewed as a catalyst that creates a “difference which makes a difference” (Bateson, 1972, p. 459) for a person, by either altering their external circumstances, behaviour or internalized world. This type of empowerment has been conceptualized as an extension of self-knowledge or personal identity growth and can be seen in a variety of therapeutic traditions, including Jungian Psychology (Jung, 1971), Gestalt therapy (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1977), Humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1961) and Self-Actualization psychology (Maslow, 1962). This lineage of thinking that focuses on subjective personal experience, has evolved significantly since the time of the aforementioned traditions of the mid-20th century. Present day personal therapeutic identity projects (White, 2002) are heavily informed by voices that recognize the profound impact larger socio-cultural forces have over people as individuals. Chinnery & Bai (2012) for example, outline a view of social and personal responsibility that is inspired by the thinking of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. In Levinas’s thinking, it is through the existence of and in relationship to “others” from which we can begin to define ourselves as individuals (Chinnery & Bai, 2012, p. 236). Similarly, Bateson (1972; 1979) and his “attention to the interrelationships and connections between” human experience and the ecology of the planet “continue to have influence within the field of therapy” (Sanders, 2014, p. 20). Bateson’s (1979) emphasis on bringing into awareness the “patterns which connect” is heavily influential on my understanding of so called personal identity work.

An individual's identity could be said to be "a pattern of patterns" (Bateson, 1979, p. 11) or a pattern in constant relationship with other patterns. Views such as these are counter to dominant western philosophical thought in which personal identity is viewed as separated and independent of relationship. Gergen (2009), in his work titled *Relational Being*, is another who provides an in-depth description of how personal beliefs and knowledge are not primarily created by an isolated individual self, but in fact through relationship and interconnection. In this thesis, I am interested in exploring how our individual stories relate to and interweave with larger culturally-reinforced stories.

Throughout this Master of Counselling program, I have been intrigued by a variety of perspectives and approaches that I see as part of the evolution of personal growth work. Presently, personal growth work is not only being connected to socio-cultural movements, but is also being shared as part of practices that are influenced by spiritual-based ways of understanding life. Voices such as Bateson (1979), Bai (2012) and Kinman (2014a) inspire ways of approaching personal identity work that invite engagement with the relationship between humans and the natural world. Bateson, as the sub-title of his 1979 work *Mind and Nature* suggests, calls the connection between human "mind" and nature "a necessary unity". In this thesis I will also be exploring a variety of perspectives that have influenced my understanding of "the mind" or "consciousness", which to me are synonymous terms. In Bateson (1979), "mind" is referring to the totality of ideas, concepts, classifications and ways of understanding, all of which have an influence on personal storylines and our relationship with the planet.

Bai (2012) also suggests that environmental activism is directly linked to our understandings of personal identity. As influenced by Taoist and Buddhist teachings, Bai (2012) explores the similar patterns between problems individuals perceive in their "inner landscapes"

and the environmental problems we all face in our external landscapes (p. 314). Like Bateson (1979), Bai (2012) sees the importance of patterns and suggests how human societal existence is becoming increasing out of sync with the patterns of sustainable existence.

Kinman (2011; 2014) has also provided discussion regarding the relationship between human thought systems and environment of the planet. As inspired by Deleuze & Guattari (1983), Kinman (2014) sees “the idea of rhizome” as a way to unify our human thinking with the patterns of the natural world (p. 8). The rhizome in nature, is the maze seen in many plant’s root systems that exist beneath the surface of the earth. Kinman’s (2014a) work creates the possibility of understanding personal identity through “a view of humanity, of relationships, of community, even of mind and body that is like rhizome” (p. 8). This image, when used metaphorically for human understanding of identity creates “physical and spiritual space of abundances and multiplicities” (p. 8), or endless possibilities and options.

Bateson (1979), Bai (2012) and Kinman (2014a) all provide alternatives to ideas of personal identity that create binaries of “either / or” thinking. These voices have influenced my thinking regarding how “spiritual” exploration of our natural ecologies allows us to connect to the complexity of existence and opens more possibilities for us to understand therapeutic identity.

The ongoing environmental degradation of our planet certainly has “deep” implications for each of us as individuals and collectively for all humankind. It is our relationship to these collective and deep questions that personal identity work is concerned with. Because of this relationship, I like to refer to personal identity work as therapeutic soul searching. My intended use of the term soul is unattached to any specific religious or spiritual definition. I choose the term soul, however, because therapeutic soul searching is a blend of cognitive, sensory and

emotive experience. Speaking of soul searching evokes a feeling of connection to the existential complexity of our natural world and human life on earth. Soul searching is engaging with thinking, sensory experience and emotion with an understanding that “there are no easy answers” to what is being contemplated (Peck, 1997, p. 24). Although there are no easy answers, personal identity work leads us into the possibility of living what Sanders (2014) has called a “preferred future” (p. 93).

Hillman (1996), has perhaps most prominently written on the meaning of soul in the field of psychotherapy. As influenced by Jungian archetype psychology, Hillman (1996) also does not stick to a “single-meaning definition” of soul and makes clear that the terms “image, character, fate, genius, calling, daimon, soul, destiny” are for his purposes interchangeable (p. 10). There is something mysterious and undefinable about what I mean by therapeutic soul searching. I envision therapeutic soul searching as a craft as well as a way of thinking. Therapeutic soul searching is a mosaic of themes and practices. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, therapeutic soul searching is largely based in subjective experiences involving relationship and narrative storying practices. These experiences and practices are not typically acknowledged as “disciplined” or objective according to analytical western discourses of knowing (Gergen, 2009, p. 206). The “spirituality” that will be described is not attachment to views associated with “institutional Religion” (Hillman, 1996, p. 11). Like Hillman’s (1996) view of life as being driven by an “enigmatic force”, therapeutic soul searching is also in many ways an enigmatic practice and worldview that we can come to understand as part of our life (p. 10).

As influenced by the teachings I have received through this Master of Counselling program, it is my understanding that our ethos of practice is the foundational beginning point from which we would then determine how we will engage in the craft of therapy. As influenced

by Sanders (2014), I prefer to view the “doing” of therapy as a craft that relies on “an aesthetics of engagement” as opposed to “therapeutic techniques” (p. 112). Also, “ethos” is not the only option of wording that can be used to describe our foundational principles of practice. Reynolds (2014a), for example, as an activist and clinical supervisor, refers to an “ethical stance” as the foundation of her practices (p. 29). Swim (2006), writes of “process ethics” as her guiding principles regarding relational supervision (p. 1). Our ethos, ethical stance, or process ethics, reflect what we see as our foundational purpose as a counsellor.

The intentions of this thesis are to outline the principles of a foundational ethos of practice and to provide a description of the aesthetics of engagement relating directly to personal identity work, which I call therapeutic soul searching. Our foundational ethos of practice is of great importance, especially if we consider our work to be inclusive and accountable to “others” and various socio-cultural movements. To say this another way, as influenced by Sanders (2013), the craft of therapeutic soul searching, is “inseparable from the political, for me” (p. 16). With that in mind, the purpose of this thesis is to:

- provide an overview of the voices, principles and approaches that have influenced my perspective regarding an ethos of practice as a counsellor;
- discuss the qualities and understandings of an ethically accountable ethos;
- discuss specific approaches that have influenced my thinking regarding how to address identity related dilemmas that are reinforced by larger socio-cultural belief systems;
- describe the craft of therapeutic soul searching as influenced by the Narrative metaphor of counselling practice;
- describe the craft of therapeutic soul searching as influenced by spiritual-based metaphors or spiritual-based traditions;

- understand how to promote ethical personal identity work;
- explore different approaches promoting therapeutic soul searching that could be potentially used in counselling.

It is important to note that this thesis is not attempting to provide an exhaustive list of all the interventions, approaches and perspectives regarding an ethos of practice or personal identity work. Only those resources which have been prominently suggested through this Master of Counselling program or ones that I have a personal affinity and history with have been included. It will be noted throughout the thesis that the perspective presented is done so with the preference that the reader understands I am suggesting options of therapeutic work, not definably superior practices.

The next chapter will provide an overview of the voices, principles and approaches that have influenced my perspective regarding a foundational ethos of practice. In Chapter III, I will describe the craft of therapeutic soul searching as influenced by the Narrative metaphor of counselling practice. Chapter IV will focus on the craft of soul searching as influenced by spiritual-based metaphors and spiritual-based traditions. The last chapter is a summary and conclusion.

Chapter II: A Foundational Ethos of Practice

Introduction

This chapter describes a foundational ethos, which acts as a guide that informs how I go about engaging with suffering others who relate to a need to focus on their own personal identity as a therapeutic endeavor. The craft of personal identity work that I call therapeutic soul searching, is informed by this foundational ethos that is inspired by multiple voices and perspectives concerned with ethics, epistemology, and social justice. This foundational ethos is vital to my practice because it summarizes the “lenses through which I view virtually everything I do” (Ellis, 2010, p. 96) as a person and counsellor. *How* I practice the craft of therapeutic soul searching is generated by this foundational ethos. Put metaphorically, I envision the practice of counselling as like walking through trails in the forest. A foundational ethos acts as the soil beneath our feet. Practicing with an awareness of this soil allows us to pay attention to our footsteps, to be cautious of the ground we walk on, while also being able to see what is around us in the forest and ahead of us on the trail. This image of the trail includes the rhizome connections beneath our feet. When we walk the therapeutic trail, so to speak, we are in a relationship with the web of rhizome connection all around us. Like a footprint in the dirt or mud of a trail, the soil and the bottom of our shoe are altered by the relational contact. Our foundational ethos is the awareness that helps guide our footsteps in a therapeutic relationship.

In this chapter, I endeavor to describe my foundational ethos and to “embrace and connect learnings from” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 246) my experience as a high school teacher, my studies in this Master of Counselling program, and my personal experience of life. This foundational ethos is not an original creation, nor is it a “set of tools” for counsellors

(Reynolds, 2010, p. 247). I relate to Sanders (2014), who references McNamee (2004), as suggesting that our approach to counselling can benefit from “theoretical promiscuity” (p. 3).

A practice of theoretical promiscuity, for my purposes, refers to an approach that is made up of a richly diverse and multi-disciplined mosaic of perspectives. An approach that desires theoretical promiscuity is “an attempt to generate inclusiveness in our” practice (Sanders, 2014, p. 3).

In presenting this foundational ethos, I invite the acknowledgement that it is a work coded with my own “presuppositions” (Bateson, 1979, p. 27) that have come from my own personal experience of life. I will also attempt to outline some of these presuppositions that structure the lens through which I enter the craft of therapeutic soul searching. This chapter is divided into subsections, each with a specific theme that informs my foundational ethos of practice. Lastly, this approach is not meant to be “a static model” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 247). I see change as necessary and the approach presented here will no doubt be added to and altered as life moves forward.

A Foundational Awareness Towards Notions of “Truth” and “Reality”

To begin describing my foundational ethos, I start by discussing my thinking towards notions of “truth” and “reality”, which for my purposes are interchangeable terms. The Cherokee-Greek-American author, Thomas King, has been a significant influence on my thinking towards notions of reality and truth. King (2003) states, “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). I find this simple statement to be a poignant reflection on human life and reality. Bateson (1979) also suggests that we “all think in terms of stories”, which is an example of a pattern that connects us (p. 14). We are individual stories, or subjective experiences, that come from a relationship to other existing stories. Bateson (1979) discusses the limitations of

human perception and asserts that “there is no objective experience” (p. 31). Only “the products” of perception (Bateson, 1979, p. 32), or in other words, the subjective story we formulate can become our reality.

Similarly, Hollis (2013), of the Jungian psychology tradition, writes, “our subjective experience is, of course, our reality strained as it may be through our physiology and our affective and emotional screens” (p.29). In my view, it is always important to acknowledge the influence of relationship on the subjective experience. Anderson (2000) and Gergen (2009) for example, both describe from a postmodernist perspective that our personal identity is constructed by “knowledge” that is passed on to us via relationships. This postmodernist view brings an awareness that relational contact is a necessary precursor to the story of an individual’s subjective experience.

Taking another voice from an Indigenous cultural heritage, the Nuu-chah-nulth people of British Columbia’s North Coast and Island territories, believe that “reality is fundamentally an interconnected and interrelated whole” (Atleo, 2011, p. 57). Relationally constructed subjective experience is a major part of how stories of personal identity are created. Personal identity often becomes seen as a person’s reality or truth.

Our story of personal identity is in constant relationship, if not dependency, on the collective stories and relations that are thrust upon us from the circumstances into which we are born. Like Hillman’s (1996) metaphor of the “acorn theory”, the “contesting dogmas” of the world continually disrupt the story of our “defining image” we as individuals are born with and must re-discover (p. 11). Each individual life, like an acorn, is created through an ecology, which is a rhizome of relational connection. The acorn, as an individual life, is attached to the surrounding circumstances and previous existence of the tree from which it came.

The idea of contesting dogmas that impact our individual story appears to me to reflect what has come to be *the* narrative of North American history. More specifically, the collective story of colonialism is impacting the individual stories of modern North Americans. Referring to King's (2012) influence on my thinking, his work is devoted to telling a version of the narrative history of what has come to be known as North America through a modern Indigenous perspective. The historical narrative of North America centers around colonialism and how the dominant migrant cultures decimated the cultures of the Indigenous peoples. King, having a mixed Indigenous and migrant heritage, has a unique lens through which to tell about this history and comment modern Indigenous identity. As a male Caucasian of migrant heritage, I look to voices such as King's to inform my understanding of life and, in particular, modern Indigenous identity. King's (2012) work, titled *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* reflects his foundational belief about truth and stories. King titles his work an "account" not a "history" to acknowledge a foundational premise that truth is malleable and made up of many different stories. King's (2012) narrative account focuses on dispelling the myth of "Indians" and shows how collective power-based dogmatic thinking can control our stories of existence. For example, King (2003; 2012) provides an interesting account of modern day assimilation policies. These assimilation policies follow the colonial narrative as they are portrayed as "laws" by the Canadian and United States governments. King (2012) describes these processes of "law" as the legal categorizing of Indigenous people as "Dead Indians, Live Indians" or "Legal Indians" (p.73). King's (2012) *account* of these policies resists replicating the injustice of the past by adding a voice to the narrative, as opposed to writing as if it is the only voice. This example helps explain a premise of my foundational awareness of reality. The process of perception produces only a limited account of reality. Yet, this limited subjective

experience becomes “personalized” knowledge (Anderson, 2000, p. 7). This foundational awareness is of significance because it invites diversity, complexity and possibility into therapeutic engagement. In the next section I discuss how language usage plays a part in the possibilities that influence reality.

Examining Language and Systemic Power Structures

It is my hope that a foundational awareness towards notions of truth and reality will help enact a practice that explores the possibilities of personal identity with suffering others, as opposed to a process of evaluation following the storyline of various dogmas of thought. Acknowledging how important personal stories are moves us towards understanding how powerful language is to the process of counselling and life. Another aspect of my foundational ethos of practice is to be aware of power structures that are brought into existence through the manipulation and purposeful use of language. My foundational ethos and the craft of therapeutic soul searching are influenced by Reynolds (2010) and the “six principles that inform a supervision of solidarity” (p. 249). These six principles include, centring ethics, doing solidarity, addressing power, fostering collective sustainability, critically engaging with language and structuring safety (Reynolds, 2010, p. 249). As previously discussed, Sanders (2013) influences me to acknowledge that therapeutic work is inseparable from the political. Others, such as Wilkinson & Pickett (2009), are showing through a lens of data analysis that there appears to be a clear correlation between a nation’s income inequality and reported levels of stress, anxiety, depression and violent crime. This “remarkable paradox” (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p. 3), of wealth and poverty puts the political implications of our work at the forefront of my ethos. As part of this social justice informed ethos, Reynolds (2010) notes that “addressing power” throughout the therapeutic work is a way to promote “cultural and collective accountability” (p.

249). Acknowledgement of and “witnessing resistance” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 249) is a way to prevent the stories of “the contesting dogmas” (Hillman, 1996, p. 11), such as psychological rhetoric, from reproducing oppression, especially when working with people who are marginalized in our society. Reynolds (2014a) work is another resource that outlines “solid feminist-informed supervision” and how important it is to orientate our work to justice-doing (p. 29). I am also familiar with Reynolds’s (2010) reference to Coates & Wade (2007) on how critical it is to “critique” language because “it can be used to serve or resist abuses of power” (p. 250). Coates & Wade (2007) write of the “four-discursive-operations” that influence how violence can be misrepresented in language (p. 511). The four-discursive-operations “demonstrate how language is used to (a) conceal violence, (b) mitigate perpetrators’ responsibility, (c) conceal victims’ resistance, and (d) blame or pathologize victims” (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 512). In our world, language is strategically used and intertwined with relations of power, even if that power exists within “democratic” structures (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 511). My foundational ethos of practice is significantly influenced by Reynolds (2010) social justice informed supervision principles and Coates & Wade (2007), which is instructive on how to examine the use of language. The practice of therapeutic soul searching is informed by an orientation that promotes social justice by using language in “liberatory ways” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 250).

The work of Canadian intellectual and social justice advocate, John Ralston Saul (1992; 1995) is another who has been a major influence on my understanding of power and linguistic systems. Saul’s (1992) work critiques systems of power and the narrative history of western thought which he calls “the dictatorship of reason”. Chinnery & Bai (2012) also critique the prominence of individualism in traditional western thought. Both Saul (1992) and Chinnery &

Bai (2012) indicate the western tradition of reason-based thinking formulates a structure of hierarchical relationships and thought patterns leading to an ability to assign value or verify certain knowledge as truth. Along the same lines of King's (2012) analysis of how the myth of the North American "Indian" was created by colonizing narratives, Saul (1992) writes, "Our reality is dominated by elites who have spent much of the last two centuries, indeed of the last four, organizing society around answers and around structures designed to produce answers" (p. 7). Hillman (1996) suggests one such linguistic system designed to produce answers is the practice of psychology. Critical of "contemporary psychology", Hillman (1996) states that the language system of psychology "tends to narrow understanding of complex phenomena to single-meaning definitions" (p. 10). Awareness of how language can be used as a limitation and a way to structure power is central to understanding my foundational ethos.

Anderson & Goolishian (1988) offer a lens through which to show understanding of linguistic systems and to practice openness in the therapeutic encounter. A therapeutic practice influenced by Anderson & Goolishian (1988) entails that the counsellor works to ensure "mutuality, modesty and respect for and about people and their ideas" (p. 384). Anderson & Goolishian (1988) speak of "the therapeutic realities", which are stories that are co-authored in a unique meaningful language by the counsellor and client through dialogue (p. 384). The therapeutic relationship becomes a shared linguistic system between the counsellor and the person seeking help. This approach agrees with Hillman (1996) and advocates resisting "psychological and social theory" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p. 384) from dominating our practice as counsellors. Practicing counselling with such an awareness ensures that language is used "as a means of communication versus language as a tool for advancing the interests of

groups” (Saul, 1995, p. 1). In the next section I discuss how larger cultural narratives are in constant relational contact with our individual narratives.

Examination and Acknowledgement of Patterns

Bateson (1979) writes of examining what we humans call “mind” and the patterns within larger “metapatterns” (p. 11). Bateson’s (1979) thesis informs my foundational ethos of practice by providing a lens through which we can begin to examine how our modern cultural mythologies, or metapatterns, influence and reflect the patterns of thought we use to create our own personal narratives.

My preferred language for therapeutic work is soul searching. Soul searching is fitting for me because these words evoke a challenge to the way this world imposes stories onto individuals. Therapeutic soul searching is about reviving “a sense of personal calling, that there is a reason I am alive” (Hillman, 1996, p. 4). I am certainly influenced by those voices, such as Peck (1997), White & Epston (1990), Hillman (1996), Brass (2009) and Bai (2012), who write of therapeutic work as a process of re-discovering some form of personal agency that was discouraged by narratives inherited from the world at some point in life. These learned dominant narratives become our “self-narratives” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 10) or personal identity. For me, narrative, myth, story and identity are all synonymous and refer to the same thing.

A third-wave intersectional feminist perspective informs us that access to power is heavily dependent on the collective narratives formulated by a person’s race, gender, sexual orientation, physical differences, material possessions or age (George & Stith, 2014). Third-wave intersectional feminism acknowledges how impactful the evolving dominant collective narratives of life are in determining how and when people can access power. These dominant collective narratives also impact how people perceive and tell their self-narrative. This refers us back to

understandings about power and the purposeful use of language. Saul (1995) writes, “Our civilization is unable to do what individuals cannot say. And individuals are unable to say what they cannot think” (p. 1). This has major implications for the craft of soul searching. What Saul (1995) is describing is a double bind (Bateson, 1972) between the dominant collective stories limiting individuals and individuals limiting the dominant collective stories based on an inability to live outside them. For example, modern activists working for systemic change ask themselves individually “Do I walk the talk?” (Richardson & Reynolds 2012, p.7). This important question reminds me of how Henry David Thoreau (2004) once wrote, “There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers” (p. 8). Richardson & Reynolds (2012) and Thoreau (2004) are both indicating the importance of ethics leaving the realm of theory and entering the realm of action.

Dominant stories also prevent individuals from being able to live outside them by influencing our ability to perceive anything different. Bateson (1972) describes people as “self-corrective systems” who understand life through various forms of “*status quo*” (p. 435). Our status quo is directly influenced, if not dictated by, the limitations of the dominant narratives that shape how we will perceive the events of life. Our limited perception becomes guided by our purposes (Bateson, 1972, p. 438), which function based on a familiar self-corrective pattern to keep us in alignment with the identity we know. What we know as our personal story, is influenced by the constraints of the dominant collective systems and stories with which we live. Gergen (2009) also writes on human perception and suggests that we are limited by our “cultural repertoire” (p. 102). Our cultural repertoire, or narrative that we understand, is suggested as stronger than biology in determining how and when we experience our so called “emotions” (Gergen, 2009, p. 107).

Bateson (1972) raised concern over the influence of technology and “more and more effective machinery” into our world. Bateson (1972; 1979) expressed a great concern for the disconnection between human purpose and the natural ecology of our planet. This raises concern for the patterns of our present-day world. In our “always connected” electronic communication-based world, it has been suggested that “popular media culture is the dominant culture” (Nylund, 2007, p.13). Our technologies have become the dominant dispenser and supervisor of collective knowledge. Like the message of King (2012), which writes of the dominant narrative myths told about the Indigenous peoples of North America, Nylund (2007) asserts that “Media stories also provide the symbols, myths, and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of people in contemporary global, capitalist societies” (p.13). Adding an Indigenous perspective to this topic, Atleo (2011) describes the genesis of our current global crisis as being linked to the ideological polarity of western thought systems. These polarized ideologies, such as liberalism and conservatism, lack the vision of constant “shared responsibility” that exists within the beliefs of the Nuu-chah-nulth worldview (Atleo, 2011, p. 58). Can anyone in modern capitalist societies not have their self-narrative influenced by these dominant myths told to us in various media? The craft of therapeutic soul searching is influenced by this lens that suggests dominant discourses are dispensed through mass media culture. In the next section I discuss the prominence of mass media culture as connected to the narrative beliefs of free market capitalism.

The Influence of Free Market Capitalism as the Dominant Metapattern

The metapattern of free market capitalism, as dispensed through our “culture industries” (Nylund, 2007) is indelibly linked to patterns that create identities of deficiency (Sanders, 2014) which are designed to become our self-narratives. Sanders (2014) has influenced my thinking about examining how oppressive socio-political and socio-economic contexts of peoples’ lives

are creating damaging storylines of personal deficiency. Free market capitalism and the dominant media culture (Nylund, 2007) are fueled by individuals being captured by “problem discourses” (Sanders, 1996, p. 400) that generate a self-narrative based on personal deficiency. I assert also, that free market capitalism and the culture industries also supply mythologies of personal superiority that can be attained through various purchases of material items and practices of exclusion. Examination of free market capitalism and its influence on how it can create suffering in our lives is a significant part of my ethos of practice. As referred to previously, however, Wilkinson & Pickett (2009) show how free market capitalism negatively impacts the self-narratives of all people, both wealthy and impoverished, in unequal societies.

I would like to look at several others voices that have informed my thinking on the topic of how free market capitalism impacts individual narratives. My brother, Daniel Starling (2012), a Vancouver-based artist, created an entire re-written version of Roald Dahl’s (1964) *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, entitled *The Culture Industry and the Propaganda Factory*. The new re-authored etchings in Starling (2012), now in the Vancouver Art Gallery’s permanent collection, were crafted in the same style as Dahl’s (1964) original version. In Starling (2012), Willy Wonka becomes the character known as “the CULTURE INDUSTRY”, which is depicted as a blend between Donald Duck and Adolf Hitler. Starling’s (2012) work is a political-art statement, which depicts the feast-or-famine plight of our modern world where capitalism engulfs everything through the myth making CULTURE INDUSTRY. Much of this political statement is expressed through the rhymes of “the Repressed”, who represent Willy Wonka’s factory workers, the Oompa Loompas. One of my favourite rhymes from Starling (2012) is near the end of the novel when the Repressed start to question the CULTURE INDUSTRY. This rhyme states as follows:

The most important thing we've learned,
So far as truth and lies are concerned,
Is never, NEVER, NEVER get
Confused by your television set –
Or better still, just don't install
The idiotic thing at all.
In every house that we've been,
People believe what's on the screen.
They think truth always comes out,
And form some nasty opinions about,
Other people's lives in other places
And the threat to us shown on their faces (p. 145).

The myths produced in our modern-day culture industry act as a quid pro quo relationship. The culture industry supplies the myth, beliefs and story of identity and we individuals follow these beliefs and acquire various needed items or experiences to act out the myths. Starling (2012) is identifying the same pattern as Nylund (2007), which acknowledges how significant popular media culture, as directed by a free market economy, is in influencing the self-narratives.

To explain the engulfing pattern of capitalistic media culture in more depth, I would like to highlight two other examples. Firstly, referring to King (2012) and his intriguing insight into how the Hollywood movie industry was vital in providing the North American public with a myth of the "Indian". Much like the message of the previous rhyme mentioned in Starling (2012) where the television screen is exposed as a device dispensing many peoples' main source of knowledge, King (2012) describes how Hollywood "crafted three basic Indian types", which he calls "the bloodthirsty savage, the noble savage, and the dying savage" (p. 34). These Hollywood film companies are Starling's (2012) propaganda factories. The "crafted" content that the film industry provides the public is so prevalent in our world. The Hollywood-movie industry

engulfed the tragic narrative of North America's history and produced mythical "Indians" that would exist in the minds and personal stories of the public. King (2012) goes on to highlight how the character of Tonto, the sidekick of the Lone Ranger, became "North America's Indian" (p. 42). The character of the Lone Ranger began with a radio show in 1933 and then went on television in 1949 (King, 2012, p. 42). King (2012) pokes fun at the myth that was created with the character of Tonto by stating that he was "Trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent", which are also "parts of the Boy Scout Law" (p. 42). King's (2012) account of Hollywood's ability to impact the narratives and stories of the mass public is an example of just how forceful free market capitalism is on altering public knowledge of culture and history.

In another example, Finnegan (2015), which is the author's memoir on his life and obsession with surfing, describes an example of how free market capitalism dispassionately invades the ways of life of our micro-cultures. The way of life in question here is the ethos of purist surfing, which Finnegan (2015) describes as the search for waves in "unmapped places...gone from the known world" (p. 189). The romanticism of this way of life indicates a resistance to or a desire to escape from our globalization. In other words, a disgust for exploitation and the industrialization of the planet. Finnegan (2015) writes of a secret wave in Fiji that he and his travel companion got to ride after negotiating with locals a deal to be taken there by boat and then picked up again after a week camping on the beach. In the ethos of surfing, it is well-understood that the location of secret spots is not divulged widely, if at all, outside those who actually "live the life" of surfing in order to defend against the exploitation of the wave's purity and natural landscape. On a larger scale, these rules of secrecy would be even upheld by the editors of mass produced surf magazines, where most surfers went to learn about

places to surf all over the world (Finnegan, 2015, p. 315). When reporting on a new surf spot, “the unwritten rules about disguising its location were strict”, for example maybe only the continent would be revealed (Finnegan, 2015, p. 315). Finnegan (2015) describes how *Surfer* magazine, “smashed” those rules by not only giving the location of this Fijian spot, but by also publishing an advertisement for the new resort two Californians had built on this remote beach in the South Pacific (Finnegan, 2015, p. 316). I include this example because it describes how the narrative and power of free market capitalism disregards the common knowledge, or culture, that smaller groups of people hold as significant in their life. This engulfment of culture by the dominant culture of free market economics is being recognized as a major influence on the presence of suffering in our society.

The work of Alexander (2000) is another resource that has influenced my thinking regarding just how ubiquitous the impact of free market capitalism is on our individual self-narratives. Alexander (2000) connects the function of our modern day electronic-based culture industry with relational disconnection and it can significantly influence people to experience a greater amount of suffering in life. Alexander (2000) focuses on Vancouver, British Columbia as a case study of both the highly visible and invisible forms of addiction that can be present in modern city life. Growing up in Vancouver, it was apparent to me, even from a very early age, just how strange and paradoxical my hometown was and still is. Alexander (2000) subtitles one section of this chapter on Vancouver as “Addiction in paradise”, which highlights the paradox of the extremes of natural beauty, wealth and poverty that exist in such close proximity to each other. Being born into “middle-class” wealth and privilege, I can remember feeling sad, guilty and uneasy when I visited “Gastown”, Vancouver’s impoverished downtown east side, with my family. Alexander’s (2000) premise is that addiction, as it has come to be mythologized as, can

be seen in various forms across the socio-economic spectrum. Sanders (1994) is another resource that evaluates the mythology of addiction. What we call addiction could be better understood as the relational response humans use to fill the void left by disconnection to family, community, spirit, or territory, all of which has a major impact on our self-narratives (Alexander, 2000).

Going back to the work of Starling (2012), another rhyme of “the Repressed” factory workers’ states: “This dreadful society sees no wrong / In feeding addictions all day long.” (p. 107). The socio-political implications of Alexander (2000) and Starling (2012) is that our relational disconnection is reinforced on a collective societal level by the ideology, or dominant mythological narrative, of our economic system. Relational disconnection is “mass produced by free-market society” (Alexander, 2000, p. 4) and reinforced by thought systems, such as individualism, which function on the metaphor of value or worth, much like a capitalist economy itself (Chinnery & Bai, 2008). Referring to the influence of Bateson (1979), free market economy is the guiding metapattern from which all other patterns function. The pattern, or story we learn and associate with as part of a personal identity, follows the same storyline, thinking patterns, and metaphors as the larger collective systems within which we live. The pattern of the 20th century has been to create a continuum of “isms” (Atleo, 2011, p.57). These “isms” act to define people and divide beliefs into definitive “knowable” categories. Ellis (2010) states that we need to be aware of where our personal identities place us on the continuum and to ask ourselves “what are you doing about it?”, as a measure to be accountable to social justice in our society (p. 96). These metapatterns (Bateson, 1979) or ideological “isms” are currently multiplying via the prevalence of electronic media culture. Within this dominant media culture, there appears to be a pattern that connects human suffering with the limitations of these dominant myths or patterns of thought fed to us through the culture industry.

Kinman (2014a; 2014b) also writes of how metapatterns, such as the system of free market capitalism, generate individual and collective suffering. Kinman (2014b) refers to Bateson (1991) as acknowledging the presence of “monstrous atomistic pathology at the individual level, at the family level, at the national level and the international level – the pathology of wrong thinking in which we all live” (p. 21). Healing at the individual level is connected by the same patterns that need to occur at the international level. Kinman (2014b) suggests that a new collective understanding he calls “a Great Health” is necessary to counter the systemic oppression that is the pattern of dominant discourses that attach identities of deficiency to the individuals of society (p. 21). The pattern of movement towards providing individuals with alternative understandings of how they tell their self-narrative is undeniably linked to alternative understandings coming from our collective stories.

Conclusion

My foundational ethos of practice provides structure (Reynolds, 2010) and a lens that guides how I perceive the world and therapeutic encounters. This foundational ethos utilizes the concept of theoretical promiscuity (McNamee, 2004) by being informed by a variety of voices from differing disciplines and cultures of knowledge. As informed by this mosaic of voices, our realities and personal identities are heavily dependent on the possibilities of language. Personal identities are formed from a relationship to collective stories, ideologies or modern mythologies. The dominant collective story that impacts individual identity is that of free market capitalism, which is intertwined with modern culture industries and mass media culture. There is a disconnection between the natural world of our planet, and the patterns which free market capitalism is structured by. The system of free market capitalism creates a story of lack and deficiency which impacts people in very differing ways. This collective power system structures

suffering and creates scenarios where entire cultures of people can be trapped in narrative of oppression and marginalization. King (2012) and Alexander (2000) both illustrate how people can become marginalized, impoverished and defined by identities of deficiency. Wilkinson & Pickett (2009) and Starling (2012) are works that highlight the narrative of constant need and insecurity at the opposite side of the economic spectrum. This foundational ethos provides a guiding lens for the craft of therapeutic soul searching. Therapeutic soul searching acknowledges the need to provide possibilities for individuals to re-envision our collective stories and individual identities.

In the next chapter, I will explore how the tradition of narrative therapy can be used to address issues and dilemmas related to our personal identities.

Chapter III: The Narrative Metaphor and Therapeutic Soul Searching

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the craft of therapeutic soul searching as influenced by the narrative metaphor tradition of counselling practice. I have chosen to include this description of how the narrative metaphor tradition influences the craft of therapeutic soul searching not because I find it superior to other approaches, but because I personally relate to the idea that life is a story. For me, the narrative metaphor tradition is one option, or linguistic system, amongst other valid and helpful approaches. This narrative approach relates to my thinking for two prominent reasons. The first, goes back to King (2003) and his assertion that “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). Fittingly, narrative therapeutic practices ask us to engage with those stories of who we are. The Second influence is Reynolds (2014) assertion that we should be committed to “holding ethics at the centre” of our supervision and practice (p.2). The narrative approach provides a guiding structure from which I can keep my foundational beliefs, ethical stance (Reynolds, 2010) and the aesthetics of engagement (Sanders, 2014) at the forefront.

On another level, I believe that at the heart of the narrative approach there is a desire to allow people to feel dignified in their humanity. Finding dignity and meaning are at the core of therapeutic soul searching as a practice. The significance of dignity and meaning is something I have encountered throughout various readings in my life. One such example is Reynolds (2014b), who writes of how therapists devoted to working with the most marginalized and oppressed people in our society hope to “help clients keep a finger-hold on dignity” (p. 2). Reynolds also refers to her ethical stance as necessary in “promoting dignifying supervisory relationships” (p. 6). Another inspirational example that holds dignity as a significant human

need is Carlin (2008), which provides a historical account of Nelson Mandela's struggle to be released from prison and win the presidency of a newly democratic South Africa. Our dominant culture often privileges "progress" and constantly looking for newer and better methods or machinery. What is often overlooked are the aesthetics of "run-of-the-mill respect", which Carlin (2008) suggests Nelson Mandela knew can appeal to the human heart (p. 28). Some may find it sentimental, but Carlin (2008) suggests that Nelson Mandela knew that the dignity of both the oppressor and the oppressed had to be considered if apartheid law was going to be altered. It is these and other examples that lead me to believe in the power of providing dignity and meaning to people. For this reason, I find the narrative approach as connected to the craft of therapeutic soul searching. In the next section I will frame my understanding of the premise of narrative therapy and describe how it works with therapeutic soul searching.

Framing the Premise of Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy is concerned with the processes of interpretation "by which we make sense out of the world" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 2). This relates to the function of therapeutic soul searching as a practice because *how* we choose to go about interpreting the world has a great deal to do with the storylines of our foundational beliefs. Sanders (2014) describes how the originators of narrative therapy, Michael White and David Epston, were inspired by the lens of anthropological interpretative study, which included, amongst others, the work of Bateson (1979; 1972) and Mayerhoff (1982). The work of Bateson (1979; 1972) and Mayerhoff (1982), both strongly suggest that the processes of interpreting the macro-narratives of our world are linked to our understanding of self-narrative and personal identity. In addition to being inspired by the lens of anthropological study, the narrative approach was also greatly influenced by "the French intellectual", Michel Foucault (White and Epston, 1990, p. 1). Sanders (2014) writes that

Michael White found in “Michel Foucault’s writing a useful analysis of power relations” that helped promote the practice of decentering the taken-for-granted storylines that can limit our self-narratives (p. 62). Sanders (2014) also provides a more up-to-date understanding of the narrative approach, which focuses on influences that are “beyond Foucault” (p. 65). It is important to recognize “openness” as part of the narrative approach because from the beginning it was the intention of Michael White and David Epston to *not* create an isolated approach or “school” of thought (Sanders, 2014, p. 61). These original intentions show why the narrative approach fits in with my thinking regarding the multi-dimensional, theoretically promiscuous (McNamee, 2004 in Sanders, 2014) nature of therapeutic soul searching.

As discussed throughout Chapter II, a foundational belief of therapeutic soul searching is that the influence of macro-narratives, as presented through the culture industries, is ubiquitous in our western society (Nylund, 2007; Starling, 2012). These macro-narratives, which take on many differing shades according to each individual person’s interpretation, are equivalent to what the narrative approach calls the dominant discourses. Narrative therapy and therapeutic soul searching share the similar foundational belief that people are not the problem – the “unhelpful and harmful societal cultural practices” learned from the macro-narratives are the problem (Gehart, 2014, p. 398). Narrative therapy and therapeutic soul searching both assist people to interpret the macro-narratives in a different way. Gehart (2014) writes that “The process of narrative therapy involves *separating the person from the problem*, critically examining the assumptions that inform how the person evaluates himself/herself and his/her life” (p. 399). Narrative therapy flows into the craft of therapeutic soul searching by helping people question the taken-for-granted notions they have learned and to “identify alternative ways to view, act, and interact in daily life” (Gehart, 2014, p. 399). The following section will investigate how the

narrative approach has been applied to addressing dilemmas relating to body image.

Thinness: A Dominating Female Storyline

Dickerson (2004) is a work that challenges the prominent dominating discourse in western society that holds many females' captive to the storyline that they "must do everything", or else they are a failure (p. 3). Dickerson (2004) writes, as if addressing a female reader, that this "must do everything" storyline is learned from "the tremendous pressure you feel to meet a certain set of expectations that come from society and are passed on and reaffirmed by your parents, your friends, and most all, yourself" (p.2). Dickerson's (2004) assertion follows a narrative informed approach that recognizes how individuals are influenced by societal or macro-narratives. This relates to a point made in Chapter II about how macro-narratives interact with self-narratives in a quid pro quo relationship. In many cases, those individuals who fulfill the expectations of macro-narratives will be "rewarded", if only in an illusionary sense, by being able to proclaim themselves as having a certain desired identity. This is where Nylund (2007) and Starling (2012) would most likely argue that the culture industries, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter help people "achieve" and then re-inforce the identity storylines of dominant discourses.

Dickerson (2004) identifies seven major aspects of the dominating discourse that influence the lives of many females. One of these aspects is "Look Good, Be thin" (Dickerson, 2004, p. 4). Although only one aspect of the expectations placed on females from this dominant discourse, the lifestyle practices that many females learn in order to be thin often leave them living in consistent emotional heart ache. Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) is an example of a narrative informed approach that addresses the emotional heart ache that has turned into practices of anorexia and bulimia (a/b). The abbreviation "a/b" is used in Maisel, Epston &

Borden (2004) to take a stance against approaches that isolate a/b as a psychiatric disorder. In this paper, I will also refer to anorexia and bulimia as a/b because it highlights how a/b is linked to cultural beliefs and lifestyle practices associated with dominant storylines that are promoted through the culture industries. As an example of a/b's link to culturally reinforced practices, take for example Saul (1995), in his dictionary of what he calls "aggressive common sense" (p. 1). Saul (1995) defines anorexia as "A condition aspired to by most middle-class women" (p. 25). No further comment is made under this definition, leaving it to the reader to remember the premise of the entire work was to make it stomach churningly clear just how powerfully harmful certain ideologies and dominant discourses can be. The main point of Saul (1995) is to remember to question *how* we live and to question the storylines (dominant discourses) that are handed down to us. Saul's (1995) definition is included here to show just how "normal" the pressure has become for females to "achieve" thinness. The next section will focus on Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) and use the example of resisting a/b to show how the narrative approach has inspired the concepts of therapeutic soul searching.

Identifying the Voice

To begin describing how the narrative approach has helped inspire my craft of therapeutic soul searching, I offer a reminder of Reynolds (2014b) and her assertion that structure provides us with a starting point. One guiding foundational structure of therapeutic soul searching is King's (2003) statement that "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 3). The work of White & Epston (1990), Nylund (2007) and Starling (2012) also suggest that each of us will be exposed to and learn certain dominant storylines or belief systems that will impact how we experience life. Therefore, one way to begin the process of therapeutic soul searching is to investigate and learn about the dominant beliefs a person has acquired through engagement

with the world.

Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) write that “A/b doesn’t need steel bars or barbed wire to imprison people and starve them”, but that a/b holds females’ captive “through its voice and the rhetorical strategies it uses to influence how they view themselves, their bodies, and the world around them” (p. 21). The voice of a/b is similar, if not a specific part, of what Dickerson (2004) has highlighted as the dominant “must do everything” storyline that plagues the lives of so many females (p. 22). Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) suggest that the voice of a/b captures people by offering “fraudulent safety” through the promotion of lifestyle practices which seemingly help females feel as though they are meeting the standards of this imposed “do everything” and be thin storyline (p. 22). In identifying the voice of a/b, the socio-cultural aspects of the problem are also being identified. The craft of therapeutic soul searching is influenced by the guiding principle of the narrative approach which is that it is helpful to separate the person from the problem (Gehart, 2014). Separating the person from the problem helps put in plain view the societal pressures that keep the problem alive. When a person is viewed as separate from a problem it allows for the opportunity for that person to use their own personal agency to not follow the storyline that keeps the problem active in their life (White & Epston, 1990).

Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) show how a variety therapeutic conversations and writing styles can be used to help females identify the voice of a/b. Through their work with many young females, Maisel, Epston, & Borden (2004), came to be able to describe what “A/b’s Tactics of Seduction” will sound like (p. 22). Take, for example, this excerpt where the authors demonstrate “the voice” of A/b:

“Yes,” anorexia says, “although I must admit that you are, in fact, a poor excuse for a

human being, you should not despair.” In sympathetic and reassuring tones, it tells the person that there is hope for her, that she is “workable.” “I can make you more loveable, more respectable, more in control, and more invulnerable. I can deliver success and happiness, but you must comply perfectly with everything I say and trust no one but me. Only I really care about you and have your best interests at heart. My solution is very simple but difficult to achieve. But with hard work, willpower, and self-discipline, I know you can do it. In fact, you can excel at it! What is my solution? Lose weight!” (p.23)

The excerpt above provides an example of how the narrative approach functions to connect seemingly isolated personal problems with the values embedded in dominant cultural storylines and norms. Notice how the voice of A/b is equating the end result of thinness with a personal storyline that shows success, happiness, hard work, willpower, perfection, and discipline. These traits are also associated with the dominant storyline of capitalistic, westernized culture. The voice of A/b also appears, at the latter part of this example, to take on the persuasive rhetoric that we see commonly in advertising media or from our political leaders.

In the craft of therapeutic soul searching, in the beginning stages, I am interested in providing a guiding structure that allows people to describe the storylines of the dominant discourses from which they understand the world. Sanders (2014) writes of “externalizing practices” such as allowing people “to compose documents personifying and naming dilemmas or problems” that are “interfering” with their life (p. 92). I have also heard Dr. Sanders conceptualize the narrative approach as a process of allowing people to describe how they were “recruited into certain practices” (Personal Communication, Dr. Colin Sanders, November 18, 2015). Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) also appear to be utilizing this guiding process by

allowing females to externalize and separate from the voice of a/b. Like Sanders (2014), in his descriptions of work with youth struggling with substance misuse issues, Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) provide examples of journal writing exercises from females that describe how they were recruited into a/b's lifestyle and belief system. This craft of allowing people to engage with the dominant "voices" that represent their dominant beliefs and understandings of the world is what I would describe as the beginning of therapeutic soul searching. In the next section, I will describe how a process of questioning a dominant storyline can be seen as a second guiding step in the craft of therapeutic soul searching.

Questioning the Voice

The work of Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) shows how journal style writing is one way of helping young females begin to identify the voice of a/b that dominates their life. White (2007) is a work that provides "maps" of therapeutic practices that follow the principles of the narrative approach. These maps provide guidance and outline a possible structure for conversation, but are not intended to restrict or "police" the therapeutic conversation (White, 2007, p. 5). I would like to highlight this point, as I continue to describe how this malleable structure has influenced my thinking regarding therapeutic soul searching. This structure is a possible option, but I understand that it is not the only way to go. If, *identification* of the dominant storyline in a person's life could be an initial step of therapeutic soul searching, then the next step might be a process of questioning this dominant voice.

White (2007) has described the process of questioning as "Unravelling Negative Identity Conclusions" (p. 26). Going back to Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004), the voice of a/b is shown to use the tactics of name calling and arbitrary standard setting, which persuade females to listen to various demands regarding their actions and beliefs. White (2007) writes that the "unravelling

process” exposes “the power relations that people have been subject to and that have shaped their negative conclusions about their life and their identity” (p. 27). The initial step of identifying the voice of a dominant storyline hopefully opens a gap between the person and the problem. The next stage of questioning this voice solidifies the separation between the person and the problem and glimpses of alternative storylines can be seen.

Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) describe conversations in which “a momentary break from a/b are often experienced as quite moving” for the females that they worked with (p. 91). In the craft of therapeutic soul searching this process of questioning and learning about dominant beliefs helps people understand the lens through which they see the world. Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) describe this step in their work with young females as an “ongoing process of questioning oneself about a/b’s intentions, effects, and trustworthiness” (p. 92). The steps of identifying the problem and then questioning the problem occur through a variety of means, including what Sanders (2014) calls externalizing practices and White (2007) calls externalizing conversations. In the next section, I suggest that this second stage of questioning develop into the craft of de-construction.

The De-Construction Process

I would like, again, to re-iterate that I do not feel these “steps” or “stages” occur in isolated, neat, sequential order. The language that I choose to describe this structure is always a loose, flexible guide that can be altered according to one’s preferences. These stages are a part of the craft of therapy or therapeutic soul searching. Following the process of questioning a dominant storyline, I suggest that the next stage be conceptualized as the work of de-construction of the dominant storyline. “De-construction” fits nicely as a metaphor with the nature of so many dominating empirical ideologies or belief systems that give birth to dilemmas such as a/b or the

spectrum of “addiction” as discussed in Alexander (2000). One therapeutic metaphor that helps conceptualize the work of this process states, “Rome was not built in a day. It will not be deconstructed in a day either” (Personal Communication, Joel Brass, April 28, 2013). As was suggested in my foundational beliefs, the dilemmas we face are embedded in our societal structures and thought systems. The process of separating ourselves from these structures and then de-constructing the power that they can have over us is a process that takes time and persistence. It doesn’t, however, prevent the power of this system from reappearing in our life.

Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) describe a variety of therapeutic activities they call “Dispelling Practices” (p. 93). These dispelling practices outline ways that females can develop a persistence in de-constructing a/b’s power over them. A/b’s characterization as that of a power that has cast a spell on vulnerable females is a therapeutic metaphor that is used in Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004). These dispelling practices, as described by Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004), have influenced my thinking regarding the stages of questioning and de-constructing the dominant storylines that can negatively impact our life. Examples of these dispelling practices are, “Asking Questions that Expose A/B”, “Sharing From the Anti-A/B Archive” and “Anticipating the Arguments and Rhetoric of A/B” (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004, p. 96-99). In thinking back to the aspects of the foundational ethos of practice I described in Chapter II, I like the qualities of these three dispelling practices because they challenge us to widen our perspective outside our normative patterns and to interconnect with other peoples’ stories. The practice of archiving creates a recorded history of therapeutic endeavors and a community of support. “Resistance” has become the normative term for those challenging a vast array of dilemmas that can be faced in life. The website narrativeapproaches.com, which was founded and maintained by Dean Lobovits, Jennifer Freeman and David Epston, keeps an online

document archive titled the “Archive of Resistance: Anti-Anorexia / Anti-Bulimia.” This online forum creates a resource and international community of people contributing to challenging the storylines that keep a/b infiltrating lives’. The practice of archiving could take the form of electronic documents as well as hard copy creations. Sanders (2014) for example, describes the externalizing practice of *collage* making. This practice occurred at Peak House, a residential service for young people challenging the life of substance dependency in Vancouver, B.C. Sanders (2014) writes that the young people were invited to create “a *collage* within a few days of entering the program describing their lived experience to that point, in regards to their struggles with substance use, and the experiences that took them into that territory” (p. 93). As the young people moved forward through their time at Peak House they would create another *collage* “of their vision for a preferred future, which they would juxtapose with the collage outlining where they had found themselves” (Sanders, 2014, p. 93).

The practices suggested in Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) and Sanders (2014) have influenced what I call a practice of therapeutic soul searching. The time spent in questioning and “de-constructing Rome” through a variety of therapeutic conversations, relationships and creative endeavors is time spent soul searching. In the next section I will discuss another stage that could be called the process of re-authoring / re-membering (White, 2007) a persons’ identity.

Re-Authoring the Dominant Storyline

In Tomm (1989) it is suggested that after the process of externalizing the problem “much more than de-labeling is possible” (p.18). As has been suggested, externalization of the problem can lead to an opportunity to de-construct the problem’s power system, which in turn can lead to another process of re-authoring a person’s identity in relation to the problem. Tomm (1989) states that “internalizing personal agency” is the next possible option to work towards after a

person has externalized the problem that has been identified. Tomm's (1989) description of the use of "reflexive questions that enable self-healing" has influenced my view on the progressive work of therapeutic soul searching.

There is a shift from a focus on understanding the problem to understanding or "re-writing" the story of a person's identity at this stage. White (2002), for example, provides an overview of a narrative approach that addresses the dilemma of "personal failure" by engaging in "Alternative identity projects" with people seeking help (p. 53). Through a process of learning how our identity was "manufactured" by dominant storylines, White (2002) suggests we can then engage in a "therapeutic inquiry" to "remanufacture" our identity (p. 53). Similarly, Tomm (1989) suggests that the process of reflexive questioning can lead to people feeling that they "have choices" and that they are "an active agent in the course of their own lives" (p. 19). This internalization of personal agency is part of a person's "evolving identity" (Tomm, 1989, p. 19).

White (2007) offers insight into the practices of re-authoring conversations and re-membering conversations. Re-authoring and re-membering practices engage people in an imaginative process of re-writing the story of their personal identity. White (2007) gives credit to Bruner (1986) for inspiring these identity re-forming practices through the "imaginative application of the narrative mode" (p. 128). In an acknowledgment of how powerful the process of re-authoring can be, White (2007) notes that "the re-authoring conversation map has been a mainstay of my therapeutic practice for many years" (p. 128). In accordance with Tomm's (1989) description of the narrative approach ultimately helping internalize personal agency, White (2007) notes that re-authoring conversations can help generate "identity conclusions associated with intentional state understandings" (p. 105). Intentional state understandings of identity refer to a person forming a storyline that exhibits a certain degree of personal agency, as

opposed to “internal understandings” that can “diminish the sense of personal agency” (p. 104). These storylines of intentional state understandings have influenced my thinking regarding the practice of therapeutic soul searching because they relate identity to a person’s “acts of living” (White, 2002, p. 101). This re-authoring practice is a way to promote identity becoming a story of action that is “shaped by a raft of purposes, values, beliefs, aspirations, hopes, goals, and commitments” (p. 101).

Re-membering conversations are a way to help evoke a preferred identity storyline by giving new meaning to a person’s sense of belonging or membership (White, 2007, p. 136). White (2007) writes that re-membering conversations provide “opportunities for people to challenge the dominant notions of identity in Western culture” that “emphasize norms” and promote isolated identity stories (p. 137).

Going back to Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004), a variety of re-authoring and re-membering practices can be seen in the work of resisting the power of a/b. It is suggested that an initial stage of re-authoring a life separated from the demands of a/b is for females to re-acquaint themselves with their preferred values and needs (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004, p. 164). For these females, the voice of A/b has been so restrictive and limiting that these first steps could be a process of “honoring themselves and their own embodied experience” (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004, p. 164). A powerful practice for females challenging the demands of a/b is to discuss or write about “their own interests and desires” while also “bracketing out anorexia-incited prescriptions and fears” (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004, p. 165). One’s own desires often appear in stark contrast to the restrictive lifestyle of a/b. This re-authoring practice gives these young females back their own voice and measures of personal agency to help construct their future. Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) also suggest that “Spirit-Nourishing” practices can

help promote the development of a new personal identity unique and separated from a/b (p. 164). The options for spiritual nourishing could include “meditation, prayer, awe-provoking encounters with nature, or warm baths” as well as “artistic or cultural experiences such as music, dance, painting” and writing (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004, p. 165). These spirit nourishing activities draw a parallel to White (2007) in that they can be generative of imaginative narratives. Processes involving creativity and imagination are a major part of the re-authoring phase.

Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) also suggest that the relationship aspect of re-membering practices can play a significant role in the resistance to a/b. The creation of a network of “allies” be the community that gives re-membership to females resisting a/b (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004, p. 237). Within this community, Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) state that parents often go through the process of detangling their own life from the problem that a/b has created. Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) suggest that “Co-research” and the development of “An Anti-A/B Parent-Child Relationship” is a way to cement into life the opposition to a/b’s influence (p. 244). In a statement that echoes the thematic title of this thesis, Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) write on the topic of co-research that “This soul-searching has the potential to not only greatly assist your daughter (perhaps even save her life), but also can bring your own life more into harmony with your own values and enrich your relationships with family members” (p. 245).

Perhaps the greatest influence on my thinking regarding re-membering practices as part of therapeutic soul searching is White’s (2007) version of “Definitional Ceremony” (p. 165). White (2007) and his group process work called definitional ceremony is an example of therapeutic work that could be used to infuse “rich story development” into our self-narratives (p. 165). Reynolds (2010), who uses her “Solidarity Group” to assist the work of front-line social

workers and counsellors working with marginalized citizens, writes that definitional ceremonies were inspired by the work of Myerhoff (1982). Reynolds (2010) writes of Myerhoff's innovation that "she believed that people require an audience for the stories of their preferred identity" (p. 248). Myerhoff's (1982) creation of definitional ceremonies came to be from her work with a community of elderly Jewish citizens in Los Angeles, California (White, 2007, p. 180). Within this community of Jewish elders many were suffering from isolation, loss of meaning, loss of family and a past that included surviving the Holocaust (White, 2007, p. 180). Definitional ceremonies became "the forums, convened by this community, in which community members would have the opportunity to tell and retell, and to perform and to reperform, the stories of their lives (White, 2007, p. 180-181). These definitional ceremonies "fostered an ethos of living that was centered on the displacement of 'thin' conclusions about identity and on the recuperation of 'thick' conclusions – for the people of this community" (White, 2007, p. 181). The process of definitional ceremony "reenergized their sense of existence" (White, 2007, p. 180).

The process of definitional ceremony involves relationships, which I believe is a key part of therapeutic soul searching. The witnesses who are asked to share in the processes of therapeutic soul searching become a community in which we belong. White (2007) describes how these witnesses can comment on "personal experiences that resonated" with the self-narrative they witnessed or speak of "how their lives have been touched by the expressions" they have heard through the conversation (p. 166). White (2007) states that the outline of a definitional ceremony consists of a "telling of a significant life story", then a "retelling of the story" by the witnesses and then another retelling of the retelling "which is done by the person for whom the definitional ceremony is for" (p. 185). As White (2007) suggests, the witnesses create an environment where self-narratives of personal identity become "public" and take on the

feeling of being real (p. 184). I see definitional ceremony as a way for intentional state outcomes (White, 2007) and personal agency (Tomm, 1989) to become “real” and tangible for those participating in this soul searching work.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I have outlined why and how the narrative tradition has influenced my thinking regarding the practices of therapeutic soul searching. I have outlined a loose, guiding process that involves the practices of externalizing the problem, questioning the problem, deconstructing the problem’s power and then re-authoring / re-membering a new storyline of personal identity. The description of this process relied heavily on the work of White (2007; 2002). The work of Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) was used to show how the narrative approach was used when working with females struggling with a/b. The work of Sanders (2014) and Tomm (1989) were also significant influences that inspired ideas about the extension of narrative practices into a variety of other dilemmas. The Chapter culminated in a description of “Definitional Ceremony” (White, 2007), which is a practice that generates community and belonging into the possibilities of therapeutic soul searching.

Chapter IV: Spiritual-based Traditions and Therapeutic Soul Searching

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the foundational structure of a therapeutic process that was influenced by the tradition of narrative therapy. This process, when used as a malleable guide, consists of four themes which could be called: 1) externalizing practices (Sanders, 2014), 2) questioning the voice (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004), 3) the de-construction process, 4) re-authoring / re-membering processes (White, 2007). In the current chapter, I intend to describe how therapeutic traditions based in the use of spiritual-based metaphors follow a strikingly parallel thematic process as the one previously described.

In our globalized, commodified, media saturated world, we are constantly exposed to supposedly new, original and improved methods or systems. The field of counselling and therapeutic practice is not immune to these illusionary practices. Sanders (2014) writes, “I consider it imperative that students and novices to the vocation of therapy have a sense of the affinities, similarities, and convergences existing amongst perspectives” (p. 8). Being one who sees these lineages and similarities between various traditions, I tend to agree with Sanders (2014) reference to the adage, “there is nothing new beneath the therapeutic sun” (p. 8). Although I am not opposed to the concepts of improvement or progress, I do suggest that much of what is offered “on the market” has little to do with actual forward movement. These supposedly new practices are simply portraying themselves as such to meet the requirements of the dominant discourse of a competitive consumer system. The dominant belief of this competitive consumer system is that new brands must offer something advanced that you couldn’t get with the previous model.

This chapter will focus on describing four themes of therapeutic soul searching that have

been influenced by spiritual-based traditions. These four themes will be shown to parallel the four themes described in Chapter III. These four themes could be called: 1) witnessing, 2) knowing who we are not, 3) focusing on being, 4) new pathways. The “names” of these four practices represent my own personal preference as influenced by the mosaic of sources I will show have contributed to my understanding of them. As the reader of this thesis may be able to infer, I believe that these names are interchangeable, and encourage the individualization of them with the people we meet in therapy.

In the next section, prior to describing the four themes associated spiritual-based traditions, I will begin with a discussion of how I see a convergence between the “imaginative applications” White (2007) saw in his narrative approach and what has come to be referred to as “inner work” (p. 130).

Creativity, Imagination and Inner Work

In Chapter III, it was noted how various practices under the umbrella of the narrative approach encouraged the presence of imagination and creativity to enhance the therapeutic experience. Collage making (Sanders, 2014), engagement with nature, journaling, music, painting, dancing, meditation (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004), and conversations about a “projected future” (White, 2007, p.129) were all used as part of bringing imagination and creativity into the therapy. The hope of using this creativity in therapy is to “invoke the play of imagination” for those suffering and perhaps generate richer, more meaningful stories of personal identity (White, 2007, p. 76).

These imaginative and creative practices as seen from the narrative approach are parallel to what I see as possibilities of what spiritual-based therapeutic approaches call “inner work”. Much like how Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) suggest that working against a/b is an ongoing

progressive process, those who come to understand the practices of so-called inner work often see it as worthy of prolonged participation. Cohen (2015), a therapist, educator and author influenced by Buddhist and Taoist traditions, writes, “Inner workers are in the process of exploring all aspects of their lives by entering intentionally into those areas that call for inquiry” (p. 40). To me, the three factors of time, effort and relationship are key similarities between practices influenced by the narrative approach and those of spiritual-based traditions. Regarding what I call therapeutic soul searching, these factors of time, effort and relationships are also the key factors involved in reflecting on one’s personal identity.

As we have seen, there are a variety of mediums that account for inner identity work and the medium should be varied and tailored to match an individual’s therapeutic journey. Inner work is about “entering intentionally” (Cohen, 2015, p. 40) into experiences that evoke “imaginative applications” (White, 2007) that will challenge us to separate from taken-for-granted dominant discourses or illusionary identities. In the next section, I will describe the practice of “witnessing” as the initial theme of identity work as influenced by spiritual-based therapeutic traditions.

Witnessing

The decision to bring any practice into the therapeutic relationship occurs in conjunction with being guided by our foundational ethos. To serve as a review, my foundational ethos involves Sanders (2014) notion of practicing an aesthetics of engagement that allows, first and foremost, that the suffering other can tell their story. King’s (2003) notion that, “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” helps us find what the best course of action is to take with each person (p.3). The stories told in the initial therapeutic encounters not only help us choose what practices to bring into the relationship but also the language which we will use to engage with

these practices.

Part of the craft of being a counsellor is the ability to use metaphorical imagery or metaphorical stories that the person suffering will understand. The practices of spiritual traditions are full of metaphorical language and stories that help us understand them. The metaphor of “witnessing” is one such example. I have found the practicing of witnessing to be in a variety of Buddhist, Taoist and Hindi spiritual teachings. One such example, is in the 1973 work entitled *I am That*, which is transcriptions of various conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, who was a “petty shopkeeper” in Bombay, India that became known for his ability to live and teach the ways of a spiritual existence that has come to be referred to as non-dualism (p. xii). It is said in Maharaj (1973) that, “You must watch yourself continuously – particularly your mind – moment by moment, missing nothing. This witnessing is essential for the separation of the self from the not-self” (p. 25). The idea of “the mind” is important throughout these spiritual-based traditions. Recall that Bateson (1979), thought of “mind” as a “system capable of purpose and choice” (p. 136). The mind can be seen as the system or web of storylines, concepts, perceptions, and thinking patterns that are the result of our interrelationship with the world around us (Bateson, 1979). Maharaj (1973), in further conversation about the idea of witnessing states, “Watch over your thoughts, feelings, words and actions” (p. 25). The idea of witnessing is asking us to be able to engage with and identify what the contents of the mind. Another term that, for me, is synonymous with the contents of the mind is consciousness. Our consciousness, therefore, also represents the web of storylines, concepts, perceptions, and thinking patterns through which we see life. It is using language, then, that we begin to understand the contents of our mind and consciousness. Here I see a link between the ideas suggested by Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) in their work with young females who began a resistance to a/b by learning and

identifying the language, or the voice, of a/b. Those young females, were asked to begin to discern the voice of a/b and practice witnessing its demands. The therapeutic practice of identifying voices and giving language to the contents of the mind is t parallel to the idea of witnessing.

I have also found the practice of witnessing or observing to be present in the spiritual tradition of Zen Buddhism. According to Deshimaru (1982), a Japanese Samurai Zen master, the purpose of Zen Buddhism is to “still the restless mind” and “perceive the ultimate harmony beneath seeming discord” (p. 1). Deschimar (1982) states that the beginning stage of practicing Zen Buddhism requires a period of “will and consciousness” (p. 15). It is suggested that the practice of zazen sitting meditation is the gateway into an ability to witness the workings of the mind (Deschimar, 1982, p. 1). It is interesting to notice how in language we can describe consciousness as both an action of observation as well as the object of that which we are observing. The same goes for the mind, as we can use our mind to observe the workings of the mind. A metaphor that is used to illustrate this double aspect of consciousness and the practice of witnessing is the image of the moon’s reflection on a passing stream (Deschimar, 1982, p. 17). The moon’s reflection and the water in the stream represent the workings of the mind or consciousness, while the moon itself is the conscious witness to its own reflection and the water. All three, however, the moon’s reflection, the water in the stream and the moon itself, are in fact in their own flow of motion. Deschimar (1982) states, “do not attach yourself to any thought, let the thoughts pass by” (p. 18). I believe the beauty of these Zen Buddhist is shown through these metaphorical stories. We must first consciously attach ourselves to a thought of not attaching ourselves to any thought to be free of attachment to thoughts.

The use of this metaphorical imagery is contingent upon collaborative meaning making

within the therapeutic relationship. Zazen sitting meditation need not be the medium of allowing someone to witness their thoughts. Brass (1987), is an example of a written guide that is influenced by this spiritual-based theme of witnessing, but without the mystical metaphors as seen in the previous Zen Buddhist example. In working with an emotionally suffering other the theme of witnessing can be evoked using this distinction: “Each of us has emotions”, but “We are not our emotions” (Brass, 1987, p. 61). If, then, we are not our emotions, does this allow us the space to witness them? And how would this practice of witnessing change our experience? Our thinking? Our perception? I would like to point out how this witnessing practice is creating a thread of crossover with the concepts used in the narrative approaches shown in the previous chapter. For example, I compare this practice of emotive witnessing to how Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) hoped that those struggling with a/b would be able to learn its voice and create a space of separation from it. Brass (1987) goes on to explain how common language usage helps perpetuate our identification with emotional reactions. Statements that internalize emotive states, such as “I am angry” or “I am depressed”, bind us to a “mistaken identity” (Brass, 1987, p. 62). In practicing witnessing by observing how our emotions are portrayed in language we can shift to statements that show a degree of separation from the states we can experience. For example, statements such as, “I have anger” or “depression is there sometimes”, are ones that make this shift in perspective. Brass (1987) writes that shifts in focus such as these “do change how we see, relate to and handle our emotions and thereby our experience of life” (p. 62). Sanders (2014) noted a similar preference in the work done at Peak House, where practices shifted away from the disease influenced model of addiction recovery. This disease model, most prominently used in 12 step recovery programs, uses statements such as “I am an alcoholic” or “I am an addict”, which can take over a person’s story of identity.

In no way do I see Brass's (1987) suggestion about witnessing emotions as a universally applicable exercise. I do see it as relevant, especially with populations heavily influenced by mass media culture, because the expression of our emotions is imbedded with the dominant discourses of our culture. As Gergen (2009) suggested, the expression of how we feel and act out our emotions is learned through our culture (p. 107). Reynolds (2014a) has suggested that we are "swimming" in harmful cultures of misogyny, patriarchy and racism (p. 37). Mass media culture preys on our emotions because that is what fuels the culture of consumerism. Or as Alexander (2000) sees it, the culture of addiction. The practice of witnessing is a beginning challenge to these discourses that depend on peoples' non-awareness towards their experience of life. Brass (1987) writes of this "unconscious" emotional being as living like "a fish on a hook, tossed hither and yon by the power and the whims of an unknown fisherman" (p. 61). The theme of witnessing, when used as a practice, helps people engage with these dominant discourses that so heavily influence the make-up of our consciousness. A practice of witnessing provides people with the space of time, which is so important in allowing us to choose the way we language and perceive life.

In the next section, I will look at another spiritual-based theme about investigating our identity in terms of who we are not. This concept will be shown to run parallel to the practice of questioning the voice as seen in Chapter III.

Know who you are not

In this section I will explore the convergences between the theme of "questioning the voice", which comes from the influence of the narrative approach in Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004), and the spiritual-based approach of learning about our identity by investigating the parts of ourselves that do not fit into our preferred storyline. So far, the theme of witnessing has been

shown to be similar to practices of “identifying the voice” of the dominant belief system that influences our everyday experience of life. As has been discussed, witnessing engages us with the mind. To add to my previous discussion of the mind and consciousness, I offer the writing in Chopra (2013), a work that advocates for a “holistic solution” to problems related to body image and diet (p. 32). Chopra (2013) writes, “I realize that neuroscience treats the brain and the mind as one and the same” because “the mind is invisible” (p. 39). As opposed to viewing the mind and the brain as one, Chopra (2013) suggests, “The brain is like a radio receiving what the mind has to say” (p. 39). Like Bateson (1979), Chopra (2013) views the mind as the web of all the thought patterns, storylines and ideas that work as a system of perception. To illustrate his point, Chopra (2013) writes, “When you hear a concert broadcast, you don’t mistake the radio for Mozart” (p. 39). This view of mind acknowledges how impactful socio-cultural forces can be on the content of our mind and consciousness. To Chopra (2013), “The mind comes first because the person comes first” (p. 39).

The therapeutic practice of questioning the voice allows us to engage with the mind and begin to understand what influences it. Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) used this practice to assist young females in separating themselves from the domineering force of a/b lifestyle practices. Brass (1987) suggested that the emotions be the focus of what we need a degree of separation from to begin to perceive life differently. Chopra (2013) similarly suggests that we begin a practice of witnessing our bodily sensations, emotions and the mind itself (p. 32). I assert that for those heavily influenced by modern day mass media culture, a practice of witnessing emotions is a good starting point in the direction of questioning this culture’s dominant storylines.

A practice of witnessing opens the opportunity for further externalizing practices

(Sanders, 2014). Externalizing practices, as understood in the narrative approach, provide the opportunity for people to feel separate from the problem. Spiritual-based traditions often focus on separating people from the problems of the mind. For example, take this excerpt from Maharaj (1973):

If you are angry or in pain, separate yourself from anger and pain and watch them.

Externalization is the first step in liberation. Step away and look. The physical events will go on happening, but by themselves they have no importance. It is the mind alone that matters. (p. 236).

This excerpt is not included to represent a universal truth. I am not suggesting that all physical events have no importance. But when circumstances are deemed safe and appropriate, this concept could serve as useful in the therapeutic journey of the people we work with. Maharaj (1973) includes the theme of understanding who we are not as a means of further separating ourselves from problem-based lifestyles.

Identities formed in cultures engulfed by materialistic mass media are inherently attached to storylines that give people “a personal sense of not measuring up” (Sanders, 2014, p.101). Like Reynolds (2014a), who suggests people can be completely surrounded by cultures of hate, Brass (2009) argues much the same, but prefers to conceptualize these dominant cultures as both existing in our consciousness as well as the outer world. As an internalized consciousness, Brass (2009) prefers to refer to these dominating voices as “the aggressive/defensive ego consciousness and the Universe Of Fear” (p. 38). This inner and outer conceptualization is similar to how a/b is confronted in the work of Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004). Brass (2009) describes a therapeutic journey that works towards undoing the thought system of the aggressive/defensive ego. In Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) the workings of a/b were shown to be subtle and deceptive,

even appearing as helpful. Many of the young females were not able to see on their own how a/b was running their life. Brass (2009) suggests that the workings of the aggressive/defensive ego are also subtle, deceptive and difficult to recognize “Because we are in it all the time” (p.38). Again, this journey of undoing a dominant thought system appears to mirror in many ways Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) in the journey of un-attaching a female from the thoughts of a/b.

In Maharaj (1973), it suggests that “To know what you are, you must first investigate and know what you are not” (p. 56). When this spiritual-based idea is applied to therapeutic scenarios where a person’s identity has become a topic of discussion, we can begin to investigate aspects of that person’s life that are troublesome and have created a problematic understanding of their identity. Brass (2009) follows this theme and uses an investigation into an aggressive/defensive ego consciousness. The work of knowing who we are not is parallel to the idea of questioning the voice, as discussed in Chapter III. Brass (2009) suggests using journaling and therapeutic conversations as the primary means of learning the worldview of what he calls the aggressive/defensive ego consciousness. This therapeutic work is similar to what Cohen (2013) describes as inner work. I find Brass’s (2009) work with the aggressive/defensive ego consciousness is also similar to some of the practices Sanders (2014) utilized in his work with young people at Peak House. Brass (2009) states, “*It could be said that the ego consciousness is synonymous with, and born out of, the experience of not being good enough*” (p. 43). Through a series of interviews, letters and journals, it is suggested that we can let the aggressive/defensive ego “tell its story” (Brass, 2009, p. 174). Sanders (2014) practice of collage making with the young people at Peak House reminds me of the sentiments of Brass’s (2009) work with the aggressive/defensive ego consciousness. The original collage made by those young people at

Peak House told the story of “their lived experience” (Sanders, 2014, p. 93). Learning about the aggressive/defensive ego consciousness is also a way of telling the story of our lived experience regarding the conflicts, dilemmas and emotional difficulties we have faced. Brass (2009) has influenced my thinking greatly because I appreciate how he does not turn these therapeutic practices into personal or internal warfare. The goal of learning who you are not is not to begin fighting against parts of ourselves. As Brass (2009) states “*Transforming the fear you have inherited into higher and greater love is the essence of personal healing*” (p. 45). I have found a similar message in the work of Sanders (2014) about how the essence of this therapeutic work is learning about love and life. I compare Brass’s (2009) words with this excerpt from Sanders (2014), which is a metaphorical description of Peak House that was written by a young participant:

I know from my experience I’m always going to think of Peak House as a place where they take wounded birds who cannot fly or fend for them selves, and they feed the little bird and care for it, and nurture it, and most importantly teach it to love and respect. (p. 85).

This “spiritual” craft I envision called therapeutic soul searching holds the same values as these views of therapeutic endeavours.

The work of White (2002), which is titled “Addressing Personal Failure”, has also influenced my thinking regarding engaging in identity work. I find White (2002) to be quite helpful because it contains the same thematic workings of a spiritual-based approach, but does not engage necessarily with mystical spiritual language. White’s (2002) use of language provides a means of engaging in soul searching work for those who would be put off by spiritual-based metaphorical language. White (2002) provides a “Failure conversations map” that begins with a

discussion called “Failure in relation to” (p. 58). In this conversation, people are asked about “the expectations, norms and standards” that they “believe they have failed to adequately reproduce in their acts of living” (White, 2002, p. 58). This conversation relates to my preferred viewpoint that suggests people should explore and understand the boundaries, or the norms, standards and expectations, of the storyline that dominates their worldview. White (2002) then suggests proceeding with conversations that inquire about “Response to failure” and “Unique outcomes” (p. 58). Part of these conversations is designed to investigate how people have in fact been refusing and questioning “these expectations norms and standards” (White, 2002, p. 58). To reiterate, without using the same language as the spiritual approach of Maharaj (1973), I see White (2002) as engaging people in a parallel direction through the conversation topics of “Failure in relation to”, “Response to failure” and “Unique Outcomes” (p. 58). White’s (2002) map, in fact, lays out a total of eight possible conversations that comprise the work of an “identity project” (p. 57). This concept of an identity project I find similar to the notion of inner work, which Cohen describes as people “exploring all aspects of their lives by entering intentionally into those areas that call for inquiry” (p. 40). White (2002) states that these identity projects are “helpful in opening up, to intentional investigation” of “neglected territories of people’s lives” (p. 57). As part of these identity projects, it is suggested that an understanding of who we are not is helpful in developing a complete storyline of one’s self.

In the next section, I will describe how “knowing who we are not” transitions into the theme of “focusing on being”.

Focusing on being

In the previous section, it was suggested that therapeutically exploring the theme of “knowing who we are not” works in similar fashion to externalizing practices (Sanders, 2014)

that have been inspired by the narrative approach, which has a preference of identifying people as separate from problems. It has been suggested that various externalizing practices (Sanders, 2014) help in allowing people to gain insight into how the dominant discourses of “the mind” are restricting them from being able to engage with preferred lifestyle practices and preferred identity storylines. To describe further the parallel themes between the narrative approach and therapeutic approaches primarily influenced by spiritual-based traditions, this section will focus on how the theme of “knowing who we are not” often transitions in an inquiry into one’s preferred identity and lifestyle practices. As I have previously discussed in Chapter III, Tomm’s (1989) conception of “Internalizing Personal Agency” is similar to this spiritual-based theme of “focusing on being”.

The theme of “focusing on being” is a main topic of conversation throughout Maharaj (1973). In several different conversations in Maharaj (1973), he, as the spiritual teacher, is asked how he came to be living in such a state of spiritual existence. Each time Maharaj replies quite simply by stating that he was an earnest learner and that his teacher told him to focus on “I am” as a mantra that would lead him to understand that his *being* is separate from the false ideas of the mind (Maharaj, 1973). The use of a mantra is another aspect of a practice of witnessing. I have previously discussed how witnessing engages us into awareness of consciousness or the mind by using language. The word *mantra*, as translated from Hindi, consists of *man*, which means “to think” and *tra*, which refers to agency (Maharaj, 1973, p. 524). The practice of a mantra is about thinking with agency. In looking at the purpose of such a practice, focusing on “I am” draws attention to language and therefore engages our mind. “I am” is the present tense of the verb “to be”. Focusing on “I am” is in fact drawing our attention to the degrees of personal agency that exist in each present moment of our being. Focusing on “I am” creates space for

people to engage with preferred *ways of being* and to discern how they differ from identities of deficiency (Sanders, 2014), which are embedded in the dominant storylines that have infiltrated our minds. The following excerpt from Maharaj (1973) engages with the idea that our minds can lead us astray and that it is better to utilize intentional awareness, or thinking with agency, as we perceive the happenings of life:

Do not struggle with your memories and thoughts; try only to include in your field of attention the other, more important questions? like, ‘Who am I?’ ‘How did I happened to be born?’ ‘Whence this universe around me?’ ‘What is real and what is momentary?’ No memory will persist, if you lose interest in it; it is the emotional link that perpetuates the bondage (p. 230).

I find this excerpt from Maharaj (1973) has several convergences with those other voices that have influenced my thinking. For example, Hillman’s (1996) acorn theory of “character and calling” asks us to question our memories, especially the memories of childhood that are so heavily infiltrated by the discourse of psychology, which has created a problem saturated storyline for so many people (p. 10). Also, like Brass (1987), Maharaj (1973) indicates how our emotional experience is intertwined, or in bondage with perception, memory and thinking. The theme of focusing on our preferred being or “I am” as a point of focus allows us to engage with personal agency or what White (2002) called “intentional state understandings” of life (p. 103).

The work of Bai (2012) has influenced my thinking on how to proceed with the theme of focusing on being. As previously discussed in Chapter I, Bai’s (2012) work is influenced by Buddhist and Taoist traditions of spiritual development. As influenced by these Eastern traditions, Bai (2012) conceptualizes a great deal of human suffering as stemming from “our conditioning and programming” that comes from a culture that alienates people from nature and

conscious awareness of being (p. 319). As a result, we suffer by living in a constant, but “unconscious” state of “alienation” (Bai, 2012, p. 320).

Kinman (2011) is another work that has described the topic of human alienation from nature. Similar to Bai (2012), Kinman (2011) writes of how our human mind can create such strong beliefs in “causal chains” and these impacts how we perceive the environment of the world (p.72). As influenced by the thinking of Gregory Bateson, Kinman (2011) writes, “By understanding life as if it were simply a product of causal chains, and then by intervening in life as if our actions would implement a redemptive causal chain, is, according to Bateson, the very form of thinking and acting which disrupts and endangers complex environmental systems in the first place” (p.72). A practice, such as focusing on being, that would enable us to shift our perspective to what Kinman (2011) calls “rhizome lines” of creation could open up our consciousness to what occurs outside the scope causal thinking patterns (p.73).

Although the use of language may be different, when I look at the mosaic of voices that have influenced my perspective I see so much overlap and convergence around what could be called unconscious alienation. From Reynolds’s (2014a) assertion about us swimming in a culture of violence, to the work of Sanders (2014) and Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) who assisted young people by de-constructing their life story from clutches of identities of deficiency and a/b or Brass (2009) which is about bringing people into an awareness of thought systems that severely limit their options for action – there is a pattern of engaging therapeutically with storylines of alienation in various forms.

These influences are all concerned with the culture that surrounds us. Bai (2012) states, “To summarise the main thrust of my arguments so far: environmental educators are moral educators, and moral educators are psychological educators, and all three are cultural educators”

(p. 320). This view privileges the belief that an awareness or consciousness of the culture in which we live is a major stepping stone in our stories of therapeutic healing. Bai (2012) has inspired my thinking regarding how Eastern spiritual traditions can contribute to what I have referred to previously as the stage of de-construction of dominant storylines. The Buddhist tradition of *bodhicitta* is one such practice that helps promote a more conscious awareness of being. Bai (2012) writes, “The whole meditation tradition in all branches of Buddhism is focused on finding ways to get in touch with the seed of bodhicitta, watering it and growing it” (p. 321). Bodhicitta, when understood through the lens of Buddhism, is a universally accessible consciousness, ever-present and a core part of human experience, although it is mostly covered up by an ego-consciousness (dominant discourse), which is also part of our conditioning (Bai, 2012). Bodhicitta is a universal human consciousness that is “boundlessly warm and radiant, spirited and courageous, at the same time, clear-sighted and calm, loving and compassionate” (Bai, 2012, p. 321). The teaching of bodhicitta is learned by contrasting its way of being, as a consciousness, in comparison to an ego-consciousness. According to Bai (2012) the ego-consciousness is often filled with “anxiety, fear, frustration, jealousy, feelings of inadequacy, discontent, ill will, anger and hatred, and the attendant turmoil, confusion, despair, self- and other loathing, empty feelings, or wishes that things are otherwise, and resulting tension and despair, helplessness and dispiritedness” (p. 321). The concept of bodhicitta helps bring the ways of love, respect and healing into our preferred way of being. As previously see in the work of Sanders (2014) and Brass (2009), this aspect of love is an integral part in the journey of any practice therapeutic soul searching.

Bai’s (2012) suggestion of working with the consciousness of bodhicitta is similar in practice to how Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) used “Disspelling Practices” to cement in the

separation between the thought system of a/b versus a personal, preferred value system (p. 93). In these dispelling practices, part of the de-construction of a/b's power was to ask young females to contribute to or read from an anti-a/b archive. I find this practice of uniting someone in intellectual, if not personal, communion with others also mirrors the thematic practice of exploring bodhicitta. Being a core aspect of human experience, bodhicitta is also a uniting practice. Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) also suggest practices that contrast the values of a/b compared to the preferred values and goals of those who have been suffering under its spell. It is apparent that therapeutically exploring bodhicitta through writing, conversation or meditation will also call into question the values of various dominant thought systems. Chinnery & Bai (2008) provides an example of such a practice by suggesting how the western cultural view of "individualism" can be questioned and examined as a possible ego-based thought system.

The exploration bodhicitta, as a consciousness, is a practice that also gels with the concept of an identity project as seen in White (2002). In White (2002) it is suggested that conversations about "Ethical Substance" or "bottom-line considerations" and "Mode of subjectification" are helpful in examining what a person finds to be of "ethical relevance" and what "values and principles" shape the culture of the specific narratives that formulate their worldview (p. 59). These practices could also be considered a de-constructing practice that helps people focus on their way of being. This draws us back to the spiritual-based therapeutic tradition of focusing our being or "I am" to open new conscious awareness.

Brass (2009) also provides a similar practice of contrasting the different values, principles and beliefs that make up the various perspectives of our consciousness. As noted previously, Brass (2009) suggests a therapeutic exploration of an aggressive/defensive ego consciousness, which is parallel to the narrative inspired concept of identifying the voice of the

dominant storyline that most influences our lifestyles practices. As a way to provide contrast to the voice of an aggressive/defensive ego consciousness, it is suggested that another exploration be done that therapeutically engages with an “natural child consciousness” (Brass, 2009, p. 228).

Therapeutic work exploring a natural child consciousness is based in similar themes as the tradition of bodhicitta. Where Bai (2012) described bodhicitta as being a consciousness of courageousness, calmness, warmth, spirit, love and compassion, Brass (2009) describes a natural child consciousness as “loved-based and growth-oriented” (p. 228). The natural child consciousness is another option to help the people we work with counter the identity storylines of insufficiency or not being good enough that are inherent in many dominant discourses in our society. Brass’s (2009) concept of an inner natural child consciousness works congruently with the practices of de-constructing the dominant restrictive voices and moves towards the practice of re-authoring an identity. For example, the therapeutic journey could be described as a progressive shift towards understanding the aspects of a natural child consciousness as being our preferred worldview. Brass (2009) writes, “It is your natural child consciousness that is the most practical guide into a new, loved-based operating state and way of being” (p. 229).

The natural child consciousness is another therapeutic option and should be consider as synonymous to an exploration into a preferred future or way of being in the world. For me, Brass’s (2009) aggressive/defensive ego consciousness is synonymous with dominant discourses like western individualism or competitive materialistic capitalism. It is my preference to suggest that inquiry into the ideas of love, community, compassion, forgiveness and peaceful being, which are all inherent in both bodhicitta and the natural child consciousness, is a meaningful therapeutic practice that is necessary to counter dominant discourses based in insufficiency and competition. Work with bodhicitta and a natural child consciousness is slightly more prescriptive

than, for example, White (2002) would suggest he prefers his identity project to be. However, given the examples in White (2002), it is apparent that his map of eight conversational stages does lead to a rejection of dominant storylines that at one time produced stories of personal failure for those participating in the identity project.

My preference for working with these concepts such as bodhicitta or the natural child consciousness demonstrates my affinity for King's (2003) assertion that "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 3). If King's (2003) statement about stories does reflect how many of us relate to the world, then I see White's (2002) identity project, Bai's (2012) suggestion of understanding bodhicitta as a therapeutic tool and Brass's (2009) contrast work between an aggressive/defensive ego and a natural child consciousness *as practices that introduce people to a helpful storyline to live through*. And if, as the narrative approach suggests, dominant discourses negatively influence people to feel insufficient and subjugated, then therapeutic soul searching is a craft that helps teach a counter culture. In accordance with the influence of Bai (2012), these practices place counsellors in a position of being "cultural educators" (p. 320). Through individual self-narratives changing to storylines of love and community, it is hoped that shifts in dominant narratives can also occur.

In the next section, I will be discussing how focusing on being can transition into another stage of therapeutic inquiry that could be called an exploration of "New Pathways".

New Pathways

Various spiritual-based traditions of therapeutic inquiry use the metaphor of following a new pathway as symbolic of healing or the dissolution of a person's suffering. The metaphor of following a new pathway has come into my life through many different voices. I would like to mention two that stand out to me. The first, is from the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert

Frost (1916), which is a piece that I have used throughout my ten years as a secondary school English teacher. The final stanza of the poem contains the lines:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. (l.18-20)

I am always intrigued to read and hear the responses from the young people who participate in my English classes about these lines. Most often I have found that they see a metaphorical message about the difficult decision to not follow the crowd and to be open minded about what they do in life. I find poems such as these help to open discussion about how our cultural norms and standards need not represent the only way of thinking and living.

The second source that stands out to me is the work of M. Scott Peck (1978; 1993; 1997) and his “Road Less Travelled” trilogy. I mostly found inspiration in the message that “life is complex and there are no easy answers”, which makes our learning and “spiritual development” a main point of our meaning and purpose (Peck, 1997, p. 24). Peck (1997) also promoted the importance of community building. I also admired this because it is a reminder that we do not walk these new pathways alone.

The using the metaphor of a new pathway is a way to focus the therapeutic journey on visions of preferred futures (Sanders, 2014) and preferred identity storylines. White (2009) has described this stage of the therapeutic journey as re-authoring and re-membering conversations. Brass (2009), as a practitioner and author influenced by spiritual-based traditions, writes of this metaphorical theme as a re-visioning our identity by exploring a natural child consciousness and then extending this exploration into a spiritual consciousness. The following excerpt from Brass (2009) describes his thinking regarding a spiritual consciousness:

This “spiritual consciousness” is *not* necessarily God or Jesus Christ or Allah or Buddha or YHWH or Krishna or any other formal deity. These are various names for specific “Higher Powers”. What I am referring to as the spiritual consciousness of the Inner Family is an innate, organic, inwardly-felt, and individualized spirituality. It is a highly personalized guide, presence, teacher, and source of direction and love that, in your experience of it, is unique to you. It may or may not attach itself to any formal deity or symbol. (p. 242).

As written in the above excerpt, Brass (2009) suggests that a therapeutic exploration entails working with an inner family, which is conceptualized as consisting of an adaptive child consciousness, an aggressive/defensive ego consciousness, a natural child consciousness and a spiritual consciousness. An inquiry into the story behind each of these four consciousness follows the *thematic pattern* I have outlined in the current Chapter as well as the pattern of therapeutic work as influenced by the narrative approach in Chapter III.

Brass’s (2009) idea of a spiritual consciousness has influenced my view on therapeutic endeavours because of how directly his work challenges the belief systems of the dominant cultural discourses that render people to acquire a worldview that is divisive and produces identities of deficiency (Sanders, 2014). Therapeutic work with this conceptualized inner family, made up of four different consciousness, is an option that could be very helpful for many people. Once again, I am not suggesting the inner family model is a universally helpful approach. I do not propose the inner family model as superior to any other approach, but rather that I see it as compatible and similar in *thematic nature* to the other approaches outlined in this thesis.

As with all the members of the inner family, the spiritual consciousness is explored through participation in writing, meditative contemplation and therapeutic conversation. I find

this combination of work and the nature of the therapeutic conversations to evoke imagination and rich, thick storylines, which are also suggested as a positive quality of White's (2009) re-authoring and re-membering conversations. This process of working with different consciousness and varying perspectives of inner family members is indeed generative of narrative storylines. In this work, we as counsellors act as a witness as the people we work with, perhaps for the first time, get to be known for their life story. The inner family work of Brass (2009), I believe, evokes the feeling where therapy becomes something soulful and sacred, as Sanders (2013) envisioned.

By interviewing and telling the story of each inner family member, it is possible that the metaphor of a spiritual consciousness becomes a part of a person's preferred identity and preferred vision of the future. As previously mentioned, although this spiritual consciousness is love and growth-based, it is also personal and individualized based on each person's cultural and identity needs (Brass, 2009). The metaphor of the spiritual consciousness can thus expand into the metaphor of an inner guide, which works well with the spiritual-based traditional metaphor of proceeding down new roads and new pathways with a new guide. Brass (2009) writes, "Having a non-physical guide or teacher is the same as being in the presence and receiving guidance from a highly respected, experienced mentor" (p. 269). I would suggest that a desired outcome of inner family work is to create a richer understanding of one's self-narrative and to instill a degree of personal agency over the future of one's life story. This pattern is very near the description of narrative therapy work in Tomm (1989).

Therapeutic work with an inner family, as presented in Brass (2009), has convergences with other spiritual influenced traditions. Namely, community-based cultures, such as the traditions of many Indigenous or First Nations peoples'. Brass (2009) states that there is great

value in “going public”, so to speak, and participating in this identity work with a therapeutic community (p. 264). On a personal note, I can attest to how a practitioner such as Brass and his approach is generative of creating not only a therapeutic community, but also a larger therapeutic “family” with lasting friendships and highly supportive relationships. These therapeutic families become supportive of what White (2007) saw as the re-association or new membership aspect of one’s new pathway.

There are further extensions of the inner spiritual guide metaphor, especially when it is aided by embracing a community of external guides who are also exploring aspects of their own inner family and spiritual consciousness. Therapeutic communities and families, such as the way I am envisioning here, have similarities to the role of the elder that is present in many Indigenous and First Nations traditions. Stiegelbauer (1996) has informed my understanding of the role elders play in Indigenous and First Nations cultures. In many Indigenous and First Nations cultures elders are valued for their accumulated age and personalized life experience (Stiegelbauer, 1996). An elder, regardless of “their exact expertise”, can be considered in some personalized way, “experts on life” (Stiegelbauer, 1996, p. 41). I suggest that this tradition of valuing people for their lived experience and expertise is a notion that is cross-cultural and highly useful in not only the therapeutic realm, but also in other contexts in our society. Take this excerpt from Finnegan (2015), which describes the valuing of an elder within a community of surfers:

Recalling his L.A. youth, he told me, “Among my friends, there was a strong belief in the surfer’s path. Most people swerved from it sooner or later.” For his models for aging well, he looked to older surfers – he called them “elders.” Doc Ball, a lifelong surfer and retired dentist in Northern California, then in his

eighties, was a favorite. “He’s still stoked,” Mark said. “He still skateboards!”

(p.348)

Communities that value people as elders also have the potential to help in the development of “inner elders” or spiritual consciousness that help to provide people with guidance towards a preferred future.

Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have discussed the similarities and convergences between the narrative therapeutic tradition and spiritual-based therapeutic approaches. Four different themes, which could be called: 1) Witnessing 2) Knowing who you are not 3) Focusing on being and 4) New Pathways, were highlighted as possible options for a therapeutic exploration of personal identity.

A main point of convergence between the narrative therapeutic tradition and spiritual-based therapeutic approaches is the idea that people should feel a degree of separation from problematic identities or thinking. This process of engaging in separating from problem identities or thinking is what begins a journey working with the spiritual metaphor of expanding our awareness or consciousness.

In this Chapter I have taken the stance that “inner work” can take on a variety of practices and mediums including and beyond silent meditation. Although I am perhaps biased towards recommending a variety of regular practices, personal identity work should also take on the preferred form of people we are working with.

The work of Brass (1987; 2009) were highly influential on my thinking, especially regarding how to conduct an inquiry of a person’s self-narrative and how to practice witnessing as a spiritual-based therapeutic practice. The spiritual-based work contained in Maharaj (1973) also played a part as inspiration for describing a world-view that is inherently spiritual in nature.

In the next chapter, I will end this thesis with a conclusion that summarizes the highlights, the limitations and the possibilities for it in therapeutic practice.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Introduction

In this thesis, I have outlined my foundational principles of practice, which guide my efforts as a counsellor. I have also described specific practices that constitute the craft of therapy, which I have referred to as therapeutic soul searching. The overall theme of this therapeutic craft, I feel, is linked to a lineage of work related to personal growth and spiritual development. With this purpose in mind, I endeavoured to look broadly at the various voices that have influenced my thinking throughout my life as a high school teacher and throughout this Master's degree program. In the following section, I review the principal highlights of this thesis.

Thesis Highlights

In Chapter I, I introduced the viewpoint that therapy is a “sacred act” (Sanders, 2013, p. 16) that often involves working with peoples’ deepest dilemmas and struggles. This viewpoint strongly identifies with the belief that life itself is sacred, although in modern times this sacredness is often expressed through secular uses of language. One such example of how this sacred craft becomes secular, and therefore more accessible, is by focusing on the modern idea of “identity” as the main theme of therapeutic work. The lineage of personal growth and spiritual development work shares many similarities with what White (2002) refers to as personal identity projects. I assert that the common link here between personal growth and identity projects is that they both relate to the meanings individuals assign to the events and storylines of their life. The events and storylines formulate into what we call an identity.

The idea of personal identity work also relates to the sacredness of life because it interlinks one's own story with the rhizomatic maze of “others” and nature. Chinnery & Bai (2012) have noted, as influenced by the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, our story of identity is

really formulated by and through relationship. Personal identity is always linked to the macro-narrative patterns of life. One such macro-narrative is often called our culture. Our culture is simultaneously individualized and part of a larger community.

The idea of “the mind” has become another wording for macro-narrative patterns of life. Bateson (1979) has conceptualized “the mind” as the totality of ideas and thinking. Bai (2012) is also concerned with how collective, macro-narratives of the societal “mind” influence our individual “inner landscapes” (p. 314). These views, I believe, acknowledge and blend together older sacred practices with uses of language that relate to a modern secular world.

Chapter I allowed me to present the idea that our personal story is always connected and in movement with macro-narratives and stories. Hillman (1996) wrote of an enigmatic force that is present in life. The beginning of this thesis acknowledged this enigmatic aspect to understanding our identity and life. At the end of the chapter, I suggest that because of this enigmatic driving force, which we as individuals seemingly have little control over, it is important to proceed through life by understanding the ethos, or “spirit”, that guides us. I described how the purpose of this thesis was to outline this foundational ethos, or principles of practice, and then to describe some specific options in the craft of therapeutic soul searching.

In Chapter II, I outline and discuss the themes of my foundational ethos. I explain that this foundational ethos guides *how* I intend to practice as a counsellor. Referencing Ellis (2010), I suggest that the different themes of my foundational ethos create “lenses” that influenced not only my counselling practice, but also my journey through life. This ethos is a mosaic of voices and reflects a preference for “theoretical promiscuity” (McNamee, 2004 in Sanders, 2014).

The first thematic discussion is about notions of “truth” and “reality”. I note how King (2003), and the belief that “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” are a major influence

on my thinking regarding notions of truth (p. 2). I found that others, including Anderson (2000) and Gergen (2009), also have an affinity for the theme that our identity is like a storyline that is formed through relationship. I also found in Atleo (2011), an author of Indigenous heritage, that not only would identity be considered a relational story, but also interconnected to all aspects of life. This guiding story of interconnectedness was also present in Hillman's (1996) acorn theory, which holds the belief that it is helpful to investigate stories of personal destiny as a therapeutic endeavour. These voices have influenced me to engage with the storylines that people hold as their own truths.

In the next section of Chapter II, I focused on the significant role language usage has on the nature of macro-narratives and stories of personal identity. Through a variety of voices, I consider how language can be used to either oppress or liberate people. For example, Saul (1992) shows how modern systems of power have created a "dictatorship of reason", where language is specifically used to confine peoples' access to knowledge and lifestyle options. Reynolds (2010) and Coates & Wade (2007) are other sources that shed light on how abuses power are often linked to careful manipulation of language. These voices have inspired me to pursue a counselling practice that reflects collaboration and liberation in the process of telling self-narratives. Anderson & Goolishian (1988) propose a view that the therapeutic relationship is generative of its own linguistic system to ensure that it doesn't replicate various abuses of power.

With an understanding of how important the use of language is in the therapeutic setting, I then discussed the topic of metapatterns from the work of Bateson (1972). Metapatterns are like macro-narratives in that they represent a dominant system of thought that has been translated into some sort of corresponding societal structure or machinery. The work of Nylund (2007) and Starling (2012) influenced me to see how strong the metapattern of media culture and free

market capitalism is in our modern world. Nylund (2007) looks through a lens influenced by the narrative therapeutic tradition and Starling (2012) is an artistic rendition of just how powerful the culture industry has become in media saturated societies. I extend this idea of how invasive and powerful the culture industry is by discussing King's (2012) work about the myths that Hollywood has created about Indigenous people and Finnegan's (2015) memoir, which relates stories of how surfing culture has been altered by free market capitalism.

Lastly, I discuss the work of Alexander (2000), which is about the trend of addiction that runs through life in modern free market economies. Alexander (2000) shows how the metapattern of free market capitalism has generated an underlying metapattern of psychological, physical and spiritual displacement that he sees as the ubiquitous phenomenon of addiction. The themes and ideas outlined in Chapter II represent the foundational ethos with which I approach the practice of counselling. It is both a base of knowledge and spirit.

In Chapter III, I look at how the narrative metaphor tradition has influenced the therapeutic work I call soul searching. From Chapter II, story, language usage and power systems were identified as interlinking factors that influence one's understanding of personal identity. White & Epston (1990) was the initial publication that helped me understand narrative therapeutic work and how it relates to understandings of a person's self-narrative.

I use the culturally learned phenomenon of female thinness to show how macro-narratives interact and restrict self-narratives. Dickerson (2004) was vital in describing how this narrative of female thinness is learned and maintained by dominating belief systems in modern media saturated cultures. Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) was used as the primary resource that outlines a holistic practice of therapeutic resistance against the lifestyles that adhere to the demands of anorexia and bulimia, known in this work as a/b. Following the narrative metaphor

tradition of separating the person from the problem, I show how Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) describe various practices that help young females take their life back by regaining some form of personal agency. I focused on the following four themes in this therapeutic practice: 1) externalizing practices (Sanders, 2014), 2) questioning the voice (Maisel, Epston & Borden, 2004), 3) the de-construction process, 4) re-authoring / re-membering processes (White, 2007). The 2014 dissertation by Sanders was also extremely influential on my thinking regarding specific practices participants in therapeutic endeavours can engage in to separate themselves from identities of deficiency.

The work of these narrative metaphor informed practitioners, such as Dickerson (2004), Maisel, Epston & Borden (2004) and Sanders (2014), have outlined a detailed way of working with identity and social power structures to therapeutically intervene with lifestyle practices that lead to problems infiltrating peoples' lives.

In Chapter IV, I describe four themes that come from the lineage of spiritual-based therapeutic traditions. The four these are identified as the following: 1) witnessing, 2) knowing who we are not, 3) focusing on being, 4) new pathways. I suggest that these four themes have many convergences with the four thematic practices described in the Chapter III, which were influenced by the narrative therapeutic tradition. Acknowledging these similarities is highly important because it shows how flexible and interchangeable language can be. This reflects my preference for language to be used to liberate people (Reynolds, 2014b) from the demands of various inflexible belief systems that can be learned in our society.

The therapeutic process of inner work is described by referencing Cohen (2015), a practitioner and author who is influenced by Buddhist and Taoist traditions. I suggest that the

creativity involved in inner work is parallel to what White (2007) called the “imaginative applications” of narrative story work (p. 130).

The spiritual practices of non-dualism as described by Maharaj (1973) and the Zen Buddhism of Deshimaru (1982) helped inform how to metaphorically describe the therapeutic intent of the four themes of this chapter. The metaphorical use of language through these spiritual-based traditions is another aspect that links this work to the creativity and imagination we saw used by the narrative-based approaches. The creative applications of inner work from these spiritual-based traditions added to the externalizing practices (Sanders, 2014) I described in Chapter III.

Another important aspect of Chapter IV was the work of Brass (2009) and the creative model of inner family work. The process of Brass’s (2009) inner family therapeutic work and White’s (2002) personal identity project were shown as highly similar and generative of creating a shift in one’s perspective towards their own personal life story. Through rich personal narrative description and meaning making processes, both Brass (2009) and White (2002) provide therapeutic practitioners with diverse options that help individuals to see what their preferred future looks like or to learn to be guided by their own personalized inner spiritual consciousness. Lastly, Chapter IV reminds the reader that the deeper purpose of therapeutic work is to explore life’s most soulful needs such as community and love.

Thesis Limitations

As I stated in Chapter I, the voices and various perspectives presented in this thesis were included because they were prominent throughout this program’s course work or of my own personal interest. This thesis does not represent an exhaustive list of references regarding the topic personal identity work.

Although I did include voices from cultural perspectives that are different from my own, I acknowledge that this in no way acts as a full understanding of those cultures or their beliefs. The Canadian population is filled much more cultural diversity that could be included in this thesis. In fact, the topic of personal identity and how it relates to differing cultures is a topic area that needs further study in the therapeutic literature.

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