

Spiritual Journeys in Emerging Adulthood: A Narrative Study

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By

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ABSTRACT

A narrative qualitative research approach was used to understand the role that spiritual journeys had on the lives of emerging adults. Participants were four emerging adults (2 female, 2 male) ranging in age from 20 to 29 years. All participants were of middle class social economic status and lived in a mid-size Canadian prairie city. Three of the participants were Caucasian and the fourth was of Spanish-Caucasian ancestry. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity for the participants to share their stories regarding the role that their spiritual journey played in their life. Data were analyzed for themes within and across the participants' stories. A visual representation of their collective journeys was created along with four-part poetic representations of each participant's individual story. The stories that the participant's shared revealed that emerging adults' spiritual journeys were cyclical in that the journeys began with feelings of discontent, which led them to seek spiritual resources and experiences to address the unhappiness in their lives. In acquiring new knowledge, the participants were faced with different theories, ideas and experiences that brought forth additional questions. These new areas of thought led these individuals to search for further answers and meaning, bring forth new questions, new meaning, and in turn, the process became a cycle. The cycle that began with their initial discontent continued because of a desire for further knowledge.

Findings are discussed in terms of the current literature on spirituality in emerging adulthood and spirituality in relation to meaning making; implications are discussed for counselors, educators, and researchers and recommendations are made for future research.

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Everything happens for a reason.

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THE ANGER THAT SAT WITH ME
CONSTANTLY PERMEATED MY LIFE

I WAS MAD BEFORE I ARRIVED

THE PAIN WAS NEVER FORGOTTEN
QUICK TO BE BROUGHT UP

THEN IT HAPPENED

A SERIES OF EVENTS
A MOMENT
A MARKED TIME
WHEN ALL CHANGED

SUSPENDED IN AN OCCURRENCE
A CHANCE MEETING

THE WORDS STOOD OUT TO ME
EMBLAZONED ON A PAGE OF TEXT

IMPRINTED IN MY MIND
IMPRINTED IN MY LIFE

ANGER DISSIPATED

EVENTUALLY IT CEASED TO BE.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

As an adolescent and emerging adult, I expressed little emotion other than anger. Problems and issues were handled reactively with little reflection or acknowledgment of the underlying context in which they arose. Advice was seldom offered and never sought and it did not occur to me to want to change or grow.

In my early years as an emerging adult, seeking personal growth and change became important to me. I wanted to lead a more positive life. There was a turning point, a series of events and circumstances that enabled me to embrace opportunities for growth. It began with an event that made me examine my life, my actions, and made me want to be grow, change, and become the best person I could be. I sought advice and read autobiographies to learn how people achieved change and gained perspective on life events. I used mantras, reflected on my experiences, and challenged myself to grow. Some people refer to this change as growing more spiritual, seeking self actualization, or obtaining personal growth. No matter the term, they hold a common element in that change for a better, healthier future is prioritized.

I refer to my own experience as a having engaged in a spiritual journey. My journey was marked by reading religious texts, conceptualizing my personal views on religion and spirituality, placing an emphasis on self growth, happiness, the importance of personal experience, and honouring objects that held meaning in relation to my experiences and beliefs. The focus of the journey was on bettering myself through moral development, self-understanding, and wisdom from others.

Reflecting on this journey, I questioned what created similar paths of change in other people and what motivated them to change, grow, and strive for a better life. I wanted to know who people turn to and what resources they employed to enhance their growth. I wanted to know

if they had reflected on the journey that changed them and what meaning they made from the process. In addition, I planned to pursue a career in counseling and felt that a deeper understanding of these processes would aid me in working with clients that were struggling with issues of identity, self-development, personal change, and spiritual development. For this reason, I began to look into what research had been conducted with people who had similar stories as my own.

Rationale for the Study

Emerging adulthood is a relatively new developmental period of life that is suggested to occur between adolescence and adulthood (18 to 29 years of age) in which young people seek to sort through the range of ideological possibilities present in their society (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). Arnett's (2000) efforts to understand the transition into adulthood is based on the understanding that due to societal, economic, and demographic shifts, a reassessment of the transition to adulthood was needed. Emerging adulthood is distinguished from other developmental stages by the variety of life challenges and possibilities in love, work, and world views during this time in life (Arnett, 2000). A crucial aspect of emerging adulthood is to determine on one's beliefs and values (Arnett, 1997) and the period is characterized by heightened risk-taking behavior and self-exploration of numerous domains, including one's spirituality (Arnett, 2000).

Issues of religiosity and spirituality are complicated by the many developmental and environmental changes that occur during this life stage (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Many emerging adults move away from their parents home (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994) and are faced with a number of decisions and choices that affect their lives. They begin to make more autonomous decisions, putting value on creating their own beliefs and making their own

decisions. During this time, there is also more exposure to other religions (Lefkowitz, 2005), and thus more self-exploration and decision making about one's own religious and spiritual beliefs.

It has been found that emerging adults place importance on developing their own opinions about religion, rather than accepting others' beliefs without question (Arnett & Jensen, 2002, Beaudoin, 1998). Hervieu-Leger (1993) reported that emerging adults use religion as "symbolic toolboxes" (p. 141), wherein they select some, but not all of the beliefs and practices from a given faith. Arnett and Jensen (2002) explored these theoretical perspectives on emerging adults' spirituality and reported that emerging adulthood may best be characterized as a time during which young people (a) question the beliefs in which they were raised, (b) place greater emphasis on individual spirituality than affiliation with a religious institution, and (c) pick and choose the aspects of religion that suit them best.

Spirituality can potentially have a significant impact on how people understand, make meaning, and process changes in their lives. The role of spirituality and meaning making has been studied with specific groups such as cancer survivors (Gall & Cornblat, 2002) and those coping in times of adversity (Mattis, 2002). However, there is limited research on the role of spirituality in the lives emerging adults.

In the past, researchers have linked spirituality with religiosity in examining meaning making (Mattis, 2002). However, due to the growing number of people pursuing an autonomous spiritual identity instead of identifying with an organized religion, it is necessary to study the effects of spirituality and religiosity separately in their relation to meaning making.

Not only is there a gap in the literature on spirituality and religiosity separately in emerging adults, there is also a gap in examining spirituality apart from religiosity across literature domains and developmental levels. This study focused on the gap in literature on

emerging adults who self-identify as spiritual. As one of the main focuses during emerging adulthood is establishing spiritual or religious views, it is necessary to study the impact of spirituality on this developmental group. It is important to understand how the spiritual journeys of these emerging adults impacts their daily life, as there is some evidence that those who spend a significant amount of time partaking in religious or spiritual activities may have different experiences of emerging adulthood than those of their peers (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005).

It is also important to understand what impact spiritual journeys have on coping. In emerging adulthood, risk-taking behavior is heightened (Arnett, 2000) and religious involvement has been found to act as a protective barrier against risk behaviours such as unprotected sex, and drug and alcohol abuse (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005). Furthermore, it is also important to understand how the knowledge gained during spiritual journeys helps to make meaning in the lives of emerging adults. With this knowledge, helping professionals may better aid such clients in the process of making meaning in their lives. In understanding the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults, counselors and educators may be better able to help or guide a client or student in developing their own spirituality so that they may make positive changes in their lives.

Research Question

This narrative study explores the stories of emerging adults who have embarked on spiritual journeys to effect change in their lives. The purpose of this study is for the researcher to (a) gain understanding, through stories, of the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults, and to (b) gain understanding into what meaning emerging adults make in their lives from their spiritual journeys.

The primary research question for this study was: What is revealed through the stories of emerging adults' spiritual journeys? Implicit in this was a secondary question: What do these stories reveal about the meaning emerging adults have made in their lives from their spiritual journeys?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research the following definitions apply (an extended discussion of these terms and their origins are explored within the literature review):

Spirituality is an exploration of one's own space by borrowing elements from various religions and mythical traditions and perhaps blending participation in institutionalized Western religion with Eastern practices. Spirituality places an emphasis on self growth, emotional fulfillment, and the sacredness of ordinary objects and experiences. There is an individual tenacity in pursuing meaning in which autonomy generally takes precedence over external authority and traditional religious doctrines (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 916).

Spiritual growth can be seen as the process of developing one's spirituality, making meaning, and obtaining personal growth through the pursuit of spirituality (McBrien, 2006; Estanek, 2006).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In examining the stories of emerging adults who have sought spiritual growth and incorporated it into their daily life, I reviewed existing literature in this area and am presenting it in three sections. First, I examine spirituality as a separate entity from religiosity. Second, I review literature on emerging adulthood; and third, as there is limited research on how spiritual meaning making informs emerging adults, this section broadly explores literature in the area of spirituality and meaning making.

What is Spirituality?

Within this section, common definitions of religiosity and spirituality are explored. A literature review of 12 articles containing definitions of spirituality and religion will be discussed in three sections: terminology review, religiosity defined, and spirituality defined. Within the section that defines spirituality, three articles with specific contributions to this study will first be discussed, followed by an examination of the characteristics of spirituality identified in the literature. Finally, a definition will be proposed for use within this study.

In recent years there has been increasing interest in the distinction between religiosity and spirituality (Marty, 1993) as the concept of spirituality has gained momentum in popular culture (McBrien, 2006). However, there is no consensus about the definition or interrelation of these two concepts (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). The term spirituality, in particular, remains somewhat difficult to conceptualize. This ambiguity is due primarily to the multiple meanings of the term spirituality (Wink & Dillon, 2003), which has extended from expressing devotion within a traditional religious institution (Pargament, 1999) to viewing oneself as a nonreligious individual who seeks answers to life's existential dilemmas (Stifoss-Hanssen, 1999). For the purpose of simplicity, spirituality and religiosity have often been described as separate, though

overlapping concepts (Hodges, 2002). While research on spirituality has increased, the terms religiosity and spirituality appear to be defined on a case by case basis. At times, being encompassed by an umbrella term (i.e., religious or spiritual), at times seen as secular; in either case, the division between the two has been unclear.

As research has not been conducted using a global definition of spirituality, the manner in which spirituality has been defined has shaped the extant research (Estanek, 2006). Instead of using spirituality as a definition that informed the research process (i.e., methodology, participant recruitment), defining spirituality became a part of the research process and the interpretation of the results (Estanek, 2006).

Spirituality and Religiosity: A Terminology Review

In order to find a common definition rather than adding to the confusion surrounding terminology, a literature review was conducted using 12 articles that discussed the definitions of spirituality and religiosity and the lack of consensus surrounding them (see Appendix A). Most of these articles contained multiple definitions of spirituality and religiosity used in recent literature. In order to make sense of these definitions, I wrote each definition on a separate row in a table format. I then looked at each definition separately, noted which characteristics made up each definition, and created a column for each characteristic discussed. With the table created, I then examined each definition and placed a check mark in the corresponding characteristic column(s). Once all definitions were examined, I tallied the characteristic columns to determine which characteristics occurred most frequently among the definitions, and which definition contained the most common characteristics.

Within these 12 articles, 7 definitions were analyzed specifically for religiosity and 34 definitions were reviewed for spirituality. Taking into account the overlap between the terms and

their meanings, characteristics were created such as ‘religiosity and spirituality are separate yet overlapping concepts’ (McBrien, 2006; Love & Talbot, 1999), ‘religiosity and spirituality are synonymous terms’ (McBrien, 2006), and ‘religiosity promotes one’s spirituality’ (McBrien, 2006; Hodges, 2002).

Religiosity Defined

The most common characteristics that make up the term “religiosity” or “religious” were: (a) accepting traditional forms of authority and rituals, as in institutional religions (i.e., Jewish, Catholic, Islamic, etc.; McBrien, 2006; Koenig, 2008; Wink & Dillon, 2003; Mattis, 2002; Estanek, 2006; Hodges, 2002; Besecke, 2001), (b) relating through prayer and public worship (McBrien, 2006; Koenig, 2008; Wink & Dillon, 2003; Mattis, 2002; Estanek, 2006), (c) inhabiting a space created for the practice of a specific faith (McBrien, 2006; Koenig, 2008; Wink & Dillon, 2003; Mattis, 2002; Estanek, 2006), (d) having a belief that religion promotes one’s spirituality (McBrien, 2006; Hodges, 2002), and (e) identifying religiosity and spirituality as separate yet overlapping concepts (McBrien, 2006; Love & Talbot, 1999).

Of the seven definitions of religiosity and religion analyzed, none encompassed all of the characteristics above. Definitions ranged from simple ways of looking at religiosity (the degree to which individuals adhere to the prescribed beliefs and practices of an organized religion; Mattis, 2000) to more complex definitions that provided levels of one’s religiosity and the characteristics that would be evident in each (Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1998). Regardless, the definition of religiosity was much clearer than that of spirituality and revolved primarily around traditional forms of organized religions, and communal forms of prayer and worship.

Spirituality Defined

Of the 34 definitions of spirituality, one was noted as the most quoted and most comprehensive definition of spirituality within student affairs literature (literature specific to University/College students). As many emerging adults are in post secondary education, this definition is relevant to the present study. This definition of spirituality (Love & Talbot, 1999) was based on three assumptions:

- (a) the quest for spiritual development is an innate aspect of human development, (b) spiritual development and spirituality are interchangeable concepts, and (c) openness is a prerequisite to spiritual development (Love and Talbot, 1999, p. 364).

Based upon these three assumptions, Love and Talbot (1999) offered five propositions that formed their definition: (a) spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development; (b) spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one's current locus of centrality; (c) spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community; (d) spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life; and (e) spiritual development involves an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human knowing.

Within the 12 articles examined, a noteworthy review by McBrien (2006) focused on clarifying the concept of spirituality. Various definitions of the term spirituality were explored to form a sense of the antecedents, attributes, and consequences of spirituality. McBrien's interpretation of spirituality provided insight and understanding into the concept and process of developing spirituality, however; it did not serve as a definition per se. The antecedents of

spirituality, as characterized by McBrien, included: (a) pivotal life events such as an illness that may provide the impetus for spiritual awareness and growth; and (b) search for meaning that involves the need to understand the threatening event and its impact on life before spiritual well-being is attained.

The attributes which characterized spirituality, as depicted by McBrien (2006) included: (a) belief and faith: believing in a higher power or God, significant relationships, self-chosen values/goals, or believing in the world without acknowledging God; (b) inner strength and peace: achieved when an individual accepts their situation and a state of congruency exists; and (c) connectedness: relationships with self, others, God/Higher Power, or the environment, which ultimately leads to a deeper meaning in life (McBrien, 2006). These attributes demonstrated how values and beliefs can build a sense of meaning or purpose in life (McBrien, 2006).

Finally, the consequences of spirituality, as indicated by McBrien (2006), included: (a) sense of hope: hope helps the individual to transcend self-absorption, not only looking beyond themselves, but also offering a basis for courage to look within themselves; (b) self-transcendence: regardless of the life event, the individual can move beyond it and aspire to a meaningful existence; and (c) other consequences: may include guilt and inner conflict about one's values and beliefs.

A final noteworthy article within the 12 analyzed was a literature review by Estanek, (2006) on definitions of spirituality, guided by the question, "What do we mean when we say spiritual and why is it important" (p. 271)? Fifteen texts were reviewed that clearly articulated a specific definition of spirituality. Estanek (2006) was searching for and uncovered five common themes that aid in understanding definitions of spirituality. First, spirituality was defined as spiritual development. This theme suggested that spirituality was both deeply individual and

communal, that there is a power beyond human existence, and that humans develop through the process of trying to make sense of their existence in light of this power. Second, spirituality was used to critique mainstream religion as in, “I am not religious but I am spiritual” (Estanek, 2006, p. 274). Third, spirituality was understood as an empty container for individual meaning. This theme suggested that spirituality was seen as a “dynamic expression of who we really are” (Estanek, 2006, p. 276). In this instance, definitions are without meaning until they are filled-in by the reader as what gives meaning to one’s life is personal and left to the individual to decide. Fourth, spirituality was understood as a common ground or field, where there was reference to a higher power (e.g., God, Creator, life force, Universe) without necessarily having any reference to religion. Lastly, spirituality was defined as a quasi-religion, where new practices were found through a network of believers or practitioners who shared somewhat similar beliefs and practices, and added to whichever spiritual or religious practices they followed (Estanek, 2006).

While the articles mentioned above provide data on characteristics, antecedents, attributes, consequences, and themes of spirituality, none of them provided a clear, stand-alone definition of spirituality. For this reason, the 34 definitions were examined to determine the most common characteristics among them and to exact a definition which most aptly fits for use within the present study. Among the 34 definitions, the most common characteristics were: (a) placing an emphasis on self growth, emotional fulfillment, and transcendence (Wuthnow, 1998; Estanek, 2006; Wink & Dillon, 2003; Koenig, 2008; Hodges, 2002; Mattis, 2002; McBrien, 2006), (b) searching for meaning or purpose (Wuthnow, 1998; Love & Talbot, 1999; McBrien, 2006; Hodges, 2002; Estanek, 2006), (c) feeling connected to a sacred “other” (Wuthnow, 1998; Wink & Dillon, 2003; Koenig, 2008; Estanek, 2006; Mattis, 2002; McBrien, 2006), (d) placing an emphasis on autonomy or an individual’s relationship to religious meaning (Wuthnow, 1998;

Wink & Dillon, 2003; Estanek, 2006; Besecke, 2001; McBrien, 2006), (e) blending participation in Eastern and Western religious practices (Wuthnow, 1998; Wink & Dillon, 2003; Koenig, 2008; Estanek, 2006), and (f) borrowing religious and mythical traditions to create one's own view of spirituality (Wink & Dillon, 2003; Koenig, 2008; Estanek, 2006).

For the purpose of the present study, a definition was selected that encompassed all of the common characteristics from the 34 definitions discussed above. In understanding stories of emerging adults who have embarked on a spirituality journey, the following definition was used:

Spirituality is an exploration of one's own beliefs by borrowing elements from various religions and mythical traditions and perhaps blending participation in institutionalized Western religion with Eastern practices. Spirituality places an emphasis on self growth, emotional fulfillment, and the sacredness of ordinary objects and experiences. There is an individual tenacity in pursuing meaning in which autonomy generally takes precedence over external authority and traditional religious doctrines (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 916).

Only two definitions discussed spiritual growth and both suggested that spirituality and spiritual growth were interchangeable concepts (McBrien, 2006; Estanek, 2006). Given the above definition by Wuthnow (1998) and the common characteristics of the 34 definitions analyzed, spiritual growth can be seen as the process of developing one's spirituality, making meaning, and obtaining personal growth through the pursuit of spirituality.

Emerging Adulthood

Within this section, the literature on emerging adulthood will be discussed in three parts: the origin of emerging adulthood as a developmental period, the ideological views of emerging adulthood in the context of Shweder's ethics of Autonomy, Community and Divinity, and the link between emerging adulthood and spirituality.

Emerging Adulthood as a Developmental Period

Erikson (1968) was the first theorist to observe that developing a personal ideology, or belief system, was an essential part of identity development, along with exploring choices in love and work. Although Erikson (1968) specified that identity development was a part of adolescence, he also recognized that many industrialized societies were beginning to extend the timeframe beyond adolescence during which identity exploration continued (Erikson, 1968). Similarly, Keniston (1971) believed that identity development was challenged by the social issues in the late 1960s and 1970s (i.e., civil rights movement, Vietnam War, anti-war protests, sexual revolution, and assassination of political figures) which led to continued development into the late teens and early twenties. The explorations described 40 to 50 years ago by Erikson (1950, 1968) and Keniston (1971) as part of identity formation in adolescence are now being experienced by people in their twenties in industrialized societies (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Arnett (2000) proposed that this developmental period has changed remarkably for people in industrialized societies during the past half-century and introduced “emerging adulthood” as a term to bridge the gap between adolescence and young adulthood. Arnett (2000) proposed that emerging adulthood encompasses individuals between the ages of 18 to 29; a period of time in which individuals may feel as if they are no longer adolescents but may not yet consider themselves adults.

Emerging adulthood differs from other developmental periods as it is a time of great change and transformation that occurs without many of the parental or societal constraints and expectations that are typically present during prior developmental periods (Arnett, 2000). For example, instead of entering marriage and parenthood in the early twenties, many people now postpone these transitions until their late twenties (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). In 2003, the average

age at first marriage for grooms was 30.2 years and for brides 28.2 years. These statistics were the highest ages of first marriages in 80 years, including the 1930s and 1940s when the average age at first marriage peaked at about 28 years for men, and 25 years for women (Statistics Canada, 2003). Rates of participation in higher education after secondary school have steadily increased as well. University education rates for men aged 18 to 24 increased from 16% in 1990-1991 to 21% in 2005-2006. Likewise, the rates of university education among women increased from 18% in 1990-1991 to 28% in 2005-2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006).

The overall result of these changes was that it was no longer a developmental norm for people between ages 18 to 29 to take on an adult role of marriage, children, and a professional career (Arnett, 2000). On the contrary, the new norm was for people between the ages of 18 to 29 to experiment and explore “a variety of life possibilities in work, love, and world views” (Arnett, 2000; p. 469), to develop one’s ideology and delay adopting the adult role until their late twenties (Arnett & Jensen, 2002).

Arnett (1998) conducted a study to determine what participants believed to be the criteria for the transition to adulthood. One hundred forty participants from the United States, ages 21 to 28 (47% female, 53% male), answered a questionnaire and took part in structured interviews. Questionnaire and interview results indicated three specific criteria for the transition to adulthood: accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions, and gaining financial independence. The participants indicated internal markers of adulthood (e.g., taking responsibility for one’s actions) to be of greater importance than external markers (e.g., parenthood). It appeared that autonomous qualities such as deciding on their own beliefs and values were more important to emerging adults in marking their transition to adulthood than role transitions such as marriage or completing their education (Arnett, 2001).

Ideological Views of Emerging Adulthood

The ideological thinking that appears to develop during emerging adulthood has been examined using Shweder's ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). These ethics were proposed as a means by which people of different ages in different cultures structured their beliefs and values (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). The ethic of Autonomy defined the individual as the "primary moral authority," where choices were made based on one's own preferences (Arnett et al., 2001, p. 70). This ethic centered on the rights of individuals, and suggested that individuals "should be free to do as they like so long as their behavior does not harm others" (Arnett et al., 2001, p. 70). The ethic of Community defined individuals as "members of groups to which they have commitments and obligations" (Arnett et al., 2001, p. 70). The basis of this ethic related to the responsibilities of roles in the family, the community, and other groups. The ethic of Divinity defined the individual as a "spiritual entity, subject to the prescriptions of a spiritual or natural order" (Arnett et al., 2001, p. 70). This ethic based beliefs and values on traditional religious authorities and religious doctrines (e.g., the Bible, the Koran; Arnett et al., 2001).

The results from several studies demonstrated that Shweder's ethical approach of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997) was useful in describing the moral and ideological views of emerging adults (Arnett et al., 2001). Jensen (1995) held thirty in-depth interviews about a variety of moral issues. Participants were divided equally into three age groups: 19 to 24 years, 33 to 56 years, and 63 to 85 years. Jensen (1995) found that people aged 19 to 24 years relied strongly on the ethic of Autonomy in explaining their moral views, whereas they relied less often on the ethic of Community, and even less on the ethic of Divinity. In contrast, older adults used the three ethics more or less equally (Jensen,

1995). Divinity was found to be used the least by emerging adults in studies involving the three ethics, except by those who had self-identified as belonging to a specific faith (Jensen, 1997). Even among those individuals, Autonomy was emphasized more than it was in older adults (Jensen, 1997a).

Haidt, Koller, and Dias (1993) examined the views of emerging adults living in an American city and two Brazilian cities with respect to a variety of moral issues. One hundred eighty emerging adults between the ages of 19 to 26, of varying socioeconomic status (SES), were asked to respond to five harmless yet offensive stories. The responses were then coded using Shweder's (1990) ethical approach. Results were similar to those obtained by Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen (2001) in that emerging adults in both countries relied most often on the ethic of Autonomy in comparison to the ethics of Community or Divinity (Haidt et al., 1993). However, they also discovered that emerging adults who came from a lower SES relied on the ethics of Community more than Autonomy in both countries (Haidt et al., 1993). Responses that were coded as an ethic of Community were related to respect, duty, authority, patriotism, or the requirements of how people in a given social relationship ought to relate to one another; while responses coded as an ethic of Autonomy related to harm or potential harm, rights, justice, or freedom of choice.

Arnett et al. (2001) suggested that emerging adults who formed their identities primarily based on the ethic of Autonomy could be understood both from a cultural and developmental perspective. Culturally, it was noted that society in the United States was highly individualistic (Triandis, 1995). Middle-class Americans were found to value individual rights and freedoms which were similar to the values that comprised the ethic of Autonomy (Arnett et al., 2001). From a developmental perspective, Arnett et al. (2001) suggested that emerging adults focused

on self-development, an Autonomy-based ethic, whereby obligations to family of origin were left behind and obligations to a spouse and children were not yet assumed. In relating to the findings of Haidt et al. (1993), emerging adults of lower SES may value the ethic of Community because they rely more on their families, neighbors and friends. Those of higher SES have the monetary means to be independent and Autonomous while those of lower SES may need to rely on others more often. For those of lower SES, the concepts of community, respect, authority, and how to act in social relationships become more important than the concepts related to Autonomy.

Emerging Adulthood and Spirituality

Emerging adulthood is the period that adults look back on as having the most impact on their lives (Gottlieb, Still, & Newby-Clark, 2007). During this time, choices are made and experiences are gained that lead to events and transitions that test flexibility and adaptation skills and in effect, set life trajectories (Martin & Smyer, 1990). Decisions to pursue postsecondary education or a certain career path, to move away from home, or to live with a partner all have an important mark on forming one's identity and life experience and are typical of this developmental period (Gottlieb et al., 2007). In addition, emerging adulthood is a period when religious beliefs that were established in early years are re-examined (Arnett, 2000) and choices are made that reflect personal interests and values rather than those that were imposed on them as children (Koenig, McGue, & Iacone, 2008).

Arnett and Jensen (2002) explored spiritual and religious practices among 140 emerging adults' aged 21 to 28, using quantitative and qualitative methods. Participants were found to place great importance on thinking critically about spiritual issues rather than accepting an existing belief system. Their beliefs were extremely diverse (as they formed different combinations from) and reflected an integration of various religious traditions and popular

culture. It was noted that it was not just religious traditions that have become part of their “symbolic toolboxes” (Hervieu-Leger, 1993, p. 141) from which young people can draw freely, but that the traditions were only one source among many which constructed their religious beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Because young people view it as both their right and their responsibility to form their beliefs and values independently of their parents (Arnett, 1998), they pick and choose from the ideas they discover as they go along and combine them to form their own unique, individualized set of beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). It was reported that emerging adulthood may best be characterized as a time during which young people (a) question the beliefs in which they were raised, (b) place greater emphasis on individual spirituality than affiliation with a religious institution, and (c) pick and choose the aspects of religion that suit them best (Arnett & Jensen, 2002).

Lefkowitz (2005) conducted a qualitative study on student perceptions (N=205, 61% female, age range 18 to 25 years) of their developmental changes in the areas of interpersonal relations, spiritual/religious views, and sexuality after the students transitioned to university. With this move, it was found that emerging adults had more autonomy in making decisions about religious practices, had more exposure to other religious influences and environments, and in turn, were more likely to rethink and explore religious beliefs (Lefkowitz, 2005; Koenig et al., 2008). Lefkowitz found that topics mentioned frequently included: being more spiritual or less focused on organized religion, being exposed to other religions more often, being more open-minded about other religions, having learned more about one’s own religion, and being more questioning towards religiosity. In addition, emerging adults who had been at college for a longer period of time, tended to portray changes in their religious views more positively than did those who had been at college for less time (Lefkowitz, 2005). More specifically, participants who

described no change in religious views tended to have started college more recently than those who did not (Lefkowitz, 2005). Participants who described changes in faith, views toward other religions, and who had become more questioning in regards to religiosity and spirituality, tended to have been at college longer than those who did not (Lefkowitz, 2005). Gottlieb et al. (2007) suggested that perhaps those who had been in college longer represented an older cohort who had experienced more personal change and had a broader, more penetrating life outlook.

Findings from Lefkowitz (2005), in relation to student's perceptions on religious views, suggested that the most common behavioural change reported was a decline in attending religious services, while the most common change in cognition was a stronger sense of faith. This finding coincides with emerging adults' desire for autonomy whereby, in this instance, they reject community based services and instead focus on strengthening their personal faith. Arnett and Jensen (2002) suggested that just as it would be wrong in emerging adults' eyes to accept wholesale the beliefs of their parents, many of them viewed participation in religious institutions as an intolerable compromise of their individuality. It was suggested that participating in a religious institution inherently meant subscribing to a common set of beliefs and declaring that you hold certain beliefs that other members of the institution also hold. Arnett & Jensen (2002) suggested that to the majority of emerging adults, this was not acceptable. Beaudoin (1998) reported that emerging adults preferred to think of their beliefs as unique, the product of their own individual questioning and exploring.

Beaudoin (1998) found similar results to Arnett and Jensen (2002) when he examined the spirituality and religiosity of individuals within "Generation X," those born between 1961 and 1981, in the United States. At the time of Beaudoin's study, those in Generation X would have been between 17 and 37 years old, thus emerging and young adults. Beaudoin (1998) found that

these individuals tended to be more suspect of institutionalized religions, and instead valued personal experience in regards to their religiosity. Beaudoin theorized that the themes of spirituality and religiosity for these individuals included skepticism about the value of religious institutions and an emphasis on personal experience rather than religious authorities as a source of religious beliefs. Beaudoin (1998) also emphasized the tentative, ambiguous quality of young people's religious beliefs. He interpreted this as reflecting the shifting, unfixed nature of young people's identities and their preference during their late teens and twenties to remain open to changing their beliefs rather than arriving on a fixed set of beliefs (Beaudoin, 1998).

Hogue, Dinges, Johnson, & Gonzales (2001) suggested that the diversity of religious beliefs among emerging adults reflected the fact that they had grown up in a pluralistic society. No matter what religious socialization they had received in their families, they had also been exposed to diverse influences from friends, schools, and popular culture. From this diversity, emerging adults constructed their own beliefs (Hogue et al., 2001). Often, the beliefs they formed bore little or no resemblance to what their parents believed or taught them to believe (Arnett & Jensen, 2002).

Arnett and Jensen (2002) reported that although some emerging adults were currently involved in religious institutions, it did not mean that they were uninterested in religious issues. Research revealed that they gave religious issues much thought and for many who felt that religious participation was not important, they still felt that religious beliefs were important (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). However, for the most part, they had concluded that at that particular time in their lives, their beliefs were best observed not through regular participation in a religious institution with other, like-minded believers, but by themselves, in the "privacy of their own hearts and minds, in a congregation of one" (Arnett & Jensen, 2002, p. 465).

Arnett (2000) cautioned that the developmental stage of emerging adulthood may not be universal, but that it may vary widely according to a culture's expectations on the age when young people take on adult responsibilities (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005). Researchers suggested that emerging adulthood had both similarities and differences across cultures (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005). Research in countries such as Argentina, Israel, and China showed that emerging adults in these cultures endorsed views both similar to emerging adults in the United States as well as views unique to their own cultures (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005). Emerging adults from all four cultures rated "accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions" as the most important marker for adulthood while other important criteria varied by culture. In Argentina, an important criteria was being capable of caring for children (Facio & Micocci, 2003); in Israel, to be able to withstand pressure was a required attribute for adulthood (Mayseless & Scharf, 2003); and in China, learning to have good control of your emotions was a necessary attribute (Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004; McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005).

Historically, there has not been a cultural division between ethnicity and religiosity; religion was "part of the attachment to a 'tribe' (real or metaphorical)" (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997, p. 113). Today, there is a partial, although unclear, separation of these aspects of one's cultural identity (Sinclair & Milner, 2005). Maintaining a religious belief is no longer expected by all cultures to remain static with what was historically a norm. The spirituality and/or religiosity of emerging adults is one aspect of culture where research is limited.

McNamara-Barry and Nelson (2005) explored the role of religious culture in emerging adult college students in the United States. Participants were 445 undergraduates (ages 18 to 20 years) from institutions that were Catholic (31 males, 89 females), Mormon (48 males, 200 females), and public (21 males, 56 females). While this study focused on religiosity, the overlap

between definitions of spirituality and religiosity provided a rationale for examining it in relation to the present study. McNamara-Barry and Nelson (2005) found that participation in religious culture influenced the beliefs and behaviors of emerging adults. Results indicated that regardless of religions tradition, emerging adults who regularly attended religious services were less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors such as unprotected sexual activity, abusing alcohol, driving under the influence of alcohol, and using illegal drugs (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005). The results of McNamara-Barry and Nelson (2005) emphasized the role of religion as an important aspect of culture that influenced emerging adulthood and gave reason to wonder about those individuals who do place a lot of importance on the religious or spiritual aspect of their lives as there is some evidence that emerging adulthood may be different for these young people than for their peers (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005).

While religiosity is an important aspect of identity development in emerging adulthood, there is an unclear distinction between those that are religious versus those that are spiritual. What is the difference between the role of religious culture on emerging adults versus the role of spiritual culture on emerging adults? Furthermore, future research is required to explore how meaning systems appear to those who are not religious, for example, non-believers, or those who are spiritual but not religious (Park, 2005).

Spirituality

In psychology, researchers who are concerned with matters of meaning have tended to focus on the link between meaning-making and coping (Park & Folkman, 1997), and on the roles of religiosity/spirituality in meaning-making and coping (Mattis, 2002). It has been noted that meaning making is a central and defining activity of human life (Frankl, 1984). As there is little research that focuses on emerging adults in the realm of spirituality and meaning making, this

section will remove emerging adults from the equation. Instead, it will focus on how spirituality alone informs meaning making by examining the ways in which spirituality informs meaning making and coping, encourages spiritual and personal growth, and aids in personal well-being.

Spirituality, Meaning Making, and Coping

Roof (1999) coined the term “reflexive spirituality” to describe a type of individual relationship to religion. “Reflexive spirituality” signals an intentional, deliberate, self-directed approach to the cultivation of religious meaning. He suggested that to be “reflexive” means to “step back” mentally from one's own perspective and recognize it as situated in an array of other possible perspectives. Roof suggested that to be “reflexively spiritual” is to maintain a constant awareness of the ever-increasing variety of religious meanings available in the modern world, and to engage in an intentional but critical exploration and assimilation of those meanings into one's own spiritual outlook. Roof suggested that the modern world is characterized by the increased presence and availability of many religious, philosophical, and scientific traditions. Roof maintained that this variety has created a spiritual marketplace and suggested that there are four techniques that people drawn on to elucidate meaning from the spiritual marketplace: metaphor, mysticism, pluralism, and reflexivity. Practitioners of reflexive spirituality gather meaning through:

1. Metaphorical interpretation. Religious texts and practices are considered to be symbols of transcendent truths, rather than descriptions of literal facts (Besecke, 2001).
2. Mysticism. Mysticism is best understood as an experiential way of relating to religion; mystics are people who practice a discipline such as meditation in order to experience unity with the transcendent (Roof, 1999). To understand how mysticism

can be a technique for meaning-making, it is necessary to understand that people who have had mystical experiences assert that these experiences gave them direct knowledge of the transcendent. Individuals may practice mystical disciplines themselves or simply talk about the mystical experiences of others (Besecke, 2001).

3. Pluralism. Pluralism in this context refers to drawing spiritual meaning from many different religious, scientific, and philosophical traditions, without adhering to any particular tradition as the "best" or "right" one (Besecke, 2001).
4. Reflexivity. There are two ways that practitioners of reflexive spirituality gather meaning. The first relates to pluralism, and signals the ability to step back from a religious idea and experience to reflect on it as situated in a plurality of possibilities (Roof, 1999). It enables meaning to be gained while maintaining rationality (Roof, 1999). The second use of reflexivity suggests that individuals are constantly examining and revising their own views and practices in light of new knowledge about those practices (Besecke, 2001). What this means in the context of religion is that individuals have access to knowledge about religion from many domains and that they continually revise their religious views and practices in light of this knowledge (Besecke, 2001).

While Roof (1999) suggested four techniques for drawing meaning from spiritual resources and endeavors, Mattis (2002) reported eight themes that demonstrated the role of religion/spirituality in meaning making and coping. Mattis conducted a qualitative study to examine the ways in which African American women use religion/spirituality to cope and to construct meaning during times of adversity. Participants (N=23) were randomly selected from 128 African American women from Michigan and New York who completed a survey study on

stress and coping. The researchers focused on African American women as social science literature represents their lives as filled with adversity. The mean age of the 23 participants was 30.9 years ($SD = 12.9$). Annual income ranged from \$10,000 to \$75,999, with 42% of participant income under \$10,000. It was suggested that the low modal income reflected the fact that many of the participants were students at the time of the study, thus most commonly emerging adults. The participants were interviewed and asked about their encounters with adversity in the past year and about strategies that they employed to respond to their adverse experiences (including race, class and gender oppression, family and parenting stress, financial stress, etc.). Eight themes were identified which demonstrated the role of spirituality/religion in meaning making and coping.

The first theme suggested that religion/spirituality helped women to interrogate and accept reality. Religion and spirituality were identified as forces that encouraged confrontations with reality and provided the psychological resources needed to accept reality. According to these participants, adversity tended to highlight a tension between reality and desire (between the way things really are and the way we want them to be). According to the participants, individuals who failed to face reality closed themselves off from crucial opportunities to learn and limited their own potential to transcend adversity (Mattis, 2002).

The second theme suggested that religion/spirituality helped women to gain the insight and courage needed to engage in spiritual surrender. Turning things over to a Higher Power was a crucial part of the processes of meaning-making and coping (Mattis, 2002).

A third theme proposed that religion/spirituality helped women to confront and transcend limitations. Spirituality both highlighted the boundaries of human ability and permitted the transcendence of those boundaries (i.e., boundaries created as a result of racism, classism, and

sexism) and led to transcendence by permitting people to develop alternative conceptualizations of life's possibilities (Mattis, 2002).

A fourth theme suggested that religion/spirituality helped women to identify and grapple with existential questions and life lessons. In times of adversity, spirituality functioned by highlighting a crucial set of existential questions, answers, and life lessons (Mattis, 2002).

A fifth theme was that religion/spirituality further helped women to recognize purpose and destiny. It was suggested that there was a purpose both to existence and to negative events as well as positive events experienced. This knowledge permitted the participants to put extraordinary as well as mundane happenings into perspective and shaped the kinds of appraisals and attributions that they made (Mattis, 2002).

A sixth theme suggested that religion/spirituality helped women to define character and act within subjectively meaningful moral principles. They lived within a set of religiously and/or spiritually informed principles (e.g., being nonjudgmental, forgiving, compassionate) that guided their behaviors. These principles helped the women to navigate between expedient choices and spiritually responsible or appropriate choices (Mattis, 2002).

A seventh theme indicated that religion/spirituality helped women to achieve growth. Both positive and adverse events signaled a crucial set of opportunities for growth or self-transformation. Participants indicated that spirituality led them to excavate lessons and signs from their own lived experiences and from the experiences of others. Many participants expressed the idea that accepting change and learning one's life lessons made personal and spiritual growth possible. In contrast, participants believed that individuals who were resistant to change were consigned to repeat negative events until transformation was achieved (Mattis, 2002).

The eighth theme by Mattis (2002) indicated that religion/spirituality helped these women to trust in the viability of transcendent sources of knowledge and communication. Prayers, dreams, intuition, and visions were a few of the modes through which meanings were conveyed and received. The dreams, visions, and proverbs offered hope, protection, insight, information, resolutions to problems, and/or clarified important questions or lessons (Mattis, 2002). Besecke (2001) stated that culture does not affirm the importance of transcendent meaning; therefore individuals must pursue such meaning for themselves. The result is a strong emphasis on individual spirituality and individuals' personal methods of relating to religious meaning (Besecke, 2001). Individuals are encouraged to talk with friends about meaning, read books about meaning, or set aside a time each day to contemplate meaning (Besecke, 2001).

With techniques and themes to guide meaning making from spirituality, one question that remains is, what does this process look like in daily life? Gall and Cornblat (2002), who conducted a qualitative analysis on the impact of spirituality on the adjustment process of American breast cancer survivors, created a model of adjustment to illustrate how spiritual resources helped some breast cancer survivors make meaning of and experience a sense of life affirmation and personal growth in relation to their cancer. Self-reflection led these breast cancer survivors to grapple not just with the illness but with other problematic and painful life issues (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). As an outcome of this reflective process, these women felt that they had grown in inner strength and peace and experienced an increase in confidence and self-esteem (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). An integral part of this personal growth for some was their becoming more spiritual and having an even stronger relationship with God (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). Overall, this subset of survivors felt that they had become better people, more thoughtful, compassionate, understanding, and accepting of others (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). The spiritual

resources drawn on in the model of adjustment were a relationship to God, religious coping activities, and social support (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). This can be seen as relevant to any spiritual journey that begins first with a crisis or major event and leads to integrating spiritual resources into one's life in order to cope.

Spirituality and Personal Growth

There is a dearth of research into how daily life is affected by spirituality. Gottlieb, Still, and Newby-Clark (2007) conducted a study that combined qualitative and quantitative data about the types of personal growth and decline reported by a sample of emerging adults. While the term spirituality was not explicitly stated within the Gottlieb et al. (2007) study, one component of spirituality used within the present study is an emphasis on self growth. In the Gottlieb et al. study, emerging adults completed a questionnaire made up of three sections. The first contained a Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, a 21-item scale which measured the degree of reported positive changes in new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation of life. The second section of the questionnaire was designed to determine whether participants attributed their growth and decline to specific events or other experiences. This was measured using a 42 item inventory of items such as "I put more effort into my relationships" and "I have more compassion for others;" participants either checked off "other" or rated each growth or decline item on a 7-point-Likert scale ranging from negative to positive. The third section asked the participants to identify the nature of the "other" events and experiences that brought about their growth and decline and to write a brief description of them. It was suggested that emerging adults were able to transform negative events into occasions that fostered new learning and insights about the self, the world, and the self in the world (Gottlieb et al., 2007). It was reported that emerging adults had the ability to make positive meaning from negative events

by converting them into personal strengths, new possibilities, and social understanding (Gottlieb et al., 2007). Negative events were also transformed into learning opportunities that affected future decisions (Gottlieb et al., 2007). In addition, themes revealed that non-eventful experiences were also perceived to bring about growth, including introspection, personal maturation, self-initiated changes in priorities, and recognition of personal achievements.

Spirituality and Personal Well-Being

Spirituality has been found to be positively related to well-being. For example, Wink and Dillon (2003) used longitudinal data to examine the relations among religiousness, spirituality, and three domains of psychosocial functioning in late adulthood: (a) sources of well-being, (b) involvement in tasks of everyday life, and (c) generativity and wisdom. Data used for the study originated from intergenerational studies at the University of California, beginning in the 1920's (Wink & Dillon, 2003). Participants were studied in childhood and adolescence and had four in-depth interviews in adulthood (Wink & Dillon, 2003). The data used for this study was obtained from 300 participant interviews in early, middle, and late adulthood. Levels of religiosity and spirituality were defined as distinct but overlapping concepts and were coded on 5-point scales. Linear multiple regressions were used to investigate the independent relations of religiosity and spirituality to psychosocial functioning.

Wink and Dillon (2003) found that spirituality was positively related to well-being from personal growth, involvement in creative activities (playing an instrument, creative writing, painting, etc.) and knowledge-building life tasks (participation in tasks aimed at increasing knowledge or skill), and wisdom. As spirituality was associated with wisdom and involvement in several everyday life tasks, it suggested the presence of a firm sense of purpose and a broad social perspective (Wink & Dillon, 2003). Spirituality was not related positively or negatively to

well-being from positive relations with others, thus suggesting that although spiritual individuals may not prize involvement with family and friends, they do not devalue it (Wink & Dillon, 2003).

Spiritual well-being was also examined by Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, and Dodd (2009) to determine its relationship to reduced suicidal ideation. In this study spiritual well-being was measured from a 20-item, 6-point scale. Ten items measured religious well-being (assessing one's relationship with God) and 10 items measured existential well-being (assessing one's perceptions such as feeling fulfilled, satisfied with life, and finding meaning and purpose). Four hundred and fifty seven college students completed measures that assessed spiritual well-being, religiosity, hopelessness, depression, social support, and suicidal ideation. Linear regressions were drawn to assess religious and spiritual correlates of suicidal ideation.

It was found that after controlling for demographic variables (age and gender) and psychosocial factors (hopelessness, depression, and social support), neither involvement in organized religion nor religious well-being significantly contributed to suicidal ideation. However, Taliaferro et al. (2009) found that students with higher levels of religious, existential, and total spiritual well-being reported lower levels of suicidal ideation. Existential well-being, which was associated with "spirituality" rather than "religiosity," showed a stronger relationship with mental health than did traditional religious items.

Looking specifically into spirituality and mental health, Sveidqvist, Joubert, Green, and Manion (2003) conducted qualitative research examining 51 people (ages 14-18 years of age) on the role of spirituality in the promotion of their mental health. Using four 1-1.5 hour long focus groups, discussions centered around defining spirituality, the role of spirituality as a promotive,

protective, or risk factor in mental health, preferred methods and situations for expression of spirituality, and perceived level of support in exploring one's spirituality.

In terms of well being, Sveidqvist and colleagues (2003) concluded that spirituality as a basis of identity formation could lead to mental health benefits. Improvement in mood, increased self-confidence, relaxation and reduced anxiety in coping with stress, hope and optimism, and the comfort gained from having "faith," all had implications for promoting resilience, mental well-being and protection of mental health problems. As mental health is relevant to all populations and developmental groups, it was be hypothesized that a sense of spirituality may aid recovery and improves quality of life (Sveidqvist et al., 2003).

The link from spirituality to mental health was examined further by Durà-Vilà and Dein (2009). The researchers examined ways in which those going through periods of spiritual angst and disillusionment did not view the period as a pathological phenomenon, but instead viewed these periods as opportunities for reflection and change. The *Dark Night of the Soul* is an expression describing phases in a person's spiritual life associated with a crisis of faith or spiritual concerns about one's relationship with God, and which has intrinsic aspects of spiritual growth (Durà-Vilà & Dein, 2009). Similarities and differences between the *Dark Night* and a depressive episode were discussed and illustrated using the accounts of five important religious figures (Saint Augustine, Saint Teresa of Jesus, Saint Paul of the Cross, St. Terese of Lisieux, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta). Their narratives were constructed using original texts and biographies.

Many of the features associated with the *Dark Night*, such as sadness and dissatisfaction, could be pathologised, however; it was noted that if these features were defined in existential terms, they could be resolved through the process of meaning making, allowing the individual to

reflect on the negative aspects of their life (Durà-Vilà & Dein, 2009). Reflection could then become a reaction that leads to the transformation of the examined aspects, and thus make positive changes in one's life. Batson and Ventis (1982) suggested that a spiritual experience could be a problem-solving process, triggered by an existential crisis which involves emotional and cognitive tension, and ends with a reduction in tension levels. It was found that those in spiritual crisis viewed this period as a natural stage of spiritual development and maturation (Durà-Vilà & Dein, 2009). It was suggested that giving a diagnosis of a depressive episode to episodes of spiritual crisis, may hold up or prevent the process of meaning making to take place (Durà-Vilà & Dein, 2009). Findings were simplified into equations: Illness (feeling sadness) + psychiatric diagnosis of depression = Disease and functional impairment; Illness (feeling of sadness) + Meaning = Spiritual experience and normal functioning. Durà-Vilà and Dein (2009) were suggesting that by directing those with spiritual based concerns (which may be very similar to depressive symptoms) to resources that would help them to make meaning from the process, they would eventually view the period of "darkness" as a spiritual experience and would return to normal functioning.

While there is evidence that spirituality is positively related to mental health and well-being, Ellison and Levin (1998) wondered why this was the case. To address this, they identified explanatory mechanisms for religious effects on health and several explanations were outlined regarding why religiosity and spirituality may lead to positive health outcomes. It was suggested that religiosity and spirituality may lead to: regulation of individual lifestyles and health behaviours, provision of social resources (e.g., social ties, formal and informal support), promotion of positive self-perceptions (e.g., self esteem, feelings of personal mastery), provision of specific coping resources (i.e., particular cognitive or behavioural responses to stress),

generation of other positive emotions (e.g., love, forgiveness), promotion of healthy beliefs, and existence of healing bioenergy.

Taken together, scholars and researchers in the psychology of spirituality and religion have suggested that meaning encompasses the ways that events, objects, and experiences are represented, how individuals' grapple with existential concerns (i.e., with questions of purpose, loss, good, and evil), and the cause and effect of life events (Mattis, 2002). It suggests that spirituality has a positive impact on mental health and well being and that younger individuals see spirituality as important, beneficial to their mental health, and protective against their mental health problems (Sveidqvist et al., 2003).

Summary

In summary, emerging adulthood is a period when young people (ages 18 to 29 years) seek to sort through the range of ideological possibilities present in their society and choose an orientation that will provide them with a guide to life (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). Emerging adults view the process of deciding on their beliefs and values as a key part of becoming an adult and place importance on autonomy in developing their own opinions about religion, rather than accepting others' beliefs without question (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Arnett, 1998). Emerging adulthood may best be characterized as a time during which young people (a) question the beliefs in which they were raised, (b) place greater emphasis on individual spirituality than affiliation with a religious institution, and (c) pick and choose the aspects of religion that suit them best (McNamara-Barry & Nelson, 2005).

What we know from previous research is that spirituality and religiosity are important aspects of identity development in emerging adulthood and that previous research has been unclear in providing distinctions between the terms. The role of religious culture on emerging

adults was examined by McNamara-Barry and Nelson (2005). They discovered that emerging adults with higher levels of religious involvement reported fewer risk behaviours such as abusing alcohol, driving under the influence of alcohol, and having unprotected sex. Luckily, Nagel and Sgoutas-Emch (2007) reported that it may be possible to alter these unhealthy behaviors before they negatively affect health and wellness. While the role of religiosity has been examined in emerging adulthood, the role of spirituality (apart from religiosity) in emerging adulthood has not been examined. However, as emerging adults tend to focus on autonomy and developing their spiritual beliefs, picking and choosing from tradition and popular culture, it is important to look at those individuals as separate from those who identify as religious. Furthermore, research into spirituality and meaning making indicated that spiritual practices were linked to positive well being, helped to transform negative events into positive opportunities, and enhanced personal growth (Gottlieb et al., 2007; Wink & Dillon, 2003, Gall & Cornblat, 2002).

If emerging adults are at risk for developing unhealthy behavior patterns, are developmentally prone to examining their beliefs and values, and researchers suggest that developing spirituality is linked to positive well being, why is there not more research into understanding spiritual development in the lives of emerging adults? The role of religious culture on emerging adults has been examined but the role of spirituality on emerging adults has not. In addition to examining the role of spirituality in emerging adults, further research has been recommended to understand how meaning systems appear to those who are not religious, but who may be non-believers, or spiritual but not religious (Park, 2005).

In the present study, based on a qualitative research design, I aim to (a) gain understanding, through stories, of the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults and to (b) gain understanding into what meaning emerging adults have made in their lives

from their spiritual journeys. Understanding emerging adults' spiritual journeys may benefit individuals who are on similar paths and who are looking for further resources, as well as helping professionals in their ability to better understand the journey that their clients may be embarking upon, to assist them in knowing that they are not alone in their search for spirituality, and to provide further resources which may benefit both professionals and their clients. In understanding the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults, one may be better able to help or guide others in developing their own spirituality in order to make positive changes in their lives and reduce harmful behaviours that they may be engaging in or at risk of engaging in.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with a discussion of my personal history as it relates to this study so that the reader may better evaluate how my personal experience of spirituality may interface with those of my participants. The research design, data generation, data analysis, criteria for evaluating the quality of the study, and ethical considerations will also be discussed.

Asserting Researcher Transparency

This inquiry into understanding the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults stemmed from my own experiences in this domain as well as through my career aspirations to become a professional helper. Qualitative research acknowledges the impact that writing has on the researchers, participants, and readers (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), the manner in which researchers write is a reflection of the researchers personal interpretations based on the culture, social, gender, class, and personal politics that they bring into research, and is referred to as reflexivity. Reflexivity requires an awareness of what the researcher contributed to the research process and analysis, and an acknowledgment that it is impossible to remain outside of the subject matter while conducting research (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). In order to address the concept of reflexivity, it is important that I disclose my story in order to demonstrate where I fit within the subject matter and to provide information that allows others to judge where my personal bias or experiences may have unknowingly had an effect on the data generated, analyzed, and presented.

Having grown up in a small rural town with little cultural variation and limited access to the world, I moved, at age 17, away from my hometown, family, and friends to attend university. Once I arrived at university, I became so intrigued by the international student community that I

did not make any close Canadian friends for three years. To say the least, my world views expanded.

Shortly after my twentieth birthday, I married an international student from Jordan. At twenty-two, I finished University and my husband and I decided to separate. Perhaps we were too young or too idealistic; nevertheless our marriage was a struggle and while we remained friends, we determined that we were not meant to be together. Feeling lost, with my life plans dashed, I decided to fulfill a dream I had since early adolescence and move overseas. I chose Hong Kong as a cousin was currently living there. Living abroad gave me an entirely new world to explore. The transient lifestyles and culture of Hong Kong constantly led me into new friendships, relationships, and experiences. Eventually, I felt that I had experienced enough. I settled down and began to reflect on my life. I asked, “Who am I? Where am I going? How am I going to get there, and how well am I doing in my approach?” I experienced panic, anxiety, depression, and heartbreak. I found that I needed to change and that I needed to grow but I did not know how and had no one to turn to. I started reading autobiographies in order to learn from others. I read religious texts, started traveling alone, meditating, and doing yoga and Tai Chi. For a short time, I also took an anti-anxiety medication. I discovered artifacts that I held dear and that spoke to me, such as a roof tile painting of Buddha, and a mantra that continues to help me cope with adversity. Together these pieces from my journey act as a reminder of my story in terms of what I went through, what I learned, and what I gained through the process.

It now strikes me that I, as a twenty nine year old, have experienced a journey of seeking answers and reflecting on them, changing myself and exploring areas of further growth, yet in the height of the search, I had no language with which to articulate my experience. Spiritual journey was not, initially, a part of my vocabulary, however; once I began my search, I

understood the concept. I did not believe however, that it was a spiritual journey that I had embarked on. Instead, I felt it a journey of personal growth, yet throughout the journey I established my spiritual beliefs and found that it was through spiritual teachings that I achieved personal growth. I chose to live out the principles that are present in most religions, such as forgiveness, compassion, and modeling love and kindness and began to feel healthy, mended, flexible, and happy with myself. The spiritual aspects of my journey led to my personal growth just as Wuthnow (1998) suggests in the definition of spirituality used in the present study:

Spirituality is an exploration of one's own space by borrowing elements from various religions and mythical traditions and perhaps blending participation in institutionalized Western religion with Eastern practices. Spirituality places an emphasis on self growth, emotional fulfillment, and the sacredness of ordinary objects and experiences. There is an individual tenacity in pursuing meaning in which autonomy generally takes precedence over external authority and traditional religious doctrines (p. 916).

After three years and a journey of searching for and finding myself, at least for awhile, I decided to come home to Canada. Arriving back in Saskatchewan was in many ways harder than arriving in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, I expected to be different; in Saskatchewan, my home province, I did not expect to experience culture shock and to have difficulty fitting in. It took almost two years before I felt like I had found myself again, before I felt like I “fit” and did not feel awkward in social situations. It took two years for me to not be taken aback by the abruptness, matter-of-fact attitudes, and intensity that I found many Western people embody. In reflecting on my return to Canada, an aspect of the difficulty I experienced was, in fact, leaving Canada as one person, and returning changed. I had to process how the changes I made within myself worked in a new environment. Only now, as I reflect on this experience, do I realize this.

After arriving home, my divorce was finalized and a re-examination of my life was due. I started looking for a career and two things happened. First, I found a career that I was passionate about, however; the position was temporary. Second, I fell into a career that paid well, but was void of passion and meaning. I realized that I wanted more. I started to volunteer, applied to do a Masters in School and Counselling Psychology and was accepted. I am now on a journey doing what I love.

Not yet out of emerging adulthood, I know that there are decisions left to be made that will require great reflection. The questions that initially spurred my spiritual journey have been answered, and I have created changes in myself that reflect what I have learned. I am happy with myself and where I am in my life and am not actively engaging in a spiritual journey at the present time. However, having engaged on a spiritual journey I now have the self awareness to reflect and create changes within myself in order to lead a happy and good life.

Research Design

Qualitative research is an approach to human science research that seeks understanding, meaning, or explanation from first hand data instead of previous knowledge or theory (Morse & Richards, 2002). It is often undertaken through “observation, interviews, field notes and documents, and are represented through text, photographs, audio and videotapes, and film” (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 2). Merriam (2002) stated that “the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by an individual’s interaction with their world” (p. 3). In other words, qualitative researchers aim to understand the meaning that individuals have made from their personal experiences. Merriam (2002) suggested that individuals create multiple interpretations of reality which change over time. Qualitative

researchers seek to gain understanding of what those interpretations are at particular points in time and in particular contexts (Merriam, 2002).

Within qualitative research, a researcher can approach an investigation from a number of different philosophical or theoretical stances (Merriam, 2002). This study employs a narrative approach to qualitative research.

Narrative Research

Narrative research has become a widespread method of qualitative inquiry used to understand how human beings make sense of their world (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). It is the study of stories lived and told and is used to study stories or descriptions of a series of events that account for human experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). It uses stories as data where a person's experience is told first hand in story form and is chronologically connected, using a beginning, middle, and end (Czarniawska, 2004; Merriam, 2002). The use of narrative research is relevant to studies where one of the central aims is to understand, conceptualize, and theorize everyday information from the perspective of an individual (Bates, 2004). It is most appropriate for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals (Creswell, 2007). When analyzing the stories told by the participants in this study, a psychological approach has been used where "the analysis concentrates more on the personal factors, including thoughts and motivations" (Merriam, 2002, p. 287). The psychological approach is holistic in that it takes into account the "cognitive, affective, and motivational dimensions of meaning making" (Rossiter, 1999, p.78). In the present study, the re-telling of the participant's stories depict how they interpret their lives and experiences, find meaning through their experiences, and how they cope with their struggles.

In studying human experience through narrative analysis, I have been aware of my role in the research process, and have given great thought into how to best tell the participant's stories, and how to "maintain trustworthiness in terms of validity and reliability" (Merriam, 2002, p. 287). Mishler (1995) suggested that:

We do not find stories; we make stories. We re-tell our respondents' accounts throughout analytic re-descriptions. We, too, are storytellers and through our concepts and methods-our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives - we construct the story and its meaning. In this sense the story is always co-authored, either directly in the process of an interviewer eliciting an account or indirectly through our representing and thus transforming others' texts and discourses (p. 117-118).

In the present study, a narrative approach using a psychological perspective allowed emerging adults who fit the participant recruitment criteria, to tell their story, from their own unique perspectives about the role that their spiritual journeys have played in their lives. It allows the data analysis to concentrate on the personal aspects of motivation, intention, and meaning making in order to depict the role that spiritual journeys play in the participants' lives (Merriam, 2002).

Narrative research can be both a method and a phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2007). As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed through stories of individuals (Creswell, 2007). As a phenomenon of study, writers have provided ways for analyzing and understanding the stories lived and told (Creswell, 2007).

In analyzing and understanding stories, narrative interviewing is used to encourage participants to describe events as they saw them, in their own language, using their own terms of

reference, and emphasizing the people, places or events that they perceive as being significant (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Analysis of narrative interviews places the researcher in the position of author in the written re-creation of the participant's story (Wengraf, 2001). In narrative research, authors have been unwilling to prescribe structure or specific writing strategies (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004). Instead, authors have suggested maximum flexibility in structure, and have emphasized core elements that may go into a narrative study. These have included:

(a) experimenting with form by first looking into preferences in reading, reading other narrative dissertations and books, and viewing the narrative study as a back and forth writing process; (b) keeping in mind the chronology of the stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); (c) forming stories around epiphanies (Denzin, 1989 b); (d) introducing theme, key events, and plot (Czarniawska, 2004); and (e) introducing metaphor and transitions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Polkinghorne (1995) suggested that in narrative analysis descriptions of themes are created that hold across stories. Researchers collect descriptions of events or happenings and then configure them into a story using a plot line, usually incorporating chronology with a beginning, middle and end (Polkinghorne, 1995).

While stories are the most common manner of conveying narrative results, Thody (2006) suggests that there are no set conventions for writing or presenting narrative data and that choices are unlimited in experimenting with narrative language which is described as vibrant, engaging, and passionate. Although narratives can be presented as stories with the usual defined plot structure, there is a wide range of literary genres available. Narrative as poetry is the genre that will be used in the present study.

Poetic representations of data. Expressive arts research has gained influence in the qualitative research community over the past two decades (Richardson, 2002). Such research places value on the views and perspectives of those who experience various phenomena and presents its findings through creative and expressive media (Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007). Poetic representation is a form of expressive media where researchers transform their data into a poem-like composition, often arranging the exact words of the participant to create a meaningful representation of the participant's experiences (Sparkes & Douglas, 2007). The goal of poetic representation is not necessarily to validate specific, concrete meanings but to create a "layered, emotionally resonant representation of the struggles" of the phenomenon at hand (Furman et al., 2007, p. 312). While poetry may not commonly be thought of as a source of knowledge, poems can capture the "contextual and psychological worlds" of the phenomenon (Furman et al., et al., 2007, p. 302).

Piirto (2002), a literary writer and qualitative researcher, acknowledged that although poetic representations might be flawed in a literary sense, they can be effective in relation to the intended purpose and audience. Poindexter (2002) suggested that the disadvantage of using poetry was that its usefulness as a form of data representation was debated and controversial. However, Sparkes and Douglas (2007) argued that there were a number of benefits for using poetic representations as a means of analyzing social worlds. One advantage related to the issue of accuracy. The claim was that "writing interviews as poems allowed the speaker's pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, rhythms, and so on to be honored and may be a better way of representing the speaker than the normal practice of quoting in prose" (p. 172). Tied to this was the issue of honesty. Sparkes and Douglas suggested that when interview data was depicted as realistic stories, the role of the researcher as author of the story was often

unnoticed. However, when data was presented as poetry, it acted as a reminder to the reader that the text had been constructed by the researcher and asserted their place in the data as a filter through which it flowed.

Another benefit proposed by Sparkes and Douglas (2007) related to the “power of poetic representations to create connections from the data to the reader” (p.172). When interviews were transformed into poetic representations, people responded to them more slowly, “expecting to hear them in their heads and be more alert to the patterns of sound, image and ideas and be more willing to engage emotionally with what was being said” (Kendalle & Murray, 2005, p. 746). In this sense, readers were invited to make their own conclusions rather than be filtered toward a researcher-dominated interpretation ending in the way that a story provides a conclusion.

Sparkes and Douglas (2007) also felt that poetic representations were able to communicate findings in a manner that “encapsulated the essence of experiences” (p.173). The writer would seek from the interviews “the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures” (p.173) and piece them into a representation that would allow the reader to “know the person in a different way” (p. 173). The reader would therefore come to know the life of another with the minimum amount of words. In addition, the pairing down of words and detail would enhance the likelihood of maintaining participant anonymity (Sparkes & Douglas, 2007).

Due to the nature of the data, I felt that stories would create answers and meaning for the reader that would be better left for the reader to create individually. I felt that poetic representations of the data were most relevant to this study, as spiritual journeys are about finding meaning, and seeking personal truths and self understanding. By representing data through poems, readers would be more likely to engage in a similar process as that of the participants. Although not all readers will be in the period of emerging adulthood, they may still

find answers, resources, or inspiration through reading about the participants' journeys. Readers may extrapolate meaning or understanding through reflecting on the poetic representations of these journeys.

Data Generation

Participants

Criterion sampling was used to recruit four participants. The participants were selected using the following criteria: (a) persons between the ages of 18 to 29; (b) persons who had engaged in a spiritual journey during emerging adulthood (the onset may include adolescence); and (c) persons who reflected upon, made meaning of, and used the knowledge gained from their spiritual growth in their daily lives. Participants were recruited via posters placed on a university campus and in community agencies targeting health practices (e.g., counselling agencies, alternative healing, yoga, etc.). Participants were offered a fifty dollar honorarium upon completion of the final meeting or a prorated amount if the participant decided to withdraw from the study at any given point in time. The honorarium was presented to offset any costs that the participant may have experienced due to time involved with the project (e.g., child care, transportation costs). Each participant was asked to sign an acknowledgement of receipt of honorarium.

Four emerging adults ranging in age from 20 to 29 were recruited who met the participation criteria for this study. Two participants were male and two were female. The participants described being at different places in their spiritual journeys; one participant was just beginning her spiritual journey and another had been thinking about issues of spirituality since an early age. All participants were from middle class backgrounds. Three participants (pseudonyms have been provided for anonymity), Joshua, Carrie, and Edward, were Caucasian , and Aleia was

of mixed Spanish/Caucasian ancestry. Joshua and Carrie were pursuing university degrees while Edward had graduated and was pursuing higher education in alternative health disciplines. Aleia had obtained some University classes and had completed a college certificate.

Edward was the oldest participant, 29 years old, at the time of the interview and had been struggling with issues of spirituality since the age of 8 or 9. He went through periods of being Christian, Agnostic, and spiritual. He was diagnosed as suffering from Bipolar Disorder and coped by practicing yoga, meditation, and living by spiritual principles that provided order and balance to his life. He offered a quote by Joseph Campbell, suggesting that, in a spiritual journey, people were not looking for meaning, but instead, were looking for a feeling of being alive. Edward was very entrenched in his journey, being able to quote religious doctrines and authors and was passionate about determining a correct way to live life. He was extremely eloquent in his discussion and was highly educated on the subject of spirituality.

Aleia was 27 years old and had been engaged in a spiritual journey since the age of 19. She spoke of beginning her journey by asking God if there was something out there, to please give her a sign. She struggled with concepts of Christianity as she felt that they did not ring true to her. Her spiritual journey began with questions of Christianity, but through the journey, she gained new perspectives within Christian thought that she was at peace with. She read voraciously and drew concepts from other religions and positive psychology to create a version of spirituality that rang true within her.

Joshua was 22 years old. At 20 years old, he realized that he suffered from social anxiety. Once understanding the disorder, he began to work on bettering himself so that he could better cope; and this led him on his journey. As a child, emotions were foreign to him as he had learned that they were to be stifled and not expressed. He practiced meditation, worked on understanding

and expressing his emotions, and began to exercise and pay attention to nutrition. Through his spiritual journey so far, he had made sense of and coped with his anxiety and felt that he was a better person.

Carrie was 20 years old and was always interested in spirituality. She was raised within a Catholic family but moved away from the Catholic Church in her adolescence. She began her journey with an interest in interconnection, everything having meaning. She suffered from anxiety and depression and coped with it through her spiritual journey.

Interviews

Data for each participant were generated through one semi-structured narrative interview. The interviews took place in a small university conference room that was free of distraction or interruptions. The interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and were tape-recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes. Before interviews began, participants were debriefed about the consent form (See Appendix B) which detailed the purpose and procedures of the study, the potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, and the participant's right to withdraw from the study.

In gaining understanding, through stories, of the role that spiritual journeys played in the lives of emerging adults, it was important to allow participants to tell their stories, uninhibited and unconfined by structured questions (Wengraf, 2001). As suggested by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), the narrative interview took the form of a conversation where participants related their experiences and discussed whatever they considered to be relevant. In order to focus the participant's story, I began the interview by asking one question with the aim of producing a narrative about the role that their spiritual journey played in their lives: "I would like you to tell me about your intentional quest for spirituality and its role in your daily life. Maybe you could

start by telling me about the time that embarking on a quest for spirituality became important for you and continue telling how things developed for you up until now.” I then followed Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s (2000) suggestions and probed for further information and detail where necessary, in order to guide the participant through the research topic. When the participant had finished telling his or her story, further topics that had not yet been addressed, were posed as questions, as outlined on the interview guide (See Appendix C). These questions related to topics of meaning made from the journey, reasons why they engaged in the journey, important lessons learned, resources relied upon, and where they currently saw themselves in relation to their journey.

At the end of the interviews, participants were given a resource list of counseling services and hotlines to call if the content of the interviews caused them any discomfort. None of the participants indicated that they experienced discomfort during the interview. They were also given a copy of the consent form which detailed contact information for myself and my supervisor should any questions about the study or their involvement as participants arise (See Appendix B). Participants were offered a second optional interview if they had further thoughts that they would like to discuss in relation to the study. None of the participants felt that this was needed and were confident that they had told me their stories in detail within the first interview. Participants were also encouraged to write down any further information that they would like to share and to call or email me to set up another meeting so that they could share further stories. Again, none of the participants contacted me with further information. After each interview, I remained in the interview room and wrote about the interview in terms of detailing the participant, the story told, my reactions, and any interesting identifying information that would aid me in reconstructing the participant and interview in my mind when preparing the results.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed by a third party, who signed a confidentiality agreement. Transcripts were then analyzed using QSR NVIVO 8 qualitative data analysis software to help manage the data. Themes were produced and separated to gain clarity and understanding within and across participants' experiences. Using software for this process helped with the organizational aspect of analyzing interviews. For example, transcripts were easily coded by highlighting and moving text to one or more thematic areas. Data analysis without the use of software would have been more time consuming, especially when referencing text under more than one thematic area. While the software was useful in an organizational sense, it did not aid in interpretation. It took much time and contemplation to discover what the participants were saying as a collective. I had read over the transcripts, read through the coded text under each theme, written poems on individual themes, and spent many hours wondering about and discussing my findings.

To represent what the participants were saying as a collective, I created a three-phased visual representation of both the collective and individual journeys. Themes that were previously coded from the transcripts were then divided and "mind-mapped" around the stages from the visual representation that they related to. The visual representation that signified the spiritual journeys of the collective group acted as a guideline to create each individual visual representation. From this data, I was able to construct a four-part poetic representation for each participant. These included the three phases of the visual representation as well as a fourth section on where the participant felt they were currently at on their journey. The end result of the poetic representations provided a clear understanding of the stories that the participants shared as to the role that spiritual journeys played in their lives. Further information on how the poetry was

created will be discussed in terms of writing styles, and the specific procedures used in forming the poetry.

Narrative Writing

Van Manen (1997) offered suggestions for phenomenological writing styles as phenomenology focuses on understanding and depicting the essence of experience. These suggestions were subsequently further elaborated by Nicol (2008). While I chose to use a narrative versus phenomenological research design, the two are similar in that they express an experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). With narrative research I explored individual lives and told stories of individual experiences (Creswell, 2007). With phenomenology, I would have understood the essence of the experience and described the essence of a lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In either case, one must strive to write in a manner that speaks to the reader. Van Manen suggested that writing styles should be vocative in that they should be thoughtful and reflective. Similarly, Thody (2006) stated that narrative language be vibrant, engaging, and passionate. Todres (1998) further suggested that language should encourage knowing through the senses, a manner of knowing that is felt and that has texture.

The relationship between language, meaning, and method in human science research was explored by van Manen (1997). Van Manen (1997) was interested in the experiences of the everyday world and how these understandings could contribute to further understandings of the meaning and significance of daily experiences. Van Manen looked at the methods used in poems, novels, and philosophic texts that stood to evoke thought and understanding within a literary framework. He examined literary pieces and discerned five features of writing that helped the reader to derive insight. These included concreteness, evocation, intensification, tone, and epiphany.

To increase concreteness, van Manen suggested using elaborate descriptions of common experiences (e.g., tossing and turning in bed). By providing concrete examples whereby the reader could situate themselves within the text, they could recall times when they themselves had similar experiences and better relate to the story. Evocation was suggested to be used to evoke particular images that brought about one's own experience. This helps the reader to reflect on similar experiences they may have had and engage in a process of wondering, questioning, or gaining understanding of their own lives through the story they read and connected with. To increase intensification, van Manen suggested using poetic devices such as repetition, alliteration, silences in text, and spaces between words and passages to enhance meaning. It was suggested that it was important to carefully quote text and avoid paraphrasing as it could not be done without the loss of meaning.

Tone was also discussed by van Manen as a feature of writing that helped the reader to gain insight into the story. Van Manen discussed two types of tonalities: the outer and inner. Thoughtful reflection aimed to bring out the inner meaning of something and was found in the more subjective undertones, while the outward meaning had more to do with the tone of the text or the meaning gathered from the informational content. It was suggested that to derive insight through tone, one must let the text speak and address the reader so that its deeper meaning may have an effect. The final feature of writing that van Manen discussed was Epiphany. An epiphany referred to a sudden intuitive grasp of meaning and was thought to be experienced when text spoke to the reader, when it validated experiences, conveyed a life understanding that moved the reader, or when it pulled at emotions. Although each of these features of writing were discussed separately, van Manen believed that they were often only visible through the text as a whole.

Creating poetic representations. Keeping in mind the benefits of poetic representations of data and the features of writing that help to derive insight (Sparkes & Douglas, 2007; van Manen, 1997), the task of creating data poems began. Transcripts had already been coded into themes, and a three-phase visual representation of participants' journeys had been created with themes supporting each phase (see Chapter IV for more information). Each participant's data were examined individually. The themes that supported a particular stage in the model were examined and key words or phrases from the text were highlighted. Poems were then created using the highlighted text, keeping the order and specific phrasing intact. Sparkes and Douglas (2007) suggested that in order to maintain anonymity, the places, names, and dates be changed. This process of creating poetic representations is illustrated in Appendix D by comparing a poetic representation with the corresponding transcript excerpt.

Upon completion of the poetic representations, the participants, as subject of each set of poems, were asked to read through them to determine whether the poems rang true to their experience and if not, to suggest amendments. Participant reactions will be discussed in relation to the evaluation criteria.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation criteria included criteria for evaluating narrative research and criteria specifically posed for poetic representations as it is a fairly new mode of representing data.

Evaluating Narratives

In evaluating the criteria of narrative research, Riessman (1993) emphasized that it was trustworthiness rather than truth that was critical to the validation of narrative interviews. It was suggested that the concept of truth assumed an objective reality, whereas the process of narration was an interpretative process. Narrations, even of the same event, may differ between individuals

and the same individual may recall an event differently or emphasize different aspects of a story on different occasions (Bates, 2004).

To establish the trustworthiness of the present study, Riessman (1993) suggested that information be provided to make it possible for others to determine the trustworthiness of the work. The information proposed included: (a) describing how the interpretations were produced, (b) making methodology visible, (c) specifying how transformations were accomplished, and (d) making primary data available to other researchers.

Throughout this study, I kept this criterion in mind and provided to the best of my ability, the information required for others to determine the trustworthiness of this study. While I have not made the primary data available within this document, it would be possible to do so for fellow researchers, upon request, provided I obtained consent from the participants and changed all identifying information.

In addition to maintaining trustworthiness, the concept of reflexivity was suggested by Nightingale and Cromby (1999) to explore how a researcher influences, acts upon, and informs the research at hand. As researchers shape the writing that emerges, Richardson (1994) suggested that the best writing acknowledges that all writing has subtext in which both the researcher and researched have a part in the co-construction. Weis and Fine (2000) suggested that the researcher engage in self-reflective questioning in order to address the impact of the writing on the participants and the reader.

In terms of impact on the participants, Weis and Fine (2000) outlined a set of concerns: How will the participants see the write up? Will they be marginalized because of it? Will they be offended? Will they hide their true feelings and perspectives? Have the participants reviewed the material, and interpreted, challenged, and dissented from the interpretation? In response to these

questions, I asked the participants to review the material that I had created from their narrative accounts and asked for feedback, making it clear that I would make revisions or clarify any areas that they were uncomfortable with. Three participants were happy with the poetic representations, while the fourth had some revisions and clarifying questions before approving of and praising the representations of his journey.

In terms of impact on the reader, Weis and Fine (2000) suggested that the researcher address: the impact certain people will have if they see the final report and whether the researcher can provide a definitive account of the results when it is the reader who makes the ultimate interpretation of events. In answer, the present study does not marginalize, blame, or present results that would upset a subset of readers. The results were presented both in poetic representations and in thematic areas so that readers could either gain personal interpretation of the results by reading the poems, or could access results in terms of themes that were presented through the narrative accounts.

Evaluating poetic representations. Sparkes (2002) felt that it was inappropriate to apply only traditional criteria to experimental forms of representation if they were to be given a fair chance to prove their worth. It was suggested that different and emerging criteria need to be brought forth that call on multiple sources, including the arts and aesthetics, as well as the sciences. Sparkes (2002) proposed three criteria for judging poetic representations:

First, with regard to aesthetic merit: Do they succeed aesthetically? Are they artistically shaped? Are they recognizable as being poetic in form? Are they satisfying? Do they invite a range of interpretive responses? Do they call for an aesthetic transaction and encounters between the reader and writer? Do they create evocative and open-ended

connections to the data? Do they work? Are they effective in relation to their intended purposes and audiences? (p. 187)

Second, with regard to their impact: Do they evoke the emotional dimensions of the subjects' experiences? Do they affect the reader emotionally and intellectually? Do they make a substantive contribution, and do they further empathy and understanding? Do they generate new questions about motivational issues? Do they move people to action? (p. 187)

Third, in terms of educative authenticity, have they raised the level of awareness or stimulated reflection in the research participants? Finally, there are ethical questions that might be asked such as: Did the researcher have permission to portray the participant in the manner that they did? Was the participant happy with the outcome? Did the participant find the representation to be fair and respectful? Did the poetic representation maintain the participant's anonymity? (p. 188)

Sparkes (2002) further suggested that this list of criteria may be modified or used as a starting point for judging poetic representations rather than a template for all occasions. In order to address criteria changes, Sparkes (2002) invited those interested to converse about what the poetic representations were, how they worked, how they might be judged, and the role they might play in developing different kinds of understanding about the phenomena of interest.

I feel confident that I can answer yes to each of the questions regarding quality criteria and poetic representation. First, I believe the poems to be evocative, aesthetic, motivational, and educational. I struggled in creating the poems related to the resources that participants found useful, particularly in reference to the literature participants discussed. In these poems, my desire was to convey the title and author and what the participant found beneficial from the work.

While these pieces, as stand-alone poems could work, when placed together, reading them may become tiresome. However, at the expense of these poems becoming less evocative and engaging, I chose to prioritize the educational piece and relay the information that participants found meaningful in their lives.

In addition, participants offered general feedback subsequent to reading their poetic representations. The following comments and suggestions were offered:

“It was so accurate! I loved reading a poem about me that was wrote by someone else. It was simply amazing.” – Carrie

“Good stuff! I’ve never had a poem written about me before... haha. I’d say it thoroughly sums me up.” - Joshua

“I don’t require any changes to my story. I can’t believe how comprehensive it is! You didn’t leave anything out!! I really look forward to seeing the other participants’ poems.” – Aleia

“I enjoyed reading over your interpretation and expression of my words and sentiments. I appreciate your sensitive and affirmative approach. There’s not much I really want changed.” - Edward

Edward offered a few suggestions and amendments to spelling of author’s names, and asked for clarification on one of the poems. After making these changes and discussing the poem with him, he stated: *“The poem makes great sense to me now. I like it.”* Edward also discussed the pseudonym that was chosen for him and how it fit into his life. He reflected on the name choice and what links it had to other domains in his life. I found this interesting, as this process alone is one that is often employed by the participants in being open to signs, being aware, and making connections and meaning with everyday experiences.

Ethical Considerations and Approval

The present study received ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science and Research (See Appendix E and F). Participation in the present study was voluntary. Through the informed consent process, participants were made aware that issues of confidentiality and anonymity were addressed. In addition they were aware that they had a right to withdraw at any time during the study. All data were stored in a secure place which only I had access to. Audiotapes were shared with a transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement. Audiotapes, transcripts, and consent forms will be securely stored in the office of the supervising researcher, in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education for five years, at which point all data records will be appropriately destroyed beyond recovery.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In gaining understanding of the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults, it became evident that the stories of the four participants involved similar journeys and were characterized by similar themes. This chapter is divided into three sections. First, a visual representation is offered that depicts the common experience of spiritual journeys in the lives of the participants. Secondly, each participant's journey is presented as a four-part series of poetic representations. Each phase of the visual representation is depicted as a different section of the poetic representation (i.e., Discontent, Spiritual Resources and Experiences; Lessons, Beliefs and Meaning). The fourth part of each poetic series is a summary of where the particular participants saw themselves on their journey at the time of the interview. Poetic representations of the data were created by combining quotes from the participant transcripts to illustrate each participant's journey. In order to protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were given and identifying information was altered. Quotations may have been altered for readability. The chapter concludes by further discussing themes that were touched upon within the poetic representations and includes direct quotes from participants to enhance the data.

Visual Representation: Spiritual Journey's of Emerging Adults

A visual representation was created that illustrated the spiritual journeys of Aleia, Joshua, Carrie, and Edward, the four emerging adults who took part in this study. The visual representation contains three phases (see Figure 1) which include a phase of experiencing discontent, followed by a phase of seeking spiritual resources and experiences, and resolving with a phase of acquiring lessons, beliefs, and meaning. Experiencing discontent marked the start of the participants' journeys. They began with a sense of being disillusioned, disoriented, or confused in areas related to self, society, and religion. For example, Edward had poor

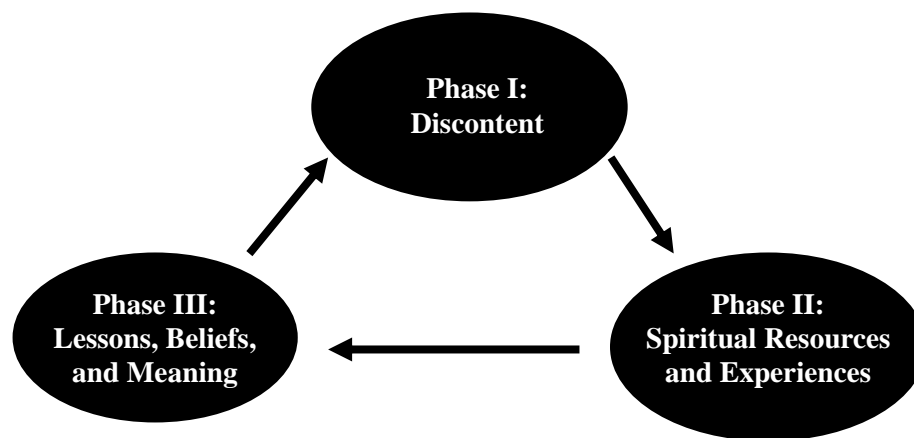


Figure 4.1. A visual representation of the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults.

experiences in bible school that led him to distrust the church while Aleia was confused in regards to religious teachings. Carrie and Joshua were unhappy on personal levels and were both experiencing anxiety. All of the participants were seeking spiritual beliefs that resonated within them in order to effect changes in their lives. The phase of seeking spiritual resources and experiences reflected the participants' desire to find answers, create awareness, and/or make meaning. They were motivated to seek out resources that aided in spiritual growth and knowledge. Acquiring lessons, beliefs, and meaning represented the participants fulfillment of their desire to find answers, awareness, and meaning that resonated within them and addressed their initial discontent.

The visual representation is depicted in a cyclical fashion because the spiritual journey is a process. When participants embarked on their spiritual journeys, they acquired new knowledge and were faced with new theories and experiences that made them question different aspects of their understandings (i.e., of themselves, society, religion). These new areas of thought led them to search for further answers and meaning, which in turn, brought forth new questions, new spiritual resources and experiences, new meaning, and in turn, created a cycle of spiritual development.

While the experience of each phase was inherently different for each participant, there were similarities and common themes that ran between them. Table 1 depicts the themes that ran between participants and which account for the creation of each phase of the visual representation.

Table 4.1***Themes Used to Create Each Stage of the Visual Representation***

Phase 1: Discontent	Phase 2: Resources and Experiences	Phase 3: Lessons, Beliefs, and Meaning
Feeling disillusioned towards aspects of self, religion, or society	Research (through books, internet, religious doctrines, etc.)	Being a better person (bringing about change in society, becoming who you were meant to be, etc.)
Experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety	Relying on people, mentors, and friends	Daily lessons (making every action meaningful, not taking people for granted, etc.)
Utilizing positive (joining psycho-educational groups) or negative (self-harm, drug use) coping strategies	Relying on inner resources (contemplation, solitude, and self reflection)	Knowing that there is power in the Universe (interconnection, signs, fate, etc.)
Experiencing relationship troubles.	Attending or belonging to groups Having faith in the Universe (openness to signs) Spiritual practices (e.g. prayer, yoga, meditation)	

Poetic Representations: Four Individual Spiritual Journeys

The poetic representations address the research question: What is revealed through the stories of emerging adults' spiritual journeys? Implicit in this was a secondary question: What do these stories reveal about the meaning emerging adults have made in their lives from their spiritual journeys? In portraying individual journeys as a four-part series, one can glimpse the internal struggles, resources used, personal growth, and further questions that created the circularity of that participant's spiritual journey. Each phase of the journey: the discontent, the spiritual resources and experiences, and the meaning made, all affecting the other.

As poetic representations are a rather new means of portraying data, readers are asked to allow time to read, digest, and reflect on the poems using Sparkes (2002) criteria for judging poetic representations:

Aesthetic merit: Do they succeed aesthetically? Are they artistically shaped? Are they recognizable as being poetic in form? Are they satisfying? Do they invite a range of interpretive responses? Do they call for an aesthetic transaction and encounters between the reader and writer? Do they create evocative and open-ended connections to the data? Do they work? Are they effective in relation to their intended purposes and audiences? (p. 187)

Impact: Do they evoke the emotional dimensions of the subjects' experiences? Do they affect the reader emotionally and intellectually? Do they make a substantive contribution, and do they further empathy and understanding? Do they generate new questions about motivational issues? Do they move people to action? (p. 187)

Aleia's Spirituality Journey

I. Discontent

Seeking the Truth

You're a teenager
Atheist

Religion a vice
A crutch
You're secure in this notion.

What about fate
Destiny
Circularity?
Perhaps
There is something.

But religion?
Christianity?
You have a problem with that.

Your mom raised you.
Single mom.
Independent.
Intelligent.
Left wing.
Feminist.
A Christian recipe?

And what of Hell?
God created you.
Knows you.
Loves you.
And you stray
You go to Hell.
This never made sense to you.

And what of the literal incarnation of evil.
God created the world.
Everything in it.
God created Satan?

The politics.

The power of silence.
The burning of books.
People have been misled.
You don't know how to find God through that.

So you ask
Personally
To God
Or the Devine
If there is something out there
Would you just let me know?

You thought it
Close minded.
To simply
Assume.

You've always wondered
Of things you can see
Of things you can't see
Perhaps
Spirituality is a door.

You've read
That God has put
In every person
Desire.
Desire for information.
You've wondered
Why the religious traditions
Have been
In all people
In every civilization
For all of time.
It's desire.

You've asked for a sign.
And when you hear the truth
It will be like a knot
Coming undone
inside of you.
A bell ringing
Resonating
Inside of you.

That is how you began.
You've sought out information
To see what rings
out the truth
Inside of you.

II. Spiritual Resources and Experiences

Compassion

You're upset
You're pissed.
You need to rant
You let loose
A fury of words radiate from your body
A force fueled of its own will.

The reaction –
Silence
Your anger turns to contempt
The silence wanes
The response comes
Everyday people are doing the best they can
with the tools they have
You're silenced
Your contempt an inner flame

Reflecting
You can still feel the sting
Of the slap
A powerful statement about compassion
It's true
Everyday people do the best they can
with what they have.
When they are capable of doing better
They will.

The contempt turned inward
Then released
Compassion to others
Compassion to self.

Vulnerability

The idea of the feminine face of God
Feminine desires
To be beautiful
To be an irreplaceable part of an adventure
To be romanced
Often thought as weakness
Silly feminine desires
You used to deny yourself of them
Indulge privately.

God wants women to pursue life
With fondness
Affection
Love
This was put into us
Part of a greater good.
This resonates within you
Not
Silly
Feminine desires.

Women are often told
They are too much
Too needy
Too emotional
Too selfish
Yet
Not enough
Not smart enough
Not disciplined enough
Not enough will power

Women strive
Everyday
To cover this up.
Seeking
To do more
Be more efficient
Make better decisions
To take matters in their own hands
Doubt that the universe will provide for them.

This is not what God wants.

God wants for you
A joyful life
A peaceful heart.

Open yourself
To the vulnerability
Embrace it
Make it your own.
Take pride in it.
The feminine heart.

Prayer

A study on prayer
Those being prayed for
Do better
Than those, not.

A prayer experiment:
You pray.
Whoever you are
I don't know what to do.
I'm frustrated.
Sad
I need help.
Please help.

The judge came back
Ruled for you in every case.
You were shocked.
Impressed.

Your mother:
Single
At times -
Crazy.
Wasn't behaving.
Wasn't acceptable.

You and your sister
You Prayed:
For Mom's insight
Mom's clarity
Mom's balance

She went away for work
Was isolated.
She reflected.
Prioritized.
Returned -
Fixed.

A prayer experiment.
Since then
Prayer
A part of your life.

Interconnectedness

You talk a lot
with others
About spirituality.
Your boyfriend.
Your sister.
Coworkers.
Clients.
You relish the occasions
When you can touch someone's life.
Inspire.
Be inspired.

A client shared -
Life will be easier
When you accept
God does not care
About emotional suffering.
We experience most growth through emotional suffering

And with a friend
You discuss Buddhism
Life is suffering

And it becomes easier.
The questions of
Why me?
Disappear.
It is a part of life
For all.

Discussions lead to further knowledge.
Client led you to friend.
Friend led you to Buddhism.
Buddhism led you to the Eightfold Path.
And you work on the eight aspects of the path.
On setting your intentions.
Intentions and thoughts.
Intentions and actions.
Intentions and words.
Working the principles
Into all aspects of life.
Your being.

A friend shared -
Her belief.
We write a plan with God
Before we come to earth
So that
We may encounter certain things.

She wondered
Why
With all the suffering in the world
She has not suffered
How was this fair?
Some suffer
Others do not.

You continue to think about this
And it grows
With the idea
Of new and old souls.
A cycle
Of curiosity
Information gathering
Discussion
Meaning making continues.

The benefits
Gratification
Contemplation
Applications.
Astounding.

Reading

You find that books
Are strange.
It seems
That they fall
Into your hands
At the right times.
The right books.

And why books?
You've always loved books.
Reading.
If God or the universe
Were trying to communicate
It would know
That this
Would be a great way to do it.

A client told you about a book
"God Winks."
If you think of coincidence:
A random spitting out
Of events from the universe
You are missing out.
Missing out
On a private smile
Between yourself and God.
Missing out
on a wink from God.

You did more research.
Came upon the Universalists.
Universalism in Christianity
It's God's will that all men be saved
God's will will be done.
It is God's will
But then
Not everyone is saved.
What sense is this?
Reading further in the essays...
Why would God create a world
Where there is evil?
It talks

Of people being creatures of comparison.
We wouldn't understand warm
If we didn't have cold.
We wouldn't know.

Five People You Will Meet in Heaven

In Heaven.
You meet 5 people
Who explain your life back to you.
It's very rare
If possible
To see the big picture in your life.
All stories
part of one story.
All stories
Interconnected.
Forgiveness
Important.
Forgive yourself.
Forgive others.
And most importantly:
Kindness
Compassion.

A Canadian author
Spider Robinson
Writes science fiction.
Sister books
Life House and *Death Killer*.
Set in the future.
Technology is developed
People experience others' experiences.
People feel others' feelings.
And have others' experiences
In their mind.
People are scared.
Their black secrets exposed.
Their darkness now a spotlight.
They then realize
They are the same
Dark secrets of the same experience
Same skeletons
Hidden in shame.
Compassion is increased.

Technology develops.
People die
And their experiences
Are uploaded.
The experiences
Join together.

And technology develops.
Reincarnates bodies
With the collective experiences
To live more
To gather more.

You appreciate the concept of knowing others secrets.
That knowing is not so bad.
Everyone is the same.
It is an idea.
A technical Heaven.
With compassion
Human experience
Love.
Everyone
You have known.
There for you.

A friend
Gave you a Christian book,
Wild at Heart.
By John Aldridge:
The masculine heart
And soul spirit
A creation and reflection of God.
Another,
Captivating
By Stacy Aldridge:
The feminine spirit
A creation of God.
There were things you struggled with
In the book.
In the end
Made you feel at peace
With the Christian idea of God.

An article about dating.

The 10 commandments.
It related to your spirituality
Not
‘Turn the volume down in your relationship’
‘Look at his actions not his words’
But this.
This spoke to you.
‘You know the truth.’
‘When you hear the truth
It is like a knot coming undone inside of you.
Like a bell ringing.
It will resonate inside of you.’

You just read *The DaVinci Code*.
It talks
Of the power of silence.
People have been mislead
In Christianity
For a long time.
You don’t know
How people can be Christian
And follow those doctrines.
You don’t know
How you find God
Through that.

Eat, Pray, Love
Talks of being in an Ashram
in India.
A poem that spoke to you said:
God has drawn a circle in the sand
Around the place where you stand right now.
You are in exactly
The time
The place
The circumstance
That you are supposed to be in
At this moment.
You believe this.

The Dali Lama
A Buddhist
Says that our purpose in life
Is to experience happiness.
There are principles

To make this happen.
He talks of gratitude
An important part.
We can easily
Make ourselves
Happier
Or less happy.
People who compare themselves
To those
who have more
Will be less happy.
People who compare themselves
To those
who have less
Will be more happy.
Gratitude
will make you happier.

There is a difference
Between
Happiness and pleasure.
Pleasure
A momentary experience.
Happiness
deeper than that.

In cultivating happiness:
Develop intimate relationships.
Vulnerable relationships
Genuine care for others.
And you apply these to your life.

Vulnerability.
Part of your spiritual path.
Happiness.
The ultimate experience.
What we are all seeking.

In differentiating
Between happiness and pleasure.
It has become obvious.
You had a date.
He would come and go from your life.
Create pleasure.
Not happiness.

It opened your eyes.
Made you more aware.
You felt it a gift.

The Secret

Offers different spiritual teachings
The powers of the mind.
One's unconscious.
Setting one's intentions.
Day to day
You experience frustration
From others.
You try to be compassionate
Towards them.
Try to find a connection.
You practice.
And compassion
comes more easily.

The Art of Happiness
and
Captivating
Talk of vulnerability.

Captivating relates to Christianity.
The feminine has three desires
To be beautiful.
To be an irreplaceable part of an adventure.
To be romanced.
Women desire to be beautiful.
Around the world.
Since being little girls.
To be an irreplaceable part of a great adventure.
The heroine in your own story.
Adventure
Something you have a strong desire for.
To be romanced
You used to deny this of yourself
It felt
A weakness.

The Art of Happiness
Important are intimate relationships.
People striving
Putting up fronts

Standing in their own way.
Not allowing others to see you.
To connect.
And you are pretending.
Pretending to be
What others are most impressed by.
What you think is best.

The books
You ponder.
Address within yourself.
And apply to your life.

III. Lessons, Beliefs, and Meaning

You believe
Everyone has a spiritual path.
Their own.
Laid out for them.
From the beginning.
They simply have to find it
Follow it.
Embrace it.

You believe
You are in exactly the time
The place
The circumstance
You are meant to be in
At this moment.

You believe
In forgiveness
And compassion
Self reflection.
Everyone has someone
They need to forgive.
In better understanding the person
It can help you
To see them
To let go
To forgive.

Your beliefs

Have led to action.
Each day you pray.
Each day you set your intentions.
You see each day as different.
With new challenges.
New messages.

Each day you pray
To inspire.
To be inspired

IV. The Journey

You work on it in pieces
By yourself
It's beneficial
Gratifying
Pondering ideas
And talking with others
You apply it to your life
And you help others to find their way.

You feel that you're not that far at all
Down the path
A quarter of the way
Perhaps

You're knowledgeable though
You can sense things
And you're excited to see what yet will come

So many times you feel
That you've come full circle
Arriving at the same spot
But ending in a different place

The reading continues to spur you on
In *The Narnia* series
There is a God figure
He is running people into the new land
He keeps saying
"Further in and further up"

Your spiritual journey

Exciting
Interesting
Life enhancing
You're excited to share with others
And it gets bigger and better
It is
Further in and further up.

Joshua's Spirituality Journey

I. Discontent

I've never understood feelings
They made no sense
I didn't have the tools
To help myself.
I don't cry.

Emotionally distant
It's how I was raised.
As were my siblings
Parents
Grandparents.

I've had anxiety
For years
Never knowing.
I coped.
The bus ride to school
An hour each day.
Time for thinking.
It was important.
For years
I never knew
How helpful it was.

I graduated.
Looked for a career.
Failed.
My anxiety
A brick wall.

A brick wall
that

For the first time
I noticed.

I was confident
This too would pass.
I would get better.
I didn't know
Of the work
The effort
It would take.
I was given an article.
Social anxiety.
And it was me.
Detailed.
Meticulous.
A turning point.
I was no longer lost.
No longer confused
By my emotions.
Suddenly
I was part of something.
Not the only one.

The social anxiety group
Gave me insight.
I was tired
Of being held back.
Thought shy.
Tired
Of being quiet.

Tired
Of bottling my emotions.
Never being myself.
Always an outsider.

I had forgotten
The importance
Of thought.
Reflection.
Meditation.
I researched.
Read.
Remembered
How powerful

Knowledge can be.

The more I learned
The more insight I had.
I'm changing.
Through time
I see it a blessing.
Social anxiety.

II. Spiritual Resources and Experiences

Nature

Animals
The wilderness
A spiritual experience
To surrender
Myself.

The move
From the farm
To the city
Shocked me.
Raped me
Of my serenity.

And I lost it
For so long.

I see
And bask
On those times.
And even within the city
It's accessible
If I seek it
Maintain its importance
To my being.

Moods

The ups and downs.
At times
I can't function.

And the name?
Depression?

At times
I wasn't doing what I wanted
Wasn't improving
enough.
Couldn't pull myself out.
Couldn't cope
Oh! But the up periods
Everything is so clear.

I've learned
To calm down
Rid myself of expectations
Placed upon myself
by myself.
The ups and downs
I balance
Oh! And when I am down
I'm not devastated.
I can function.
It's clear
The thoughts
the emotions.

Yesterday
I had dreams
Today, gone.
Not to come back.
Meditation?
Oh, but I'm down
The last thing in the world
I can bring myself to do.

I try
To be aware
Try to catch myself from reacting.
When I'm down
Irritable
Grumpy
Negative.
And I release it
In how I treat others.

With these emotions
I think certain ways
Oh! But I stop myself
And the more I do this
the easier it becomes.
I am now able to catch myself.

The ups and downs
The balance
The process
Gradual.

Personal Growth

My family.
We are the same.
I am the match
Of my parents.
Emotionally.
There's a defense mechanism
A distancing from pain.
Now, I am aware of it
It's there all the time.
In myself.
In them.
Now, I'm taking care.
Reacting differently
Eating better
Exercising

Communication
I'm learning about.
Self help books
I've read.
Self confidence,
Self esteem,
Emotions

Creating happiness
I'm learning.
I'm growing
As a being
As a whole.
it is all coming together

The knowledge,
The learning
The thinking.
It all comes in every direction
It supports me
It's going to make me rise
I want never to be held back
I will be better
My values
morals,
How I treat others.

I don't know yet
what I'm meant to do at all.
Being more positive.
Bringing joy.
Will be a start.

Resources

Reading
Led me to being found
Part of something bigger
Than myself.

Led me to meditation
Controlling myself
Understanding myself
Dealing with emotions
Communicating
I remembered
The power
Of knowledge.

The social anxiety group
Taught me about breathing
Exercises to calm the body
The mind
To cope
To be in public

Taught me about myself
My creativity
Outgoing nature

Self views changed
Turned
No longer turning that hatred inward
I see the anxiety
As a blessing

Talking to friends
About my growth
Is new.
To this point
I have been
On my own.
Keep to myself.
Deal on my own.
My girlfriend now
I can bounce ideas
She helps me.
I help her.

Being alone
Allows for thinking
Early on I knew this
The farm kid
Riding the bus.
Now I analyze.
An automaticity
Accelerating
My growth

I have diverted
Not always
A positive direction.
The ups and downs
Still present.
Thinking overrides
I try to improve.

Meditation

Lying in bed
Trying to relax
Mind focused
Each area
Relaxed

Body numb

Reading of
Meditation

The technique was there.
But for the mind.
It's difficult.
When depressed.
Impossible.
The mind wanders.

To practice
Is the main thing.
To keep at it.
And life is affected.
There is a calm
A clear
An overall
better understanding.

The Mood of Meditation

Good luck
On success
I haven't the energy
I haven't the desire
My mind
Has no focus

This is I
after a time of no practice.
Of seeping into
That state of darkness.

If I am to practice
It is the main thing.
It becomes my skin
My nature.
I am calmer
Clearer
Better

A couple days
A week

Or two
I was getting good
I was keeping on track
I would sit
I would breath
I would have answers

At times
I deviate from my path
Everyone does

III. Lessons, Beliefs, and Meaning

This journey
Will lead to fulfillment
A nice life.
I'm learning
What happiness is.
How it's created.
My confidence is growing.
I'm growing.
The knowledge
The learning
The thinking
Is coming together.
The more I learn
The more I understand
Myself.
It comes from every direction
It supports me.
I see my emotions
They won't hold me back.
Not anymore.
Change lies within.
I keep my mind active
Don't run from problems.
Educate myself.
I believe
Wisdom comes with age.
And learning.
There is always something to learn.

The turning point
Was the article

I knew who I was.
I was
Social anxiety.
The black and white
The definition.
I was part of something
Not the only one

I see myself
Becoming
The person I'm meant to be
Making everyday count
Every day meaningful
I stay focused
On being a better person.

Importance
Is bringing peace
Healing
Understanding
To be a part
Of the change.

IV. The Journey

I have come
A long way.
At times
I try to improve
I am let down
Disappointed
I can't be as good
As I want to be.

At times
I feel
That it's coming
And faster with time.
The exponential growth.

I have come a long way.
I have a long way to go.
I am proud of myself.
I like myself.

I give myself a break.
Go at my own pace.
And the future
is positive.

Carrie's Spiritual Journey

I. Discontent

The unhappiness has always been there.
When younger, you were different.
Yes, you had friends.
But your preference was to be alone.
It was constant
The unhappiness.

It stayed with you.
And after high school
What were you to do?
The darkness was a shelter you couldn't see out of.
An inkling of light
Was hope for a better life.
A reason to make changes?
You enrolled in school.
The time was right.

And then, you broke up.
The two of you
No longer.
It was sudden.
To face life
Unimaginable.
The feelings so deep in magnitude
Overwhelming your core
The time wasn't right.

Downhill it went.
The experimentation came
With drugs.
Everything changed.
You felt like a different person.
You discovered that which you were dealing
Anxiety.
Everything was clouded.

You began a class.
Anxiety management.
Grasped on to the idea
Of yoga
As a form of relaxation.
The time wasn't right.

Motivation seeped through you.
You couldn't do it.
The stress.
You had to deal with it
You knew.

II. Spiritual Resources and Experiences

Interconnectedness

You made someone's day
today
By having a conversation with them
And for reasons you don't know.
She started up with you.
Risky your judgment.
She didn't know how you would react.
But
You knew
she was joking.
And it was comfortable.
You felt different
Afterwards.
A simple
But positive human interaction.
It made things good.
You felt good.

Later
Driving down the street
You stopped.
A red light
A glance to the left.
And she was there.
Looking at you.
You both smiled.

A sign from God?
Or not God?
A sign saying
Yes, this was right.
A good thing.

God gives you signs
For the right direction
And the wrong
This you believe

The self awareness to see
The ability to connect
These two
Make meaning
These two create happiness
Interconnectedness

Meditation

Everything brightens
Slows down
It is
Surreal.
The anxiety still there
You can handle it.
Think
Positive thoughts.
Mix the two
Work with your anxiety
Create your spirituality
You will learn.
You are still in the act
You are not yet
Where you need to be
It is overwhelming
Using your anxiety
With your spirituality
To alleviate a foreign touch.

Yoga

With yoga
The shift in your life
Noticeable.
The unhappiness faded
Present
was happiness.
Signs
Signals
From the universe
Were noticed.
Relationships improved.
There was a sense of being guided.
A divine connection.

Resources

Reading
Researching
Internet surfing
You're more aware.
Movies.
Books.
Those that you reach out for
And instinctually grab
Only to find
It is exactly what you've needed.
Not knowing how you've stumbled upon them.

Education.
Know the facts.
Know the history.
Interpret
Make decisions
Hone your beliefs
With knowledge.
A religious studies class
Has taken you to new depths.
Knowing your opinions
Your beliefs
Has led to a snowballing
Of ideas
And desire for more knowledge.

Be open.
A chance Chakra cleansing
Led you to a mentor
Who provided you with books.
Conversations.
Guidance.
Motivation.

Be alone.
Contemplate life.
Let anxiety turn into prayer
Meditation.
Use the anxiety to lift yourself.
Focus on yourself
Your thoughts
Your actions.

Confide in others.
Find that person
To share spirituality with.
Someone with similar understanding.

Let the signs guide you
In interconnectedness.

III. Lessons, Beliefs, and Meaning

Embarking on a spiritual path.
Teaches you selflessness
Yet the journey itself
Is selfish.
The work is hard
The effort great
To be truly spiritual
Not following blind.

With spirituality
You are being guided
Given signs.
They come through the world
Through everything.
Through God.

Awareness
Interconnectedness
Are key
For a journey
To be truly meaningful.
It's tiring.
Everything has meaning.
Nothing to be taken for granted.
Nothing to be taken advantage of.
Acceptance is learned.

With spirituality
You learn about yourself
Learn about
Who you are
Not who others want you to be.
Yet the journey itself
Is selfish.
And what you learn
Is selflessness.

IV. The Journey

It's been a couple years.
Perhaps a quarter of the way
Down your path.
Not far at all.
Yet, the knowledge
Is so much greater
Than before.
You can sense things
Be attuned to the universe.
The excitement over the future
Is great.

Edward's Spiritual Journey

I. Discontent

I was 8 or 9
In Sunday school.
The lesson being
If you believe in God,

He will create and keep a bubble
Around you.
No harm could come to you.

I was a boy
8 or 9 years old
Beaten up at school
Nearly every day.

This was an authoritative person
Speaking to a young boy.
I had been trying hard to study the bible
To believe in God
And I was not being protected.
I had but two choices:
Believe that God hated me
Believe that God doesn't exist.
Which would you choose?

A religious mother
An agnostic father
Made it possible to defend my disregard for religion:
Dad doesn't believe it.

Nevertheless, it sparked within me
From a young age
Questions around divinity.

The years to follow
Led me on a path
A path to find
A correct set of ethical principles.
Whipping myself internally
When I stepped out of line.
Extremely harsh on myself
Over my own moral code.

Teenage years were wrought with major depression
Spirituality fell to the wayside
I thought myself a bad person
Not worthy of pursuing spirituality

Coming out
Of my teenage years
The drive reappeared

It could be
That which drives
The pursuit of spirituality
In anyone
Is that
Which drives it in everyone.
For all of these issues are present
In everyone.
It could be an inborn desire
To know
To experience
To know what life is about.
To experience being alive
Being present
Seeing everything
With fresh eyes.

It could be
The Holy Spirit driving us,
As Marianne Williamson writes,
The call to awaken
And be glad.
I believe that drives me.

It could be
A simple
Satisfaction.
Of wanting to figure out the right way of doing things
Being a good person
Being in line.
It was necessary to figure out the right actions.
This motivated me.

It could be
The desire
For openness
Joy
Wonder and inspiration.
Ultimately
I believe it to be the same source
Driving us all.

II. Spiritual Resources and Experiences

Daily Life

I see living a good life
As central to a spiritual quest.
Yoga
Meditation
Prayer
Useful in enforcing the overall practices
In the way we interact with others
Treat ourselves
And interact with the world around us.
Be it compassion,
Tolerance,
Honesty,
Integrity,
Kindness,
Taking joy in others joy,
Equanimity,
Through this
We will make the most progress
On our spiritual paths.

Stories
Prayers
Mantras
Draw attention to our own thoughts
Intents
And behaviours.
Forcing intention and effort
To live a good life

Non-Violent Communication

As a vegetarian
It's easy
To take the upper hand
Against those who don't follow your lifestyle.
After all
Calling them names and telling them they're bad,
Pales in comparison to the suffering the animals are experiencing.

Yet, what does this gain.

This harsh treatment of others
In order to gain compliance.
They may comply
And the harsh treatment put onto them
Will come out somewhere.
Perhaps onto another.
A loving approach suggests
Teaching others through actions
And they may comply
And be able to spread the loving approach

Nonviolent communication
A set of techniques for achieving goals
With a spiritual basis
A conscious communication style
Using symbols and language
To bring harmony

Self Awareness

Toltec tradition
Suggests
We make agreements
In reaction to situations that we face
What people say and do to us
As we grow up.
As we live our lives,
We form agreements.
An agreement to react a certain way
An agreement to say a certain thing
To believe
Or to feel something.
These stem from our experiences
Combined with what is given to us.
Genetics
Soul
Spirit
We read into things
Innately in each lifetime.

Empowering
Is knowing
That you can address those agreements.
Learning and practice are key

Yet it's possible to change.
In those situations, this, is how I am going to react.
I am going to live my life
In such a way
That I can be content.

Four main agreements:
Be impeccable in your word
Don't take things personally
Don't make assumptions
Always do your best.
Things we hear people say
Everyday.

Compassion

Compassion can be difficult
Being compassionate to people who treat you badly
Is discouraging
Albeit, you realize
It doesn't mean that love just got used up

It may take time
Conversations
Convincing
Modeling the principles.
Modeling love
Modeling kindness
Compassion.
No matter their words
No matter their actions
It doesn't mean that love just got used up

You do what you can
To change
Society
To enhance compassion
To rework systems
To create
Happiness.

Life Plan

I know that I need to put myself out there
I work on developing trust
And faith
To express what I believe
To let others see me
To put myself on the line
To be as compassionate as I can
I need to have faith
That what happens will work out in the end

I want to hide myself
It's easier
But I will never be found

My excuses have been used up
I need to do what I think is right
I need not be scared
To be open
Just as compassion spurs compassion
My interest and desire to pursue a spiritual life
May engage another
If they know who I am.

The Signs

Life is far
From mundane
Spiritual aspects
To be found in anything
If you are willing
Keep your eyes open.

The Karate Kid
Was taught
The principles
“Wax on, wax off”
To use with everyday tasks
Washing the walls.
Yet, the basic movements
To martial arts.
To the skill
He was aiming to hone.

To think of the opportunities
I've missed.
For mentorship
Insight
Because I didn't see
Because I didn't open up to that person.

A turning point
Is the awareness
The willingness to accept
Insight
Gifts
Sources of learning
Inspiration
To embrace them as they appear
Not in question.

Loving Self; Loving Others

The Ego
Can and will
Use everything
To set us apart.
Everyone is better than me
Or
I am better than everybody else.

The length of time
That I believed
Everyone was better than me
Was an eternity.

It came to me
That to be spiritual
I will not succeed
By beating myself up.
It is one thing
To embody the principles
In relation to others
But also
To myself
To treat myself lovingly.

So much

Stems from the idea
Of loving action.
The principles shared broadly across religion
Stem naturally
From love and kindness
They need not be forced.

In believing
I am fundamentally flawed
Will achieve nothing.
I have increasingly
Been good to myself.

Just as the willingness to give
To others
With no expectations in return
Is a spiritually beautiful thing
So is, to do to yourself

Yoga

The steadiness required
The willingness to tolerate pain
Self caused pain
To tolerate the discomfort.
As you know
That others have gone before you
And have benefited
That good has come.

Knowing the external practice
A good model
That is required internally
Perhaps a reason for its existence.

Learning lessons
Is likened
To putting yourself
In yoga pose
It may be painful
But you learn to go through it.

Reading

So much
I have relied upon
For this journey
My life journey.

Reading and reflecting.
Applying it to my life.

Joseph Campbell
Suggests
The experience of being alive
Is being present
Seeing everything
With fresh eyes
At any moment.

The Gospel According to Thomas.
Salvation is personal
Found through spiritual introspection.

“A Course in Miracles”
By Dr. Schucman and Dr. Thetford
And a reflection “A Return to Love:
Reflections on the Principles of
"A Course in Miracles"”
By Marianne Williamson.
A piece that stood out for me:
Christ is not one specific being.
The divine is in all of us.
We don’t realize it
We don’t act like it.
And we treat ourselves badly.
And we treat others badly.
When we begin to realize
That we are the embodiment of Christ
We will lead a more spiritual
More fulfilling life.

Cheri Huber
A Zen teacher
And author of
“Making a Change for Good.”
Encourages us to analyze

Pay attention
To the voices
Inside our head.
Due to different life experiences
People we've met
And who have influenced us.
It's natural to have
Contradictory thoughts
To the same situation.

Again
Joseph Campbell
Suggests
What people are looking for in life
is not meaning
What they are looking for
Is the feeling of being alive.

III. Lessons, Beliefs, and Meaning

Recognize that the Divine
Is with each of us
Treat each other
As if you were interacting as such.

Tolerance
Compassion
A loving approach
A loving action
To ourselves
To others.

Truthfulness
Reliability
Addressing your unconscious agreements
And altering how you act in a given situation
To fit with a loving approach.

Being willing to give
Without reciprocation
Engaging in actions
Because it is right.

Seeing the world

With fresh eyes
In order to experience being alive
To experience being present
To be able to find
The spiritual aspect
In the seemingly
Mundane.

To constantly work
Towards a better you.
Always doing your best.

IV. The Journey

I am at a turning point.
It is new to me
This love of self
Ridding myself of the practice
Of berating myself
For my flaws
And after
Being incapable of attending to spiritual practice.

To model love of others
By love of self.

I am now
Developing
Trust in the universe.
Faith in the universe.
To extend myself
Express my true beliefs
Without fear of consequence
To act compassionately
And to know that things
Will work out.

I am at a turning point
A willingness
To accept
Insight
Gifts
Sources
Learning

Inspiration
Teaching
As they are available to me
As they appear
And without question.

Reflections on the Poetic Representations

While Table 1 portrayed the themes that were used to create the visual representation, there were other themes that could not be expressed in this manner. By illustrating the journeys visually, the emotions of the experiences were lost, the meaning made was not evident, and the outcomes of the journeys were not relayed to the reader. I therefore decided to present the data in poetic representations to express the participants' emotionality, convey meaning made, and communicate the outcomes of the journeys. It was for this reason that poetic representations were used.

Further themes depicted in the poetic representations included aspects of development, ways in which meaning was made from life's events, and the outcomes of engaging in a spiritual journey (relief of mental health concerns, engaging in spiritual surrender, feelings of interconnection, building moral values and character, and feeling that personal growth was attained). While these themes have been revealed within the poetic representations, they will be further discussed and direct quotes from participants' accounts will be shared to enhance the data. Through the poetic representations, it is more likely that material will resonate with readers, however; the reader must take the responsibility of sorting out the poems in order to make sense of the data. By further discussing the results in this section, the results will be laid out in a more direct fashion.

Developmental Aspects of a Spiritual Journey

There was a development aspect to the participants' spiritual journeys in relation to age, experience, and reflection. The two older participants, Edward and Aleia, had been on their spiritual journeys for a longer period of time, appeared to have more insight, and were more able to discuss the resources they employed and how they made meaning from their spiritual journeys. Edward in particular was extremely entrenched in his journey, and made the conscious effort in each moment to better himself and abide by the principles that guided him. In discussing his troubles with integrating all of his principles into his life, Edward stated that:

If I am trying to get myself as spiritual as possible then I am not likely to ever succeed if I am beating myself up... The main thing if I am trying to ... keep myself on my spiritual path ... (I) will actually have to be to treat myself lovingly. Not to forget about the other principles. Like I say, I think that a lot of other things stem from the idea of loving action. So, I think that spirituality has so many implications and I think that generally a lot of the principles that you see shared fairly broadly across religions truthfulness and reliability, all of these kind of principles are very important and, but I think they stemmed naturally out of love and kindness so they don't need to be forced.

Joshua, who is younger than Edward and has not been on a spiritual journey as long as Joshua, shared his views of his journey:

It's (my journey's) going to ... lead to more fulfillment in life. I am learning what actually creates happiness and it gives me confidence and I can feel myself growing as a being as a whole, it is all coming together all that knowledge, all that learning all the thinking. The more I learn the more I understand myself. It all comes in from every direction and its supporting me and its eventually going to make me rise to my full potential and I hope

to never be held back by anything. Never let like fear and emotions hold me back from doing what I want to do.

Making Meaning in a Spiritual Journey

The participant's discussed making meaning in their spiritual journeys in many different ways which relate to existing literature. Roof's (1999) four techniques for obtaining religious meaning (metaphor, mysticism, pluralism, and reflexivity), which were discussed in the literature review, can be applied to the participants' methods of making meaning from the present study.

Metaphorical interpretation refers to religious texts and practices that are considered to be symbols of transcendent truths, rather than descriptions of literal facts (Besecke, 2001). Within the present study the participants were struck with discrepancies between literal religious beliefs and daily practices or experiences. Edward's journey began from such an experience in which he was taught the literal truth from the bible and found that he could not accept it. In time, he grasped on to the metaphoric interpretation of God protecting him. Aleia also described this process in her "*problems with Christianity*" in "*Eve being an afterthought to Adam*" and the concept of original sin being Eve's fault. She found metaphoric interpretation through another literary source who described this process as "*Eve not being created out of mud like God created Adam and the other animals, but out of Adam's rib so that she was ... twice refined, His crowning glory of creation.*" Aleia felt more secure in the idea of a Christian God who created Eve for all of the right reasons and not just as a "*help mate*," and who laid the original sin on both of them, not just on Eve. She felt that "*this was a God she could get behind.*"

Mysticism is understood as an experiential way of relating to religion. Mystics are people who practice a discipline such as meditation in order to experience unity with the transcendent. In the present study participants found that practices such as yoga and meditation created

exponential growth on their spiritual journeys. Carrie felt that yoga provided a *“noticeable shift in her life.”* Her *“unhappiness faded, relationships improved”* and she had *“a sense of being guided.”* Joshua made mention that practicing meditation was the main thing in order to be *“calm, clear and have a better understanding”* of life. Edward took this to another level comparing yoga to *“learning life lessons”* as putting yourself in a *“yoga pose may be painful but you learn to go through it.”* He stated that you *“withstand the steadiness required, the pain and the discomfort because you know others have gone through it and have benefitted in the end.”*

Pluralism refers to drawing spiritual meaning from many different religious, scientific, and philosophical traditions, without adhering to any particular tradition as the best or right one (Besecke, 2001). The idea of pluralism was, in fact, a defining aspect of this study. Participant’s self-identified with the definition of spirituality used in this study, which contained aspects of *“blending participation in Eastern and Western religious practices, and borrowing religious and mythical traditions to create one’s own view of spirituality”* (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 916).

Reflexivity relates first to pluralism, and signals the ability to step back from a religious idea and experience to reflect on it as situated in different possibilities (Roof, 1999). It enables meaning to be gained while maintaining rationality (Roof, 1999). Scholars also use "reflexive" in a second sense, in that individuals are constantly examining and revising their own views and practices in light of new knowledge about those practices (Besecke, 2001). What this means in the context of religion is that individuals have access to knowledge about religion from many domains and that they continually revise their religious views and practices in light of this knowledge (Besecke, 2001). Edward received much of his teaching through books and stated that *“A lot of my spiritual quest has been reading, now that I think about it, reading and reflecting what I read and trying to apply it.”* Edwards’ beliefs changed over time and his

understanding of the spiritual world grew. With more education came more changes to and applications of his spiritual beliefs and practices.

The present study depicted the idea of reflexivity in the visual representation as a cycle of knowledge spurring thought, reflection, adaptations and a thirst for further knowledge and understanding. The participants were able to continue this journey while inhabiting a typical existence of work, school, relationships and everyday life, thus maintaining rational thought. This distance however, is a relative concept as Edward appeared to be the most enmeshed within his journey, having travelled the furthest (in a spiritual sense), and having the least distance between his spiritual search and his daily existence. Edward's daily existence included surrounding himself with spiritual teachings, mentors, resources, and education. He embodied himself as the "poster-boy" of his own personal principles. In this manner, he believed in principles at a very high level and lived them to that degree. In the sense of reflexivity, he maintained rationality relative to where he was on his journey and continued to examine and revise his views in light of the new knowledge he received. Edward captured his thoughts on reflexive spirituality in a discussion on the importance of embodying religious principles:

I largely see them (religious principles) as useful insight in the way of enforcing the overall practices of the way we interact, the way we treat ourselves and interact with the world around us... Whether it is compassion, tolerance, honesty and integrity, it (they) embody in those principles, the loving kindness, the compassion, the taking joy in other peoples joy and this sort of accepting you, the equanimity. Those kinds of principles are the things I think through interacting (and) not just thinking about things that we are most likely to make progress on a spiritual path and so stories, and prayers and mantras (and) all these various techniques are really important as to how they draw your attention to

our own thoughts and intents and our own behaviour... I try to use a lot of those techniques to draw them out and my intention back and force my intent and my efforts to live a good life basically. I see living a good life as the central thing for a religious, for a spiritual quest...

Carrie demonstrated her reflexive spirituality in discussing a popular culture spiritual guide:

I just started watching this movie, it is based on a book called Conversations with God, by Neil Walsh... I just started to watch the movie and it made me feel less alone with my feelings... Because he said that "the spiritual world is all around you trying to give you these signs" you know I don't think it is word for word "it's all around you trying to give you these signs and you just need to know when to expect them..."

Prayers, dreams, intuition, and visions were a few of the modes through which meaning was conveyed and received. These dreams, visions, and proverbs offered hope, protection, insight, information, resolutions to problems, and/or clarified important questions or lessons. Transcendent sources of knowledge were also mentioned across participants in discussing prayers, signs, and intuitions. Edward expressed himself succinctly in his belief that:

Stories, prayers, mantras and all these various techniques, as beautiful as they are, in and of themselves, are really important as to how they draw your attention to our own thoughts, intents, and own behaviour.

Outcomes of a Spiritual Journey

Although a spiritual journey may be on-going, gains are constantly being made throughout the process. Participants shared several outcomes of their spiritual journeys, which

included: symptom relief, spiritual surrender, interconnectedness, finding answers, building character, and personal growth.

Symptom relief. Through their spiritual journeys, participants gained the knowledge and perspective to view their realities in a different manner. Mental health symptoms of depression, anxiety, and bi-polar disorder were managed through spiritual means. For example, Carrie began to work with her anxiety through meditation and yoga. She stated:

Through mediation...I started contemplating life more, the anxiety was still there but I found that I could handle my anxiety, think positive thoughts and turn it into like prayer and meditation so it kind of is good to learn to use my anxiety with my spirituality to kind of like alleviate a foreign touch. So, I am still meditating but I am not at that point where I needed to be and then. Yoga was something I pretty much had to look into on my own and I started doing yoga and it was really good actually. It was where I noticed a big shift when I started doing yoga. I started being happier and I started really noticing all of the signs and signals that I was given like that the universe or whatever gives you.

Edward discussed his spirituality as helping him to cope with his bipolar diagnosis.

It has taken a while, after I went off medication, I was exasperated for sure for a while I think. I think the medications did have some balancing effects and the thing is that that does provide a crutch. I was thinking about this recently and I have often done this myself and used the term “crutch” in sort of a judgmental way. It’s just a “crutch”, but crutches, you know, it is a pretty apt metaphor I think, and when you think about the real physical thing ‘crutches’ they are very useful and essential for some people to get around sometimes and so, but the thing is, if it is just a temporary injury for which you are using crutches, when it is finally healed then it’s probably a good idea to set aside those

crutches so you can start using the injured part of yourself again and build it up to the point it was or better and also not get really sore arm pits too. So, I see medications as having been a crutch that it was definitely difficult to get rid of, trying to get past that, but I see it as useful to me and hopeful to the world as a whole eventually for me to struggle through that and really address, like I say, I can, I am getting increasingly more able to see what is at the root of my different moods and the generally flawed perceptions or a knee jerk reactions based on conditioning based on things that have happened to me that I haven't properly digested, psychologically,

Edward also discussed overcoming his shyness through spirituality:

There might have been all kinds of opportunities for a mentor that I have turned down because I didn't really see them, and I strongly suspect that now. Or conversations that, I used to be really painfully shy and insights that I have missed out on just because I didn't open up enough to have a conversation with somebody. Sometimes in the past, sometimes I have found that I closed myself up more strongly if something seemed potentially really useful and positive than in any other situation. So I think I have missed out on a lot of things and a lot of potential by my own action and when we speak of a turning point, maybe that willingness to accept whatever insights and gifts and sources and learning and inspiration and teaching are available to me as they appear and not in question.

Spiritual surrender. A common thread between participants was faith that there was a Higher Being or Power that was in charge of the Universe. Carrie shared that:

I noticed a big shift when I started doing yoga. I started being happier and I started really noticing all of the signs and signals that I was given like that the universe or whatever gives you. I started noticing them more and like noticing what is real and what

is not real. I saw my relationships improve I just felt like I was being guided more and that is the thing with spirituality is that you are being guided. You are given these signs. If you are going in the right direction and you ask for a sign, they will give it to you.

Edward was also working on “developing more trust in the universe” or “more faith in the universe.” He further stated that:

What I am really working on now is developing that kind of trust, the faith that if I put myself out there, express what I really believe, let other people see me for who I am and put myself on the line by acting as compassionately as I can, that whatever actually happens to me that things will actually be worked out in the end. I am expecting that by taking this approach, and being compassionate to myself and everyone and everything as I can, that it will somehow contribute to my life and to the universe at some point down the road. I don't know necessarily what that will be, I won't necessarily know what the fruits of most of my actions will be but, I don't know I think it is just hard to live without trust and that the trust in the goodness of the universe is the most fundamental trust that all of our comparatively smaller or more specific issues of trusting family or friends or lovers or partners that all of those are just getting at that fundamental issue of trust in the fabric of the universe of its innate goodness.

Aleia similarly stated that:

I guess right now I wouldn't say that I identify with a Christian, like, big G, father of Jesus, God. The things that I do believe is certainty, that there is more going than we can see, always. And that there is like a benevolent power in the universe and that all people are connected.

As mentioned previously, the participants surrendered their lives more to the Universe than to a particular God. In doing this they believed that everything happened for a reason (good and bad) and that these experiences shaped who they were. Carrie discussed her interaction with a spiritual cleanser and the lesson she learned:

(There) was this spiritual cleanser. She is like a spiritual mover or something, you know, kind of like the witch. So it (the sign) said chakra cleansing, and I was like chakra cleansing? You know like I just started researching about this third eye and the chakras and stuff, so it was kind of like a connection between you know, the one and the other and then so I just said to her “oh, that is really neat, you know like I just started researching this stuff and now I am going to school and learning more about it” and she goes “you know, everything happens for a reason” you know that’s a main focus on spirituality, that everything happens for a reason and it is that focus of interconnectedness and everything, which I learned now that I am further down my path.

Interconnectedness. The participants in the present study discussed being open to opportunities as they were offered. Carrie spoke of interconnectedness and the benefits of positive human interaction provided one allowed oneself to be open to the opportunity. She said:

I made someone’s day by having a conversation with them so kind of like to the interconnectedness with people... So we had this really comfortable conversation and then afterwards I just felt different. I felt good, and it was just that you know positive human interaction that made things good but you can, if you want to turn that into human interaction, that is fine, but being a spiritual person it was more than that it was like it was more than just an interaction with someone... Two -three hours later, it was like a random time period and we just kind of pull up to each other and we looked at each other

and smiled and then we were on our way and we never saw each other again. It was just like that kind of sign from God or, I don't like to say God because I don't really know what it is but it just that kind of sign saying yeah, that was right, that was a good thing that you did so I find that God gives you just signs to say if you are going in the right direction or the wrong direction. It is just little things. You learn the awareness that is like two main things I stress for spirituality is awareness and interconnectedness those two things are key to really having a truly meaningful spiritual experience. The interaction thing to is, you know, you meet people, you might be walking down the street and all of a sudden you see someone and all of a sudden, you know you don't know them and they know that they don't know you but you kind of just like stop, you are in a crowd of people and you just lock eyes and you just feel like something is just right about that and you can tell if either the person is weirder out because they are probably not very spiritual but then if you, if that happens to you and the other person happens to have the same spiritual feeling they will kind of just look at you and it will feel good.

Aleia spoke of the idea of all people being interconnected through one story, having influence on each others' lives, and how kindness, compassion, and forgiveness all play a large part in obtaining ultimate happiness. She believed that trying to find connection with others was very important.

All our stories are part of one story, all of our stories are interconnected and forgiveness is super important... To be able to forgive yourself and forgive other people and to be compassionate, which I think goes hand in hand with forgiveness. That if we are all connected and all of our stories are one story, that the most important thing that we can do is show each other kindness and compassion.

Finding answers. Aleia sought answers to the questions that plagued her and searched until she could find answers that resonated for her. One of her “*ongoing points of contention with religion*” was “*the concept of hell.*” She stated that:

It has just never made any sense to me that God would create us, knows us through and through and loving us and knowing everything from beginning to end and at some point we could choose to stray and go to hell. That never made sense to me.

The other participants were also looking for answers to shed light on their unhappiness and anxieties. Edward spoke of his difficulties in determining the correct principles to abide by in life:

Another thing I have longed to figure out (is) the right way of doing things, being a good person, being in line... I saw it as necessary to figure out what were the right actions and then motivate myself sometime to very harsh techniques, insults, coercion directed at myself to try to get myself on the path which probably hindered me more than helped me for a long time. So, there has definitely been, for me, for a long time, the aspect of trying to figure out the right way of doing things, the one right way.

Joshua spoke of overcoming his shyness and social anxiety. He “*was tired of being held back*” and stated:

My friends, they would say, “he is just shy or whatever”. They would have trouble realizing that because normally I am super outgoing and like, always creative. But to strangers and to people I don’t know or to people who are somehow above me or intimidating to me I was very quiet and to myself so I constantly bottled up emotions of how I truly felt, I could never be myself, I could never express myself and it caused me to be an outsider. Now, I really don’t consider that to be a bad thing to be an outsider. I am

actually proud of my uniqueness. So, in a sense, the social anxiety could almost be considered a blessing, in fact, that is what they told us in our group is that most people with social anxiety are usually extremely creative and if they could be they would be super outgoing. So, instead of being mad at myself I began to see it as a blessing.

Building character. All of the participants discussed the moral principles that they discovered on their journeys which guide them in their lives (e.g., being nonjudgmental, forgiving, compassionate, etc.). Edward in particular struggled in establishing moral principles that he could abide with and apply both to others and to himself. Edward believed in, and aligned his actions with the moral principles mentioned above, yet did not treat himself the way he treated others. He discovered over time that it was one thing to embody these principles in relation to others, but that it was also necessary to apply the principles toward himself. He stated:

I have been very harsh on myself ... (I am) always trying to arrive at the correct set of ethical principles and then trying to drive myself to follow those and whipping myself internally whenever I have stepped out of line in my own moral code. I have eventually come to realize, that if I am trying to (become) as spiritual as possible then I am not likely to ever succeed if I am beating myself up.

Through his spiritual journey, Joshua also planned on acting within the moral code he was learning and planned to be an “*overall better person, improve my values and my morals, and how I treat others.*” In relation to defining one’s character according to principles and lessons learned through spiritual pursuits, Aleia discussed her thoughts on the Buddhist principles of suffering and setting one’s intentions:

I think that a lot of problems arise from people and we think that why should we have suffering, why do I deserve suffering, why is this suffering being put upon me. But really,

if you can accept that in life there is suffering as in everyone's life there is suffering, including your own, then that becomes a lot easier. You don't have to be so upset about, like, why is this happening to me. So that is a good principle. Then in Buddhism it says there is a way to end suffering is by following the eightfold path. So, the eightfold path is all about setting your intentions, like monitoring and setting your intentions and so your intentions and your thoughts, your intentions and your actions, your intentions and your words, your intentions and every part of your life. I have always believed in that, that intentions are really powerful. Whether you have good intentions or bad intentions, there are repercussions to those things. Even only having bad intentions in your mind and not acting on them.

Aleia also discussed her thoughts and applications of forgiveness and compassion:

I think everyone has people they need to forgive in their lives. Either for specific instances or just for general stuff. My parents aren't together and I am currently estranged from my grandfather and have been for going on 10 years and that's really something I have been working through. And then, I guess, in terms of compassion, I guess just trying to have a better understanding of who my grandfather is and if that can help me to let go of like being hurt by him or any anger that I have towards him. I think lots of times people choose to involve themselves in other things rather than self reflection, so definitely I would say for myself I can only handle so much of dealing with my own pain and serious problems to, so that is something I am dealing with and working on.

Personal growth. Each of the participants made reference to the growth they had achieved through their journeys. Joshua mentioned that he had come a long way and that at times

felt that his growth had been exponential. He discussed his personal growth as relating to better communication skills, reading, gaining self esteem, and being more positive. He stated that:

I feel like I have come a long way. There are times that I do things to improve but it doesn't feel like it and I get let down a lot because it wasn't as good as I wanted it to be. But I am starting to feel that it (personal growth) is coming along a lot faster now. Like I said it feels kind (of) like an exponential growth. I have a long way to go yet, I know that. But I am proud of myself. I am at a point where I actually like myself and I can actually give myself a break and go at my own pace. So I feel pretty good about my current situation compared to say a year ago. I am pretty positive about the future. I have learned that change lies within. If you want something to happen you have to do it, I have to do it and that was hard for me. I have learned that education is extremely important, continuous learning. Keeping the mind active by reading for pleasure or for knowledge or keeping the mind busy doing something. I have learned that you can't run from your problems because they get worse. (I have) learned that the world isn't out to get me.

Aleia likened the idea of personal growth to “*coming full circle and arriving in the same spot but ending in a different place.*” She suggested that she was the same person with the same ideas, questions, and life experiences but that with the new knowledge, perspectives and changes she had made, she had grown into a different person. Edward felt that one could achieve growth in any situation. He stated, “*I don't think that anything is mundane, we can find some kind of spiritual aspect to anything when one is willing to.*”

Not only do these results depict and outline a cyclical journey of spiritual development, they also demonstrate how spiritual journeys vary due to developmental factors, factors that act as catalysts to the journey, and factors that create meaning to different individuals.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the research purpose, procedures and findings will be summarized followed by an integration of the results with previous research. The importance of this research, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research will also be discussed.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to (a) gain understanding, through stories of the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults and to (b) gain understanding into what meaning emerging adults have made in their lives from their spiritual journeys. I examined the following question: What is revealed through the stories of emerging adults' spiritual journeys? Implicit in this was a secondary question: What do these stories reveal about the meaning emerging adults have made in their lives from their spiritual journeys?

In order to answer these questions, participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) persons between the ages of 18 to 29; (b) persons who have embarked on a spirituality journey during emerging adulthood (the onset may include adolescence); and (c) persons who reflect upon, make meaning of, and use the knowledge gained from their spiritual growth in their daily lives. Four participants were recruited and were interviewed using a semi-structured narrative interview format. Wengraf (2001) suggested that it was important to allow participants to tell their stories, uninhibited and unconfined by guiding questions. In order to focus the participant's story, the interview began by asking one question with the aim of producing a narrative about the role that their spiritual journey played in their lives (See Appendix C). Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. A visual representation of the role that spiritual journeys played in the lives of the participants, as a collective, was then created, along with a four-part series of poetic representations for each participant.

In answer to the research questions, the stories that the participants shared revealed that emerging adults' spiritual journeys are cyclical and play a role in their daily lives. The motivation to embark on a spiritual journey stemmed, across participants, from a sense of being disillusioned, disoriented, or confused in areas generally related to themselves, society, and religion and wanting to lead better, healthier lives. However, as the participant's continued with their spiritual journeys, they encountered further motivators (i.e., questions, existential dilemmas etc.). What happened during this journey was that in acquiring new knowledge, they were faced with new theories, ideas, and experiences that brought forth new questions. These new areas of thought led the participants to search for further answers and meaning, bring forth new questions, new meaning, and in turn, the process became a cycle. In this sense the cycle that began with their initial discontent continued because of a desire for further knowledge. The visual representation of the role that spiritual journeys played in the lives of emerging adults (See Figure 1) depicts the journey through three phases: Phase I: Discontent, Phase II: Spiritual resources and experiences, and Phase III: Lessons, beliefs, and meaning. While the experience of each phase was inherently different for each participant, there were similarities and common themes that ran between them (See Table 1).

The first phase of the visual representation, Discontent, represented the beginning of the spiritual journey. Themes that were present across participants that accounted for the beginning of their spiritual journeys included: feeling disillusioned towards aspects of religion or society, experiencing depression or anxiety, utilizing either positive or negative coping strategies (positive strategies such as doing research or joining psycho-educational groups, or negative strategies such as self harm or drug use), and experiencing relationship troubles.

The second phase of the visual representation, seeking spiritual resources and experiences, represented the participants desire to find answers, create awareness, or find meaning. This desire spurred them on to seek out resources to aid in their spiritual growth and knowledge. Themes that were present across participants in regards to the resources utilized and experiences gained included: books/reading, relying on people, mentors and friends, relying on inner resources such as contemplation, solitude, and self reflection, attending or belonging to groups (i.e., psycho-educational anxiety group), reading religious doctrines, being open to signs and having faith in the Universe, prayer, practicing yoga, being willing to give to others, being open to new experiences, being one with nature, using the Internet, pursuing education, being compassionate, and maintaining self-awareness.

The third phase of the visual representation: Lessons, beliefs, and meaning, represented the phase when emerging adults acquired meaning that resonated with them and addressed the initial discontent that began their journey. Themes that related to the lessons, beliefs, and meaning made from the participants spiritual journeys included: a focus on being a better person, daily lessons, and knowing that there is power in the Universe. The focus on being a better person included thoughts and actions in relation to bringing about change in society, becoming who you were meant to be, and knowing that change lies within. Daily lessons were lessons that the participants had which they brought into their everyday lives. These included making every action meaningful, making every day count, not taking people/things for granted, setting intentions for each day, accepting others, acting with love and kindness, being positive, forgiving others, not judging others, looking for the feeling of being alive, being willing to give to others, being compassionate, letting oneself be vulnerable, and praying for gratitude. The common theme of knowing that there is power in the Universe included beliefs that everything is

interconnected, everything happens for a reason, you are who you were meant to be, and paying attention to signs from the Universe.

Depicting the participants' spiritual journeys through phases helped to portray what was specifically happening during each phase, however; by illustrating their journeys in such a manner the affect of the experiences were lost, the meaning made was not evident, and the outcomes of the journey were not relayed to the reader. By presenting the data in poetic representations, the participants' emotionality was expressed, meaning made was conveyed, and the outcomes of their journeys were communicated.

The poetic representations expressed the participants' emotions. The participants discussed feeling angry, lost, anxious, and depressed throughout their journeys. They felt that while they had made some progress, they could have either made more progress or been more focused on their journey so that they could continue with the rate of progress they had initially been making. They learned to cope with depression and anxiety and found answers to questions that propelled their journeys. Through this process, they found peace within themselves. The participants synonymously felt that they had grown, were better people, and were happier in life and with themselves due to their spiritual journeys.

The poetic representations also conveyed the meaning that the participant's made on their journeys. The meaning focused around the areas of being better people, incorporating lessons learned into their daily lives (i.e., making every action meaningful, making every day count), and knowing that there is power in the Universe. The manner in which the meaning was obtained can be linked back to Roof's four techniques for obtaining religious meaning (metaphor, mysticism, pluralism, and reflexivity). Obtaining meaning through metaphor related to the manner in which participant's interpreted religious doctrines as symbolic and metaphorical ideas instead of literal

facts. Meaning obtained through mysticism related to meaning made through spiritual practices such as yoga or meditation. The idea of pluralism related to drawing meaning from various religious, scientific and philosophical traditions rather than strictly adhering to the teachings of one faith. Finally, meaning reached through reflexivity reflected the way in which participant's reviewed and changed their beliefs based on the new spiritual resources and experiences gained on their journey.

Through the poetic representations, the outcomes of the participants' journeys were also communicated. These included: symptom relief from mental health issues of anxiety and mood disorders, spiritual surrender to a Higher Power in control of the universe, enhanced interconnectedness with others, questions answered or understanding gained regarding questions that plagued them, character built on moral principles that they discovered on their journeys, and personal growth achieved.

While the findings discussed above represent an understanding of the role that spiritual journeys played in the lives of the participants, these findings also relate to much of the research in the areas of emerging adulthood and spirituality, spirituality and meaning making, and spirituality and well-being.

Integration of Findings with the Existing Literature

Findings will first be discussed in relation to the literature on emerging adulthood and spirituality, second, as they relate to spirituality and meaning making, and third as they relate to spirituality and well-being.

Emerging Adulthood and Spirituality

Many researchers explored spiritual and religious practices of emerging adults and found that they: (a) placed great importance on thinking critically about spiritual issues rather than

accepting an existing belief system, such as that which they were raised with (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Arnett 1998; Beaudoin 1998; Hogue et al., 2001); (b) formed spiritual beliefs from different combinations of religious traditions and popular culture (Arnett & Jensen, 2002, Roof, 1999; Besecke, 2001); and (c) realized that their beliefs were flexible and would change in response to new knowledge and beliefs (Beaudoin, 1998; Roof, 1999; Besecke, 2001). In the present study, I found similar results as three of the four participants were raised with a religious affiliation but decided to determine their own version of spirituality. These versions were constructed from reading books and religious doctrines, surfing the internet, absorbing pop culture and other resources as described under the themes related to the second phase in the visual representation, spiritual resources and experiences. The fact that their journeys were cyclical related to the idea described in existing literature that beliefs are flexible and will change and adapt to new knowledge that resonates within the individual (Beaudoin, 1998; Roof, 1999; Besecke, 2001).

Arnett and Jensen (2002) stated that emerging adults felt that participating in religious institutions inherently meant subscribing to a common set of beliefs that other members of the institution also held and that, to the majority of emerging adults this was not acceptable. Findings from the present study suggest that if an individual could find the answers to their existential dilemmas, general confusion, and unhappiness, within one common set of beliefs, they would subscribe to them. However, they want the freedom to engage in other practices or teachings that resonate inside of them. The problem in subscribing to one set of beliefs is that you do not have the choice within that institution to look outside the box or add in other teachings that are a personal “fit.” In fact, it was explicitly stated by Edward that if he came across a teaching that spoke to him, he felt that he should be able to embrace it rather than stick

to the principles and teachings of a specific religion and “*turn on the blinders*” to all other teachings.

While the participants each proclaimed to be on spiritual journeys, there were definite differences between the length, meaning, reflection, and integration of what was learned in their lives. Gottlieb, Still, and Newby-Clark (2007) suggested that the older one is, or the longer they have been in college, the more personal change they will have experienced and will have a broader, more penetrating outlook on life. This was found to be true of the participants in the present study as Edward and Aleia were older, more established on their journeys, and more reflective of their process.

Spirituality and Meaning Making

Roof (1999) described “reflexive spirituality,” as an individual relationship to religion which incorporated an intentional, deliberate, self-directed approach to obtaining religious meaning. Roof suggested that there are four techniques that are drawn on to make meaning: metaphor, mysticism, pluralism, and reflexivity. When examining the participants’ techniques for making meaning, it was found that they fit within the realm described by Roof (1999). For this reason, they were presented within the results chapter under the headings that Roof proposed.

In addition to Roof’s (1999) four techniques for making meaning from religiosity or spirituality, Mattis (2002) reported eight themes that demonstrated the role of religion/spirituality in meaning making and coping. While Mattis’s study focused on African American women’s use of religion/spirituality to cope and to construct meaning in times of adversity, it is interesting to discuss how these findings fit with the present study. Mattis found that religion/spirituality helped women to interrogate and accept reality. Religion and spirituality were identified as forces

that encouraged confrontations with reality and provided the psychological resources needed to accept reality. The present study certainly demonstrated this aspect as three of the four participants used their journey to cope with mental health issues. In fact, the driving force to embark on the journeys was partially due to participants questioning reality and being unable to accept it. This was displayed in their unwillingness to accept their mental health issues and take medication to address the problems. Instead, they felt that they wanted to better understand themselves, their motivations, change their thoughts and emotions, and gain more knowledge so that they were better able to cope.

Mattis (2002) also found that religion/spirituality helped women to gain the insight and courage needed to engage in spiritual surrender. Turning things over to a Higher Power was a crucial part of the processes of meaning-making and coping. The participants within the present study did not suggest that they consciously engaged in a spiritual surrender, but rather, over time, built up faith in the Universe; the belief that everything happens for a reason, and that each person is where they are meant to be in life. They did not hold a common view of God. Aleia believed in God while Joshua was more skeptical and Edward and Carrie spoke of the many Gods.

Another finding that Mattis (2002) uncovered was that religion/spirituality helped women to confront and transcend limitations. Spirituality both highlighted the boundaries of human ability and permitted the transcendence of those boundaries. Boundaries were created as a result of racism, classism, and sexism; and spirituality led to transcendence by permitting people to develop alternative conceptualizations of life's possibilities. The participants in the present study discussed being open to opportunities as they were presented. They spoke of lowering

boundaries between people, admitting and understanding their biases and prejudices, and allowing themselves to take better advantage of opportunities that came along.

Mattis (2002) found that religion/spirituality helped women to identify and grapple with existential questions and life lessons. This was almost imbedded in the act of embarking on a spiritual journey as understood within the present study as the participants began their journeys in order to answer questions that plagued them, or relieve themselves of confusion or discontent.

Mattis found that religion/spirituality also helped women to recognize purpose and destiny and to believe that there is a purpose or plan both to existence and to negative and positive life events. The participants' stories from the present study suggested that this may be related to Mattis's previous finding that through spirituality, participants gained the insight and courage needed to engage in spiritual surrender. The participants surrendered their lives more to the Universe than to a particular God. In believing in the power of the Universe they felt that everything happens for a reason, that there is fate, destiny, and reasoning behind both the good and bad events in their lives.

Another finding by Mattis (2002) was that religion/spirituality helped women to define character and act within subjectively meaningful moral principles. Mattis's research found that the women interviewed lived within a set of religiously and/or spiritually informed principles (e.g., being nonjudgmental, forgiving, compassionate) that guided their behaviors and that these principles helped women to navigate between expedient choices and spiritually responsible or appropriate choices. The participants in the present study depicted this idea of defining character as they focused on being better people and bringing about change in society. They also believed in making every action meaningful, not taking people for granted, accepting others, and acting with love, kindness, and compassion.

Mattis (2002) also found that religion/spirituality helped women to achieve growth. In the present study, each of the participants made reference to the growth they had achieved.

Another finding by Mattis (2002) was that religion/spirituality helped women to trust in the viability of transcendent sources of knowledge and communication. Prayers, dreams, intuition, and visions were a few of the modes through which meaning was conveyed and received. These dreams, visions, and proverbs offered hope, protection, insight, information, resolutions to problems, and/or clarified important questions or lessons. Transcendent sources of knowledge were also mentioned across participants in the present study in discussing prayers, signs, and intuitions.

Further research that related to this study was conducted by Gall and Cornblat (2002) who studied the impact of spirituality on the adjustment process of American breast cancer survivors. Their model was created to illustrate how spiritual resources helped breast cancer survivors make meaning of and experience personal growth in relation to their cancer. The model illustrated a starting point, the spiritual resources that were relied upon to create meaning and personal growth, and the integration of those principles into their daily life. The visual representation proposed in this study took Gall and Cornblat's model one step further. The model and visual representation were similar as they both began with crisis, unhappiness, or confusion. Gall and Cornblat's model then segmented resources and meaning into one phase, and the integration of that meaning into a third phase, while the visual representation proposed within this study incorporated the resources and integration into one phase, suggested meaning as a third phase and depicted all of the phases as cyclical process (See Figure 1. p. 54).

The visual representation proposed in this study suggested that resources which assisted in spiritual development were applied and integrated into daily life, and meaning was then made

from the application of those resources. The meaning made and incorporation of new knowledge then created further questions that led participants to cycle through the phases again.

Spirituality and Personal Well-Being

Wink and Dillon (2003) found that spirituality was positively related to well-being from personal growth, involvement in creative (playing an instrument, creative writing, painting, etc.) and knowledge-building life tasks (participation in tasks aimed at increasing knowledge or skill), and wisdom. The participants in the present study certainly displayed personal growth from increased knowledge through reading, while creative involvement could be seen in practicing yoga, meditation. Pure creative endeavors however, such as painting and writing were not discussed by any of the participants as helping them along their journey.

Wink and Dillon (2003) also found that spirituality was associated with wisdom and involvement in everyday life tasks and suggested the presence of a firm sense of purpose and a broad social perspective. In the present study, this was displayed in the participants desire to remove social boundaries, to gain wisdom, to be open to new opportunities, and to feel interconnected with those around them. Wink and Dillon also found that spirituality was not related positively or negatively to well-being from positive relations with others, thus suggesting that although spiritual individuals may not prize involvement with family and friends, they do not devalue it (Wink & Dillon, 2003). This also holds true to the present study. While the participants discussed being open to others and feeling interconnected, they did not rely on positive relations with others in order to develop spiritually. They discussed the importance of friends throughout their development in relation to discussing their ideas with others, for information gathering and clarification of ideas rather than as a social gathering for enjoyment purposes.

Looking specifically into spirituality and mental health, Sveidqvist, Joubert, Green and Manion (2003) conducted qualitative research on the role of spirituality in the promotion of mental health. In terms of well being, it was concluded that spirituality as a basis of identity formation could lead to mental health benefits. Improvement of mood, increased self-confidence, relaxation and reduced anxiety in coping with stress, hope and optimism, and the comfort gained from having “faith,” all had implications for promoting resilience, mental well-being and protection of mental health issues. All of these factors were described by participants in the present study as outcomes of their spiritual journeys.

The link from spirituality to mental health was examined further by Durà-Vilà and Dein (2009). It was suggested that giving a diagnosis of a depressive episode to episodes of spiritual crisis, may hold up or prevent the process of meaning making to take place (Durà-Vilà & Dein, 2009). Findings were simplified into equations: Illness (feeling sadness) + psychiatric diagnosis of depression = Disease and functional impairment; Illness (feeling of sadness) + Meaning = Spiritual experience and normal functioning. Durà-Vilà and Dein (2009) were suggesting that by directing those with spiritual based concerns (which may be very similar to depressive symptoms) to resources that would help them to make meaning from the process, that they would eventually view the period of “darkness” as a spiritual experience and would return to normal functioning. While some of the participants described mental health disorders (Bi-Polar disorder) and symptoms (anxiety, depression), all of the participants choose to work on these issues through personal and spiritual growth. Edward, who was diagnosed with Bi-Polar disorder was managing his symptoms without medication. In this case, although he was diagnosed, he was actively engaged and achieving the meaning making process. I believe that there is some validity to what Durà-Vilà and Dein (2009) suggest, however; it comes down to making the distinction

between those who suffer from a Depressive Episode and those who are solely in a spiritual “*Dark Night*.” It was suggested by Durà-Vilà and Dein (2009) that helping professionals should receive training in religious issues, as an understanding of religion is necessary both in terms of diagnosis and treatment.

Importance of Study

People today are trying to make sense of themselves and the world. It is a common conception in popular culture that in one week today the average person is faced with more decisions than they would have had to make in a lifetime in the 17th Century. Literature on spirituality, achieving dreams, and living good lives are on the best seller lists. With globalization, it is more common that people are exposed to and influenced by different religious teachings, stories, traditions, or values that may resonate with them, but that may not fit within the teachings of their current faith. Many people are beginning to reflect on and determine their personal spiritual beliefs instead of following a mainstream religion as was once the status quo.

This study demonstrates that a spiritual journey is an act of creating one’s personal truths in order to make life changes, whereby new knowledge is integrated into one’s beliefs and daily interactions. It shows that a spiritual journey helps emerging adults in achieving peace by taking the time to find answers to dilemmas and make meaning of past events. It shows that a spiritual journey helps emerging adults to determine a moral code or guide for living. Overall, the present study demonstrates that it is possible for people to live good, moral, and peaceful lives without having spiritual or religious beliefs dictated to them; that it is possible by determining which truths resonate inside of them and acting accordingly.

Understanding stories of emerging adults’ spiritual journeys may benefit not only individuals who are on similar paths and are looking for further resources, but also helping

professionals in their ability to better understand the journey that their clients are embarking on, to assist them in knowing that they are not alone in their search for spirituality, and to provide further resources which may benefit both professional and client. In understanding the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults, one may be better able to help or guide their son, daughter, friend, or client in developing their own spirituality in order to make positive changes in their lives and reduce harmful behaviours that they may be engaging in or at risk of engaging in.

The visual representation is also an important component of the present study as it was an extension of Gall and Cornblat's (2002) model of spirituality and brought a focus directly onto emerging adulthood. The visual representation may act as a starting point to gather information, understand the lives of emerging adults on similar paths, and guide future research.

Furthermore, the literature review on definitions of spirituality and religiosity is an important addition to existing research. Most studies are limited by their vague definitions of religion and spirituality (McMinn et al., 2008). The literature reviewed in relation to these definitions not only provides distinct definitions for both religiosity and spirituality, it also examines the prevalence of specific characteristics of spirituality in order to determine a definition that encompasses those most commonly associated with spirituality.

The present study not only provides information on the role of spiritual journeys in the lives of emerging adults, it also has implications for helping professionals and contributes to the literature on using poetry as a method of data representation.

Implications for Helping Professionals

Only recently have religious and spiritual issues found a place in psychological research (McMinn et al., 2008). Research on the association between religion, spirituality, and positive

health outcomes is becoming more commonplace (Seeman, Dubin, & Seeman, 2003). Positive psychology is also generating public interest and has ties with spiritual and religious teachings such as forgiveness, gratitude, hope, and love (McMinn et al., 2008). Furthermore, understanding the religious and spiritual values that helping professionals hold has a bearing on the way research is conducted, interpreted, and translated into services offered (McMinn et al., 2008). Researchers indicate that psychologists perceive the religious and spiritual functioning of their clients to be an important aspect of their overall well-being. However, it is also indicated that most psychologists do not routinely assess religious and spiritual functioning or address it in treatment planning (Hathaway, Scott, & Garver, 2004). In the present study, I provide qualitative evidence of strengthened spirituality leading to positive outcomes for individuals living with mental health concerns, such as mood disorders and anxiety, and supports addressing clients' spiritual functioning in treatment planning.

McMinn et al. (2008) acknowledge that helping psychologists grow in awareness of spiritual and religious issues is an important step in evolving psychological research and practice. In planning for a new journal, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (American Psychological Association, 2008), McMinn et al. (2008) surveyed psychologists to determine what areas of religion and spirituality were of most interest to be researched and presented in the publication. It was noted that articles on religion and spirituality as relating to health and coping, cross-culture, and interfaith comparisons would be most useful. In the present study, I provide research on health and coping as it relates to the outcomes of spiritual journeys in emerging adulthood. Furthermore, as the research obtained from these emerging adults ties in with existing literature on spirituality and meaning making across developmental stages, it could be applied to those outside of emerging adulthood, provided it is done in an exploratory manner. In other words, a

client struggling with spiritual issues may read through the poems, or explore the visual representation of a spiritual journey as a means of connecting new knowledge with their areas of discontent in order to gain answers to questions and aid in the meaning making cycle. The emerging adult client may relate best to the data presented here as it is directed at their developmental level, however, the topics addressed within a spiritual journey need not be developmentally based.

Using Alternative Means to Represent Data

It is more common to find scholars writing about alternative ways to represent data (e.g., Nicol, 2008; Sparks, 2009; Richardson, 2002; Todres, 1998; van Manen, 1997) and there are increasing examples of using poetry as a way of presenting research findings (e.g., Friesen, 2007; Furman, 2007; Furman, et al., 2007; Ohlen, 2003; Wiebe & Nicol, 2007). Sparkes and Douglas (2007) suggest a number of benefits for using poetic representations including: accurately representing the speaker by using their words, repetitions, rhythms, and pauses; honestly portraying the role of the researcher as creator of the poems in the sense that text has been positioned in a way that reminds the reader that data is flowing through the researcher; creating connections from the data to the reader whereby the reader is more willing to engage emotionally with what is being said (Kendalle & Murray, 2005); and communicating findings that encapsulate the essence of experience being told.

In an effort to relay the experiences of spiritual journeys, I felt that representing data through poetry would allow the reader to emotionally connect with the experiences depicted. Spiritual journeys are about finding meaning, seeking personal truth and self understanding. In representing data through poems, I believed that readers would be more likely to engage in a similar process as that of the participants. Readers may find answers, resources, or inspiration

through reading about the participants' journeys and may extrapolate meaning or understanding through reflecting on the poetic representations. The present study adds to the growing literature on using poetry as an effective means of representing research data.

Limitations of Present study

The present study sought to understand of the role that spiritual journeys played in the lives of four emerging adults. Three of the participants were Caucasian, and all were from middle class backgrounds and had varying levels of post secondary education. While this lack of diversity may restrict the transferability of these findings, narrative studies generally focus on a small number of participants and the more similar those participants are, the more trustworthy the research will appear. In this case, a limitation of the study would be that the participant's backgrounds were too diverse.

The data collection involved meeting with the participants once and scheduling further meetings if the participant felt they had more stories or experiences that they wanted to share. In meeting only once, the researcher-participant relationship was not built in a manner customary to narrative research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested the importance of collaboration with participants, by actively involving them in the research. In narrative research, a key theme has been the turn toward the relationship between the researcher and the participant in which both parties would learn and change in the encounter (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). In this process, the parties would negotiate the meaning of the stories, and add a validation check to the data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). By meeting the participants only once and having further discourse only through email, the researcher-participant relationship did not evolve. The participants validated the visual and poetic representations through email and with brevity. The initial methodology that the participants agreed to did not include a participant evaluation of the

poetic representations as suggested by Sparkes (2002). However, as their input was deemed beneficial in evaluating the results of this study, the participants were emailed and asked to evaluate their respective poems. The email noted that this evaluation was not asked of participants in the initial agreement, but that it would be of great value to the study if they were willing to offer their feedback. A strengthened relationship with each participant would have encouraged the sharing of more stories and more feedback from the participants. Such a relationship may have made it more likely that participants would have reflected on the poetic representations as another means through which they created change in their lives.

By offering poetic representations of data, the audience may be more apt to become engaged with the material and it is more likely that the data will resonate with the audience. This, however, places the onus on the reader to delve into the poems in order to make sense of the data. It was for this reason that the results were further discussed in terms of reflecting on the poetic representations in the results chapter as well as linking results to literature reviewed in the discussion chapter.

Some narrative studies involve data gathering with more than the primary source. This study focused solely on primary sources and did not seek third parties to share their perspectives and stories. By engaging more parties in the reconstruction of participant stories, the information acquired would have added more depth and detail to the stories. In relying on one perspective for a story, the research was limited to the information each participant found useful and relevant to share as well as what the researcher thought was important to ask. In interviewing third parties, further information and stories might have been shared and inconsistencies in stories may have been exposed. The inconsistencies could have been used to as a basis of discussion with the

primary participants to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations, understandings and perceptions of the incident.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from the present study offer a basis for future research. It would be interesting to longitudinally study emerging adults, who identify as being on a spiritual path, through their journeys from ages 18 to 29 to discuss the turning points and experiences of their journeys on a regular basis so that changes made in their lives could be better accounted for and monitored. This would also allow participants to read over past interviews and reflect on their thoughts and experiences, as well as the changes they had made. In addition, this would enable researchers to understand the role that marriage and children play in the lives and spiritual journeys of emerging adults. When emerging adults get married or have children, do they return to religious institutions, continue on their spiritual paths, or find other means to address the questions present in their lives?

It would also be interesting to explore the experiences of emerging adults who self-identify as spiritual, following the definition provided by Wuthnow (1998), and compare results to a group who self-identify as being religious, prescribing to a specific faith, as well as an atheist group. In comparing how participants' lives are affected by their religiosity or spirituality, or lack thereof, more knowledge would be obtained in differentiating spiritual and religious paths as well as understood in terms of how crisis, questions, and life events are approached for those who were not spiritual. What themes might emerge for atheist participants, and would any of these themes be similar across groups in terms of how meaning was made or how change was achieved in their lives, regardless of spiritual or religious affiliation?

Furthermore, comparing the present findings to research on emerging adults who are spiritual and who have not received post-secondary education may illustrate key differences in the impact of education on the lives of these adults. Together, these topics of study would provide a deeper understanding of the role that spiritual journeys play in the lives of emerging adults in comparison to other groups.

Final Note

When I began my spiritual journey I was engrossed in absorbing wisdom. I found that in my experiences with Western culture, people do not often feel that they have the right to offer their advice or wisdom. They may feel that it is not their place to inform others of their shortcomings or to offer their guidance on something that you struggle with. While at times their silence is appreciated, it may also be beneficial to hear their thoughts as it is often easier to see another person's situation than to see your own. These are the times when it may be beneficial to have another's input or advice on how to make your situation better.

When I began my journey I was an angry person, quick to temper, negative in thought, and I did not have control of my emotions. I did not feel that I had anyone to turn to in order to grow. However, through my spiritual journey I overcame these shortcomings. I no longer feel the need to work on these issues on a daily basis, although there are days that I struggle. There are also days where I realize that there is something else in my life that I need to work on and I focus my energy there to overcome the problem.

When I began this study, I was at a low point and unsure of the direction I wanted my life to take. The words of the participants came at a time when I most needed to hear them. It had been a couple of years since I was entrenched in my own spiritual journey and the principles and teachings that the participants discussed with me felt like a refresher course in spirituality. There

are so many beliefs and ways of thinking about life and meaning that I have heard – but that have gotten lost and forgotten in my day-to-day affairs. This study has reminded me to keep these principles close and make use of them.

My final words will leave you with some of the teachings that I keep in mind, some stem from my own journey and some came from the participants:

Live what *you feel* is a good life.

Treat others as you wish to be treated.

Be compassionate, tolerant, honest, and kind.

Remember that everyday people are doing the best they can with the tools they have.

And finally, yet simply,

There is no time for anger or greed as life is too short.

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Appendix A: Reference List for Literature Review of Definitions of Spirituality and Religiosity

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Appendix B: Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Emerging adults' intentional quest for spirituality and its role in daily life: a narrative study. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions.

Researcher: Heather Childs, M.Ed. candidate, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 270-0345.

This study is supervised by Dr. Stephanie Martin (966-5259) of the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan.

Purpose and Procedure:

The purpose of this study is to understand the journey of emerging adults who have intentionally embarked on a quest for spirituality and how this experience is meaningful in the context of their daily lives. Through careful attention to your stories, I hope to be able to convey a sense of the experience emerging adults have in pursuing spirituality and how they use it in their daily lives. Participation in this study requires meeting in person with myself, the researcher, three times. There will be two interviews, the first approximately 2 hours and the second (optional) approximately 1 hour. You will be asked to reflect on experiences that have been particularly important in your spiritual pursuits and to discuss how they have impacted your life from the initial decision to pursue spirituality until now. The interviews will be audiotape recorded for transcription purposes. Following this, you will be asked to read a narrative that I create based on the interviews. We would then meet a third time to discuss your response and any further insights you may have. Once you are satisfied with the way the narrative represents your experiences, I will ask you to sign a release form which will allow me to publish the story. With your permission, additional meetings, telephone calls, or correspondence may be employed for purposes of clarification and feedback.

Potential Risks:

Some experiences that come to mind may be of a sensitive nature. It is possible that recalling and speaking of such experiences could result in discomfort. At all times, you are free to decide what you will or will not disclose, and may choose not to answer a question. Furthermore, a list of community resources (e.g., counselling services) is provided with your copy of this form should you feel the need to further pursue any personal reactions.

Potential Benefits:

Your involvement in this study may provide you with the opportunity to reflect more deeply on your personal and spiritual growth. By sharing your stories, you will assist the researcher in making a contribution to the professional literature in the field of spirituality for emerging adults. You will also be offered a \$50 honorarium upon completion of the final meeting or a prorated amount if you decide to withdraw from the study at a given point in time. The honorarium will stand to offset any costs that you may have experienced due to time involved with the project (e.g., child care, transportation costs).

Storage of Data:

At the end of the study, all data that contains identifying information, including consent forms, audiotapes and transcripts, will be securely stored at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years by Dr. Stephanie Martin, the faculty member supervising this project.

Confidentiality:

The data from this study will be published in the form of a Master of Education thesis. It is also possible that portions may be used in subsequent academic publications or conference presentations.

Your identity will be kept confidential. Although I will report direct quotations from the interviews, you will be given a pseudonym and all identifying information (such as the name of acquaintances and locations) will be removed from the report. A reputable transcriber will be hired, and will also be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Because the participants for this study have been recruited through Saskatoon agencies and organizations, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said. Prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the narrative constructed from your interviews and to add, alter, or delete information as you see fit.

Right to Withdraw:

You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed.

Questions:

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any time; you are also free to contact the researcher or supervisor at the numbers provided above if you have any questions. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on (date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (966-2084). Out of town participants may call the Office of Research Services collect. Each participant will be provided with a summary of the thesis when completed.

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Interview 1

Question: “I want you to tell me about your intentional quest for spirituality and its role in your daily life.” Maybe you could start by telling me about the time that embarking on a quest for spirituality became important for you and continue telling how things developed for you up until now.”

Further narrative based questions may be posed if clarification is needed: (Probes)

1. What meaning have you made from this spiritual journey that impacts your daily life as an emerging adult? *What impact has your spiritual journey had on your daily life as an emerging adult?*
2. What motivated you to intentionally embark on a quest for spirituality? *Was there a significant event or events that led up to this decision?*
3. If you could think of the most important lessons you have learned through your spiritual journey, what would they be?
4. What resources did you rely on during this spiritual journey? *Who introduced them to you? Where did you acquire them? (i.e., books, mantras, spiritual leaders, etc.)*
5. Where do you see yourself at this point of time, in your spiritual journey?

At the end of the interview, I will ask “Is there anything else you would like to add at this point?”

If not: “If there is anything else that comes up after this interview, I would like you to write it down and at the second interview, we can further discuss it.”

Note – Make debriefing notes. Stay in the same room and write down everything you can remember about the interview: content, feelings, process, etc. Write in a free associative flow for 30 minutes.

Interview 2 (optional):

Question: “Do you have anything further that you want to add since our last meeting, or any questions or concerns regarding this research?”

Appendix D: Process Example of Creating Data Poems

<p>Interconnectedness</p> <p><i>I made someone's day today By having a conversation with them</i></p> <p><i>And for reasons I don't know. She started up with me. Risked my judgment. She didn't know how I would react. But I knew she was joking.</i></p> <p><i>And it was comfortable. I felt different Afterwards. A simple But positive human interaction It made things good. I felt good.</i></p>	<p>Transcript theme - interconnectedness</p> <p>Reference 1 <u>I made someone's day by having a conversation with them</u> so kind of like to the interconnectedness with people</p> <p>Reference 2</p> <p>It was my first time going there and I come in and I am getting my drinks and stuff like that and she just says to me, she says "is it wrong to kill a man" you know and a lot of people would like flip, someone could have just freaked out with her saying that you know. But <u>for some reason she decided she was going to say that to me and like risk someone like freaking out on her. She just doesn't know how I am going to react.</u> I was just like, sit there and like well you know, because <u>I knew that she was just joking,</u> I know it wasn't like a serious comment, and I am like, well it kind of depends on who it is. And she just goes, well this worker of mine he is just a wiener and he never listens to us women and stuff like that and it was just really good interaction between the two of us and we had a really comfortable conversation cause I find that when you make conversation with strangers they are more kind of like freaked out and like why are you talking to me, I don't know you. And it is really like that uncomfortable, people are weird. So <u>we had this really comfortable conversation and then afterwards I just felt different. I felt good,</u> and <u>it was just that you know positive human interaction that made things good</u> but you can, if you want to turn that into human interaction, that is fine, but being a spiritual person it was more than that it was like it was more than just an interaction with someone but the weird thing is that I drove this</p>
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<p><i>Later</i> <i>Driving down the street</i></p> <p><i>I stopped.</i> <i>A red light</i> <i>A glance to the left.</i> <i>And she was there.</i> <i>Looking at me. We smiled.</i></p> <p><i>A sign from God?</i> <i>Or not God?</i> <i>A sign saying</i> <i>Yes, this was right.</i> <i>A good thing.</i></p> <p><i>God gives you signs</i> <i>For the right direction</i> <i>And the wrong</i> <i>This I believe</i></p> <p><i>The awareness to see</i> <i>The ability to connect</i> <i>These two</i> <i>Make meaning</i> <i>A truly spiritual experience</i> <i>Interconnectedness</i></p>	<p>girl home after a while and I was <u>driving down the street</u> and I pull up to her in a car like an hour later, no 2 hours later, <u>maybe 2-3 hours later</u> and it was like a random time period and <u>we just kind of pull up to each other and we looked at each other and smiled</u> and then we were on our way and we never saw each other again. It was just like that kind of <u>sign from God</u> or, <u>I don't like to say God because I don't really know what it is</u> but <u>it just that kind of sign saying yeah, that was right, that was a good thing</u> that you did so I find that <u>God gives you just signs to say if you are going in the right direction or the wrong direction.</u> It is just little things. <u>You learn the awareness that is like two main things I stress for spirituality is awareness and interconnectedness</u> those two things <u>are key to really having a truly meaningful spiritual experience.</u></p>
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Appendix E: Ethics Application

1. Supervisor:

Dr. Stephanie Martin, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Saskatchewan

1a. Researcher:

Heather Childs, Master of Education Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan

1b. Anticipated start date of research study: April, 2008

Expected completion date of study: September, 2008

2. Title of the Study: Emerging adults' intentional quest for spirituality and its role in daily life: a narrative study

3. Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and understand, within a narrative conceptual framework, the journey of emerging adults who have intentionally embarked on a quest for spirituality and its' role in their daily lives. Spirituality has had an immense impact on how people understand, make meaning and process change in their lives, and although studies on emerging adults have been limited in this domain, there has been extensive research on spirituality in the lives of specific groups such as anorexia nervosa survivors or cancer survivors. Studies that investigate the intentional pursuits of spirituality in emerging adults are needed, and a narrative approach will contribute to this area of limited research.

Stories have the power to draw people in and to promote an emotional level of understanding that is difficult to achieve through other means. As a further focus in this thesis, I will be studying what these stories reveal in relation to what motivates emerging adults to intentionally embark on a quest for spirituality and what meaning they have made in their lives from these spiritual quests. The results of this study will be of particular interest not only to individuals, but also helping professionals in their ability to provide guidance, advice and assistance to individuals in emerging adulthood.

4. Funding: The study is not externally funded. The researcher will offer participants a \$50 honorarium upon completion of the final meeting or a prorated amount if the participant decides to withdraw from the study at a given point in time. The honorarium will stand to offset any costs that the participant may have experienced due to time involved with the project (e.g., child care, transportation costs). Each participant will be asked to sign an acknowledgement of receipt of honorarium (see attached).

5. Participants:

Between three to five participants for this study will be recruited using the following criteria: (a) persons between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine; (b) persons who have intentionally embarked on a quest for spirituality while in emerging adulthood (the onset may

include adolescence); and (c) persons who reflect upon, make meaning of, and use the knowledge gained from their spiritual growth in their daily lives.

Participants will be recruited via posters (see attached) placed within the University of Saskatchewan and in Saskatoon community agencies targeting health practices (e.g., counseling agencies, alternative healing, yoga, etc.). Interviews will be held in a quiet place of comfort to the participant and where there will be no distractions or interruptions. It will preferably be situated in a place in which I can remain to make notes following the interview. Participants will be asked to meet with me three times. The first being an initial interview that will take approximately two hours, and will be split into two subsessions. The second interview is optional depending on further questions or clarifications from either the researcher or participant, and the third meeting is for the purpose of obtaining a signed data release form (see attached) from the participant after they have reviewed the final written narrative based on their interviews.

6. Consent:

I will proceed with interviewing participants only after obtaining informed consent. Participants will be informed of their rights by means of a Consent Form (see attached).

7. Methods/Procedures:

A qualitative, narrative methodology will be used in this study. Once individuals have expressed interest in participating, an initial interview will be arranged. At that time, informed consent will be obtained.

I will be conducting lightly structured depth interviews (single question followed by clarifications on topics brought up by the participant) over one or two recorded interviews (the second being optional). The first interview will be split into two subsessions and will be approximately two hours long in entirety. The second interview is optional and will be scheduled on a later date (one-two weeks after the first interview). This interview will be based on further questions, clarifications or additions from either the participant or researcher and the length will depend on the additional information needed. It will be approximately one hour in length. The participant will be asked to meet a final time for the purpose of obtaining a signed data release form (see attached) after he/she has reviewed the final written narrative based on their interviews. The final meeting will be approximately thirty minutes.

In the first interview, there will be two subsessions. In the first subsession, a single question will be asked with the aim of producing a narrative in regards to experiences with spiritual growth: *"I want you to tell me about your intentional quest for spirituality and its role in your daily life."* Maybe you could start by telling me about the time that embarking on a quest for spirituality became important for you and continue telling how things developed for you up until now. Please take all the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for after you've finished telling me about your experiences." During this session, I will take notes on the topics that the narration is about, recording the topics in succession as they were raised, using the participant's key words. The key words will be used to ask questions in the second subsession. The notes will follow the "Situation, Happening,

Event, Incident, Occasion/Occurrence, Time” (SHEIOT) format (see interview guide attached). Through use of this methodology, there is a constant invitation for the participant to provide more narratives and narrations.

During the second subsession of the first interview, the researcher will ask for narratives about the topics raised and recorded in subsession one. For example, *“You said that your mother played a key role in your spiritual development in 2001, during a conversation at the lake. Can you tell me more about that?”* The questions are based on the SHEIOT notes from the first subsession and questions will be asked with the intent of producing more narratives from the participant. At the end of the session, I will ask *“Is there anything else you would like to add at this point?”* If not, I will add, *“If there is anything else that comes up after this interview, I would like you to write it down and at the second interview, we can further discuss it.”* All interviews will be audiotape recorded and a reputable transcriber will be hired to transcribe the tapes for analysis purposes. The transcriber will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (see attached).

The second interview, scheduled one - two weeks from the first interview, is optional and will revolve around further questions arising from the preliminary analysis. Further narrative based questions may be posed if clarification is needed and the participant will also have the opportunity to discuss any additional information that they may have thought of after the initial interview.

Data collection and analysis will occur simultaneously, allowing for emerging concepts to shape the kinds of questions asked as the research proceeds. I will be keeping process notes in order to keep track of personal reactions, hunches, and any changes to my research plan. This will assist me in describing the research process in my final document, including the role of my subjectivity, which in turn will help readers reach their own conclusions about the legitimacy of my findings.

Once the data is analyzed and narratives have been written, the participants will be asked to review the narrative constructed from their interviews and to alter or delete potentially identifying information as they see fit. When they are satisfied with how the narratives represent their experiences, participants will be asked to sign a data release form (see attached). In order to provide further feedback and for purposes of clarification, follow-up interviews, telephone conversations, and/or correspondence may be employed with the permission of the participants.

8. Storage of Data:

For the duration of the study, the recordings and transcripts derived from the interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. At the end of the study, all data that contains identifying information, including consent forms, audiotapes and transcripts, will be securely stored at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years by Dr. Stephanie Martin, the faculty member supervising this project.

9. Dissemination of Results:

The data from this study will be published in the form of a Master of Education thesis. It is also possible that portions may be used in subsequent academic publications or conference presentations.

10. Risk or Deception:

This research project does not include any elements of deception. I believe that a thorough explanation of the purpose of my research will give participants the opportunity to carefully evaluate their willingness to participate in the study. However, certain personal experiences may be difficult or painful to speak of. At all times, participants are free to decide what they will or will not disclose, and may choose not to answer a question. Furthermore, a list of community resources (e.g., counselling services) will be supplied along with the participants copy of the consent form, should participants feel the need to further resolve their feelings. The researcher will explain to the participant that the \$50 honorarium is a means to offset any costs that the participant may experience due to their time involved in the project (e.g., child care, transportation costs).

11. Confidentiality:

Participant's identities will be kept confidential. Although I will report direct quotations from the interviews, each participant will be given a pseudonym and all identifying information (such as the name of acquaintances or locations) will be removed from the report.

Participants will be informed that a third party will be transcribing the audiotapes and that this person will also hold any information confidential (see attached confidentiality form).

Because the participants for this study have been recruited through Saskatoon agencies and organizations, it is possible that they may be concerned with being identified by other people on the basis of what they have said. Prior to the data being included in the final report, participants will be given the opportunity to review the narrative constructed from their interviews and to alter or delete potentially identifying information as they see fit before signing the data release form (see attached).

12. Data Release:

Participants will be given the opportunity to review a draft of the narrative constructed from their interviews. They will be reminded of their right to withdraw any or all of their responses. Once participants are satisfied with the written product, they will be asked to sign a data release form (see attached).

13. Debriefing and Feedback:

Debriefing and feedback will occur as part of the research process as I involve participants in the process of discussion, analysis, and reflection. Because of the collaborative nature of the research process, communication with the researcher may be ongoing. Each participant will receive a summary of the thesis once it is completed.

14. Required Signatures:

Heather Childs: Master of Education Candidate,
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education,
University of Saskatchewan

Date

Dr. Stephanie Martin: Supervisor,
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education,
University of Saskatchewan

Date

David Mykota: Department Head,
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education,
University of Saskatchewan

Date

15. Contact Information:

Researcher: Heather Childs
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Appendix F: Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Stephanie (Lin) L. Martin

DEPARTMENT
Educational Psychology and Special Education

BEH#
08-70

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon SK

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Heather Childs

SPONSOR
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

TITLE
Emerging Adults' Intentional Quest for Spirituality and its Role in Daily Life: A Narrative Study

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
10-Mar-2008

APPROVAL ON
09-Apr-2008

APPROVAL OF:
Ethics Application
Consent Protocol

EXPIRY DATE
08-Apr-2009

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/

John Rigby, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Room 302 Kirk Hall, 117 Science Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8
Telephone: (306) 966-2975 Fax: (306) 966-2069