

The Experience of Sacred Breathwork™:  
Healing Through Non-Ordinary States  
of Consciousness  
by  
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A DISSERTATION  
Submitted to  
Michigan School of Professional Psychology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Doctor of Psychology  
March 2015

This dissertation was approved by the doctoral committee:

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## Abstract

This study addressed the experience of Sacred Breathwork, a psychospiritual engagement of non-ordinary states through evocative music and abdominal breathing, by asking, *What is the experience of Sacred Breathwork?* A heuristic model of qualitative research was utilized, incorporating the six stages of heuristic study: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. Eight co-researchers were interviewed and 10 themes were explicated to help uncover this phenomenon. These themes were: (1) A lack of familiarity with Sacred Breathwork; (2) psychological breakthroughs were experienced; (3) importance of safety, community, and facilitator commitment; (4) impact of disruptive intellectual and outside influences; (5) emotional regulation improvement; self-confidence and maturation regarding life issues; (6) limitations restricting acceptance and surrender to the anomalous; (7) both intentional and unintentional occurrences aided profound experiences; (8) creative process was revealed as arduous evoking remembrance and further self-discovery; (9) Sacred Breathwork was conceptualized as a sacred ceremony that fostered self-directed, profound, and sustainable change; and (10) how a flawed but open and spiritually driven community fostered vulnerability and honest self-growth. This study can assist psychotherapists, educators, healers, and society at large in understanding the practice and experience of healing through non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as Sacred Breathwork. The results of this study can be helpful to clients interested in holistic and spiritual approaches in need of healing and self-empowerment.

*Keywords:* Consciousness, Cultural Misappropriation, Indigenous, Shamanic, Spirituality, Transpersonal

### Dedication

To my wonderful Sawyer family—Mom Nereida and Daddy Rex—you were the first to heal me, I love you both dearly! You taught me invaluable life lessons.

Dr. C. Michael Smith, aka “Mikkal the Conscious Traveler” and my psycho-spiritual curator, you helped me further understand the road I walk and exemplified the sincerity and balance I needed to witness in order to move forward. Mikkal and the Crow’s Nest International Community is a golden thread forever woven into my heart.

To my unborn child, seven months in utero as I type these words, so far you have helped Mommy write a dissertation, I am looking forward to our journey in life together with Poppa Beers!

Jason, my counterpart, my pack mate, you are the center of my heart!



## Acknowledgements

Boozhoo<sup>1</sup>, I would like to honor the Four Directions, all ancestors, the divine Creator, friends, teachers, the water and Earth, the in-between spaces, as well as all animal and plant friends. I am grateful for the guidance and counsel of my elders in the psychological and spiritual realms. Dr. St. John--thank you for your exemplary mentorship! Peggy Malanti,--you were the first person to encourage me to further my progress on the mystic path and to introduce me to my Inner Goddess. The never ending teachings I received and the wise elders I came to know as a result of my internship at AiHFS reinforced and enriched my understanding of the sacred and of my own spirituality; and, allowed me to reconnect with what was once lost to me. Abigail and Chantel--you are amazing, strong women, the many other elders who provided me teachings at AiHFS, Mino Bimaadiziwin . . . Chi-miigwetch<sup>2</sup>!

Dr. Sollars, my dissertation chair, and Dr. King, my advisor--thank you. Joan and Richard--immense gratitude to you for taking me in and introducing this city girl to the farm. To my birth mother, Debbie--thank you for your gift of humility and for finally beginning the process of healing yourself. To my fathers, Guadalupe and John--thank you for the inheritance of culture and ancestral lineage my spirit needed to embark on this path. And finally, to my special little soul being, my first daughter in this lifetime, my queen-princess canine, Maddie--although you won't read this, I celebrate the many gifts of love you give me!

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<sup>1</sup> Boozhoo is Anishinaabe Ojibwe, the Algonquian language, and translates as "welcome, greetings, and hello."

<sup>2</sup> Mino Bimaadiziwin is Anishinaabe Ojibwe, the Algonquian language, and translates as "a good life." A belief of Anishinaabe people is to return to live this gift of the good life the creator gave, with the traditions from their ancestors. Chi-miigwetch translates as "I hold all you have given me in the highest regard," and is commonly understood as a "big" or extra special "thanks."

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## Chapter I

**Introduction to Sacred Breathwork**

*"The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. It was the experience of mystery even if mixed with fear—that engendered religion."*

~ Albert Einstein (1956, p. 7)

The following is an effort to uncover the nature and meaning of the Sacred Breathwork phenomenon. This chapter will cover the following: introduction to the topic, cultural considerations, statement of question, personal relevance, clinical psychological and social implications, psychological philosophies, and key terminology. The investigation employed the heuristic design, which is appropriate for exploring the process of self-discovery that occurs through connection with the spiritual aspects of the individual in relation to the diverse lenses of the self, the world, and the universe.

Sacred Breathwork is a psychospiritual technique of the same category as other approaches permitting a form of sacred psychoanalysis, such as the transpersonal, depth, and Jungian sectors of psychology. Each of these allows for spiritual-centered modes of being and, depending on the clinician, may welcome the integration of indigenous traditions. The words *indigenous* and *shamanic* will be used interchangeably throughout to acknowledge the origins of this technique. However, the word shamanic will be used exclusively to articulate inherent mystical qualities shared across cultures. Western researchers commonly define the word shamanic as a product of indigenous cultures in relation to healing practices. For the purposes of this study, indigenous people are defined as any who belong to a non-dominant society; are born in a tribal territory; or come from a family unit of such lineage that engages in the practice of prioritizing transmission of cultural and spiritual traditions to future generations, maintenance of

a close relationship to nature, honoring of animal life, and reverence for ancestral lands. These groups are vulnerable to exploitation, marginalization, and oppression by those in power within the larger society.

In Chapter II, the term shamanic will be explored further, including how this terminology is received among indigenous cultures. Incorporating the shamanic into Sacred Breathwork is necessary as the technique utilizes ritual—inclusive of evocative music and abdominal breathing—to induce non-ordinary states of consciousness. The process also uses tools that in some form have been exercised in a communal space within these cultures and that have been identified in the western world as being shamanic. Psychological philosophies such as the shamanic, transpersonal, and Jungian—as well as other key terminology—will be defined within this chapter trailing cultural considerations, the statement question, and relevant implications.

### **Cultural Considerations**

The intention here is not to naively chronicle or present the Sacred Breathwork method as an imitation or prescription for a “one size fits all” process. It is influenced by indigenous ceremony and wisdom traditions and requires the researcher to respectfully satisfy the constituted authorities of both academia and spirituality. This research articulates and presents relevant information on the experience of this modernized technique. In collaboration with the heuristic methodology, this investigation includes a cross-cultural ethnographic and anthropological approach. Belief systems and cultures rooted in ancient eastern spirituality—wisdom traditions and indigenous customs are explored, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufi, the !Kung of the Kalahari, various Native American cultures, the Nahua, Aztec, and the Altaic people. The latter practice Tuvan Shamanism, a form of Tengrism. A commonality amongst these indigenous and ancient cultures is the practice of engaging non-ordinary states of

consciousness for healing purposes. The words heal and healing are used rather than cure and curing because these are associated with conventional medicine and suggest the elimination of disease; healing connotes the sense of becoming whole.

To begin, the concepts of religion and spirituality are diverse and highly personal. For instance, the Tuvan form of shamanism is viewed as a religion. Conversely, for many native people of the Americas, their ritualized expressions of spirituality are not considered shamanic because most consider this term as only applicable to other cultures. Every region of the world possesses an indigenous culture with its own labels and qualifications by which its people identify their healers and medicine people. This dissertation presents just a snapshot of this phenomenon.

Some Native Americans view their spirituality as a religion while others do not. So the question is then: What is religion? To be brief, both spirituality and religion have a set of axioms and rituals that promote a relationship with the divine. However, religion is institutional and commonly associated with authority, judgment, hierarchical and bureaucratic leadership, and predomination. Because organized religion is sometimes associated with dogmatic and judgmental ways of thinking, this research will instead focus on the coalescent, non-dogmatic features of spirituality.

Indigenous cultures also share the use of storytelling and mythology to integrate and heal the multidimensional selves, an aspect that relates to Sacred Breathwork's use of incorporating fire talks and the Jungian archetype framework that will be examined throughout this dissertation. The applicability of the multidimensional selves is a collective concept and can be seen in the intricate beliefs of indigenous people that pre-date the dissemination of such major religions as Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For example, pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs

and the practices of Tengrism are, to this day, crucial elements of Kazakhstan spirituality (Zhansagimova, 2013). In brief, this belief system reveres its ancestors and is both pagan and shamanic in nature. The tribes of Kazakhstan, the Mongols, and the Altai people of Russia practice Tengrism. Tengrism is a natural and monotheistic religion, “The cults of Sky (Tengri), Earth, Water, Fire, and Fertility are central to the belief” (Zhansagimova, 2013, p. 54). The Altaic people abide by the *bilik*, an evolving powerful myth that personifies a holistic and transcendent worldview. According to Shodoev, “The *bilik* embodies a very particular perception of the universe, nature and human society, drawing on the collective experience of centuries. It reveals a profound relationship to life, a deep understanding of natural energies and rhythms, and a keen feeling for the dramatic contradictions of our time” (2012, p. 2). An example of this type of indigenous spiritual expression would be that of the Anishinaabe, one of the largest groups of Native Americans in North America, who believe in a supernatural being that exists in the divine realm that they have named Kitchi-Manitou, which translates to Great Spirit and refers to a creator or god. Ethnologist Basil Johnston of Cape Croker First Nation, the Neyaashiinigmiing, is fluent in the ancient Ojibwe language and illuminates this divine being’s act of creation as a teaching to guide humans. Johnston (1996) wrote,

According to the creation story, Kitchi-Manitou had a vision, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, sensing, and knowing the universe, the world, the manitous, plants, animals, and human beings, and brought them into existence. The story represents a belief in God and in creation, an explanation of the origin of things; it also serves as an example for men and women to emulate. (p. 3)

Johnston is a respected author who has been entrusted with the task of presenting and preserving the oral traditions of the Ojibwe culture. He has suggested the teaching within this story promotes following Kitchi-Manitou to fulfill the soul purpose, to create and bring opportunities for more life. Author D’Arcy Ishpeming’enzaabid Rheault (1999), also referring to the

Anishinaabe philosophy, wrote, "Anishinaabe philosophy is a philosophy of interconnection. Creation is understood as both the source and unity in movement of all life" (p. 33). The natural and holistic perspective at the core of Rheault's thesis is very similar to the spiritual framework of Sacred Breathwork.

Additionally, traditions and beliefs from another ancient culture survive in today's world within the indigenous Nahua people in Mexico. Their traditions and beliefs originate from the Aztec civilization, a belief system with some similarities to those of the Native Americans of what is now North America. Philosophy professor at the University of Maryland James Maffie (2014) said, "the Aztec notion of *teotl* is well within the realm of indigenous North American metaphysical thinking about the ultimate nature of reality" (p. 37). Maffie's writing highlights the resonance between these cultures and helps bring awareness to the depth and complexity of the ancient Aztec culture. However, it is important to note that elders and tradition keepers of varied Mexica Nahau communities have maintained this knowledge orally and practice many of the ancient traditions in the present day. This is not an extinct culture; both academia and western society must acknowledge this.

The archetypal images, mythology, and beliefs of the Aztec culture can be accessed and experienced through a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Teachings from this culture also can be directly applied to inform or influence ritual aspects of the Sacred Breathwork ceremony. Therefore, discussing the primary belief system of the Pre-Cuauhtémoc Aztec society is important. This belief system reflects a theory that regards nature, the sacred, all beings, the cosmos, time, space, and consciousness as one. The primary belief in this ancient culture is pantheistic, monistic, and denies hierarchical distinction between the sacred and the profane; it is referred to as *teotl*. *Teotl* is inclusive and is all. *Teotl* is the name and belief of the unfolding of



all-in-existence. Its reality is duality, with matched ascending and descending polarities existing only because of that duality. Life is because death is. Furthermore, teotl is not a deity because that would suggest that God is separate from all in existence. It is the concept and belief that only one supreme force exists and that all things in existence are aspects of it. Teotl is a sacred energy-in-motion. Also, in this belief system the processes of nature, such as the cycle of the seasons and lifespan of human beings, are enduring transformative characteristics of reality, always in motion, developing, and transforming, just like teotl. The teotl belief declares there is no difference between humans and non-humans. Moreover, time and space are understood as patterns of how teotl moves (Maffie, 2014).

The word Nahau originates from the word Nahualli, and Maffie (n.d) translated in this way, "the Nahuatl word 'nahual' derives from 'nahualli' signifying a form-changing shaman (suggesting its indigenous shamanic roots)" (para. 22). Another way to understand this term in respect to Nahau custom is that it denotes the interconnectedness of duality.

Furthermore, what has been written to date hardly addresses the complexity and omneity that comprises indigenous spirituality. Understanding and appreciating these nuances is fundamental to understanding this research because indigenous religion and spirituality shaped and continue to influence Sacred Breathwork.

Historically, traditions in these cultures were preserved orally, symbolically, artistically, and behaviorally through generations. In modern times, there are two common ways to practice: by maintaining the purity of the traditions or by embracing and integrating the synergistic contemporary. Understandably, this divide in practice approach adds to the complexity. Among indigenous people, it is largely considered taboo to share, modernize, or question preserved sacred knowledge. For those striving to maintain purity and authenticity of tradition, it is a

method of cultural preservation and survival. Given that this maintenance of respect and honest interpretation is a core aspect of this dissertation, for some this will be a sensitive topic to explore. Despite this, it is necessary to examine due to the current state of dysfunction and fragmentation in the world. For example, capitalism rules in the western world; material possessions and status are valued more than nature or human and animal life. Humanity is in need of a psychology that is more consciously globally and collectively focused. This research aims to contribute to this movement. Psychotherapists and authors Mustakova-Possardt, Lyubansky, Basseches, and Oxenberg (2014) said, "The paradigmatic shift needed for psychology to remain relevant to how humans manage life on our planet, is overwhelming. Critical to this shift is the rethinking of the relationship between psychology and culture" (p. 4). Hence, it is important to research a holistic and integrative technique such as Sacred Breathwork that is influenced by more cooperative societies because it exposes one to a more transcendent and unifying worldview. Such a craft has the capacity to heal, expand, and promote global consciousness.

A byproduct of this dissertation might be to engage its audience in issues that face indigenous people across the continents, such as post-colonialism, loss of habitat, being a misrepresented or misunderstood indigenous contemporary, and the "plastic shaman" phenomenon. Such issues are inherent to the complexity of growing up in a culture that has survived significant genocides, spiritual persecution, abolishment of human rights from foreign societies, and racism. Likewise, such survivors encounter anomalous and divergent identity formation as a result of both internalized and externalized oppression. Lastly, there is the plastic shaman phenomenon – people from outside indigenous cultures who believe they can achieve the status of healer or shaman through immature, short-term, and profit-based ventures without

reliance upon elder wisdom or community support. These individuals blindly, or sometimes knowingly, commercialize spirituality. Adequate training requires an initiation process that often involves a degree of suffering, and in earlier societies, initiation required fortitude (Field, 1992). Traditionally, becoming a healer did not happen through weekend workshops and reading pop psychology literature. This is not to say a basic knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms behind this phenomenon cannot be obtained in these ways. However, a full understanding is very much reliant on an immersion in the culture and ongoing self-exploration of one's lived-experience.

Trivializing acts that provide a shortcut to enlightenment encourage and propagate misappropriation and lead to ethical violations. According to Field, shamanic training "involves a symbolic process of dying, being dismembered, and then re-assembled into a new, and more spiritual, form. The ordeals of modern psychotherapy training are a diluted version of a similar procedure" (Field, Harvey, & Sharp, 2005, p. 75). Within indigenous societies, traditionally those in training have an elder, shaman, or medicine person working to guide them through their journey. This guiding individual functions in much the same way as the licensed supervisors that psychotherapists-in-training are required to have. Without successful initiation and guidance, the vulnerable seeking help are endangered.

Conjointly, this dissertation will make a case for spiritual depth psychology and treatment methods that extend beyond the confines of conventional, short-term psychotherapy. Withal, this dialogue can bring awareness about the vulnerability and naïveté of those seeking spiritual healing, and the importance of ensuring that only qualified individuals deliver psychospiritual services. On this topic, Native American activist and author Joseph Bruchac (1995) paraphrased Black Elk's granddaughter, Olivia Pourier:

People want to learn about spirituality so badly that they will follow anything that comes before them, but actually what they are doing is hurting themselves if they don't understand it. You have to be sincere whenever you're practicing the Indian religion; it's too sacred a thing to mess around with. (p. 75)

Being careful to not make the sacred profane or to play upon the spiritual needs and ignorance of innocent people seeking help is something to bear in mind when communicating powerful information on healing traditions. Also, in most indigenous communities, reasonable opposition is often expressed regarding the potential of harming the assailable, behavior which is core to plastic shamanism—namely stealing, imitating, and selling ceremonies based on a spirituality and tradition foreign to mainstream westerners. For these reasons, it is important for clinicians to consider responsible ways to deliver techniques such as Sacred Breathwork to diverse populations, including when educating and publishing. At the same time but in opposition, although an idea inherent in this research is that no particular culture owns spirituality; that does not give anyone the right to act irresponsibly or to participate in the act of engaging sacred healing without adequate initiation, practice, and study.

Furthermore, traditions and thoughts on inducing a non-ordinary state of consciousness vary among indigenous cultures. Tribal beliefs, the era, and political climate can influence traditions that in turn cause change. Author, health educator and Qigong Master, Kevin Cohen, practitioner of indigenous medicine for more than 30 years, respectfully touched upon this in his book *Honoring the Medicine: The Essential Guide to Native American Healing*. Cohen (2006) wrote, “Native American healing has changed as Native people have adapted to new circumstances. In the past, Native American healing evolved as tribes migrated and adapted to new landscapes or as they traded goods and information with other tribes” (p. 9). Cohen acknowledged an existence of a global consciousness in these ancient cultures and speaks to contemporary elements of change in Native American traditions. He asserted that it is unsound to

think Native American healing has not undergone adaptations in the modern era.

This research will maintain appropriate respect to indigenous and shamanic cultures throughout. This investigation will look further into the realms of the sacred and transpersonal that conventional psychotherapy commonly ignores. With these things in mind, the dilemma of exploring the sacred and this modernized spiritual technique academically is acknowledged. Hopefully, the audience will gain an appreciation for this convolution and continue the quest to understand these subjects beyond this dissertation.

### **Statement of Question**

The research question for this study examines the personal encounter and intentional use of Sacred Breathwork, with a concentration on community, music, and shamanic spiritual aspects. Thus the question is, *What is the experience of Sacred Breathwork?* In asking this question, how the co-researchers expansively perceive their experience and ongoing processes with their Sacred Breathwork interactions – including the amalgamation of their breathwork sessions, experience of the sacred, and evocative music – is assessed.

### **Personal Relevance**

In my quest for personal and spiritual growth, I became acquainted with Sacred Breathwork and had profound experiences that conventional psychotherapy had not afforded me. These breathwork sessions positively transformed elements of my physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual selves. During the sessions, I found myself developing a relationship to the evocative music, which created a third conscious space, where my creativity and imagination were active as an experiencer and observer. This space afforded me the opportunity to engage and integrate the dimensions of my multivariate selves, as well as to encounter, as a sentient being, a direct connection to the divine, the cosmos, and the earth.

My exposure to consciousness expansion and the therapeutic success I experienced through this approach, led me to not only conduct scholarly research on the topic but to pursue facilitator certification in Sacred Breathwork through the technique's architect, clinical psychologist Dr. C. Michael Smith. During the procession of my breathwork journeys, I found confidence and liberation in using what Smith identifies as "the inner compass" to navigate my psychological cartography. In a few words, this is an experiential array of death and rebirth encounters in a safe, sacred, and communal context. I experienced the numinous, the transpersonal, and even what some scholars might characterize as an overactive imagination or hallucinations. I might have considered them that as well, had I not discovered cogency in the information obtained and witnessed. But time and time again, no matter how painful, transcendental, or mystical the experience, I found it always proved to be powerful, affirming, recuperative, and antidotal. Over the course of engaging in breathwork sessions, I endured many challenges that were summoned from both my subconscious and the collective conscious. The first of many vital vicissitudes was triggered by as few as five breathwork sessions. I have now experienced over 40 breathwork sessions in almost three years.

The intimate encounters I had with Sacred Breathwork helped me carve out the space needed for deep conscious, emotional, and psychological work during a period in my life that was filled with much chaos, incertitude, and agony. I was born into complex, intergenerational family dysfunction. Due to this, I eventually ended up in foster care and group home systems. With my birth family, I experienced a cycle of substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, and neglect, as well as physical and sexual abuse. I was the caretaker of my younger siblings by the age of 10; I was involved in gang and criminal activity by the age of 12. From 14 to 18, I was shuffled through external care systems. These experiences proved to be onerous. This wounded

upbringing had a tremendous impact on my well-being, which ultimately influenced my interest in holistic approaches to healing and personal growth. I looked away from the problems I had experienced with conventional and Western medicine to my ancestors and indigenous traditions, seeking wisdom and healing.

I experienced depression throughout my youth. In my mid-twenties, I realized I was psychologically and emotionally disabled by the grief and pain I had endured in my childhood; each new trauma amplified the old ones. Prior to starting graduate school, I decided to revolutionize my life by taking a more conscious role in healing my deep wounds. Conventional psychotherapy proved to be inadequate when attempting to reconcile my intergenerational trauma, the residual conflict that existed from having grown up in foster care, spiritual divergence, and ongoing distress from a series of loved ones' deaths. These complex issues seemed beyond the ability and expertise of conventional psychotherapeutic methods to address. After years of failed psychotherapy, I began researching and practicing holistic, ancient, and indigenous healing techniques. I came into contact with both qualified and unqualified individuals in the realm of holistic and indigenous healing and eventually came across Sacred Breathwork. The challenges I confronted during my involvement with breathwork caused a complete disintegration and metamorphosis in my life. It has been nothing short of transformational.

In defiance of the obstacles I encountered, I found myself healing by acquiescing to the positive gains that came as a result of conscious effort and the maintenance of a confident sense of self. Sacred Breathwork helped foster awareness of and supported a healthy integration of what Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist and analytical psychology founder, referred to as archetypal traits. All of this further complemented my emerging identity. As a result of employing Sacred

Breathwork, I became acquainted with the Jungian perspective and a term that identifies an aspect of persona called the Shadow, which the conscious ego does not recognize and which is largely thought of as negative – an aspect of the self that the ego denies and projects onto others. American writer Ken Wilber (1977), well-versed in mysticism and developmental psychology, succinctly summarized the ego as a level of consciousness comprising our role and self-image, with conscious and unconscious aspects, inclusive of the analytical and discriminatory nature of our intellectual mind.

According to Jung (1938/1966), “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious, the blacker and denser it is” (p. 93). My own shadow work required intensive effort and required me to concede the existence of – as well as suspend attachment to – specific traits that had prevented me from rising above behaviors I consciously detested in others, yet unconsciously embodied in myself. This work gave me the strength to withstand the trials of graduate school, divorce, suicidal crisis, loss, terminal illness, racism and prejudice, job loss, financial ruin, serious health complications, and recurrent miscarriage—all of which occurred in the span of a few years.

During a point in my life when I did not have the time to hurt, let alone the time to heal – because of graduate school demands – combining my dissertation topic with the certification process of Sacred Breathwork allowed me the opportunity to advance both my personal and professional goals. My progression garnered positive benefits, which led me to regard Sacred Breathwork as a valuable therapeutic psychospiritual technique. Through my training, I became fascinated by the dynamics that promote transformational experiences, such as music selection, honoring of the sacred, the role of setting and community, cultural orientation, and facilitator expertise; each of these is an integral component of this craft. I found solace in the psycho-



spiritual features of Sacred Breathwork and the community that emerged around the associated workshops. It was an environment I had unknowingly been seeking throughout my life to help me overcome the consequences of the unstable family life of my childhood. Long before coming to the Crow's Nest community, I had explored the rave and electronic music scene. I had even dedicated 15 years of my adult life cultivating a community within the annual Detroit Electronic Music Festival<sup>3</sup> currently known as Movement. I volunteered and worked various positions within the festival operations and production teams since 2003, including managing the volunteer and intern departments from 2008 till 2014. During this time, I unknowingly began the journey I would actively embrace at Crow's Nest. While participating in the festival, amidst the various driving melodies, I would enter a non-ordinary state of consciousness while in the company of like-minded individuals, most of whom were interested in the subjects and experiences of the metaphysical, mystical, altered states, and non-dogmatic spirituality. I became aware of this synchronistic connection after my first breathwork session where I immediately realized my work with the festival, graduate school pursuits, and upbringing were all preparation for becoming a healer utilizing non-ordinary states. All these past experiences were my initiation. My burgeoning interest in these forces, a result of my own healing and maturation, became the impetus for me to heuristically explore Sacred Breathwork.

### **Clinical Relevance**

Clinicians that ascribe to Jungian, transpersonal, depth, and indigenous psychologies may find interest in Sacred Breathwork because of its holistic approach and inclusion of the spiritual.

Sacred Breathwork honors and incorporates the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual

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<sup>3</sup> Movement Electronic Music Festival is an annual 3-day event that has been held Memorial Day weekend in Detroit, MI, at Hart Plaza. Hart Plaza has hosted a Memorial Day weekend electronic festival of this magnitude honoring Detroit Techno since 2000. This festival has been organized by several different production entities over the years, resulting in name change and visionary direction.

dimensions of the self. Likewise, clients who are spiritually oriented and interested in indigenous-influenced practices may find Sacred Breathwork useful in the growth process. This approach to healing can be viewed in conventional therapy as a visceral method of processing varied issues, such as intergenerational trauma, grief and loss, and spiritual discrepancy.

Conventional psychologists often pathologize spiritual phenomenon—instead of appreciating the multiplicity of human beings, such as the dimensions of spiritual-self – or simply do not know how to identify and assist a client with a spiritual discrepancy. Sacred Breathwork promotes departing from pathologizing the client by welcoming the sacred intersection of inter-subjectivity in the forms of experienced interiority and co-creativity. This act requires emphasis on the sacred, ability to hold space, facilitator and client knowledge, and appreciation of ideas shared. The client is also encouraged to use the felt sense to verify and go deeper – a valuable tool that will be discussed in Chapter II.

In addition, using breathwork in conjunction with sacred analysis and embodied knowing, such as the felt sense, helps the client further understand and integrate experience. This is where Jungian psychoanalysis in respect to the sacred plays a complementary therapeutic role by providing a reflection of the client's inner, outer, and spiritual worlds and inviting the multidimensional self to explore archetypes of commonly known mythologies and fairy tales. Chapter II will also discuss archetypes and the basic premise of Jungian psychoanalysis.

Techniques in breathwork such as inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness help to actively engage the imagination and spirit. Following this engagement, the individual processes through verbal and creative explication and amplification. The explicating involves recalling and selecting unconscious material encountered and then attempting to amplify it by identifying resonate archetypes, or even sharing an original story. The facilitator leads this process. Dyads

are conducted, and a group process transpires. These opportunities welcome and promote intersubjectivity, a mutual understanding and acknowledgement of the interrelationship between the client's subjective perspective and that of others. It is a way the client can become aware and explore personality development in real time. James Alistair Ross wrote a thesis on the notion of this intersection of subjective presence known as sacred psychoanalysis. Ross (2010) wrote, "This research concludes that three forms of sacred psychoanalysis can be identified embracing a generic framework for theoretical and clinical understanding; a framework for intersubjective presence; and a framework for spiritual/sacred encounter" (p. 1). All of these could be productive therapeutic tools to include the spiritual self and holistically develop the multi-dimensions of the self.

Furthermore, some research claims there are several therapeutic benefits to engaging a non-ordinary state of consciousness (NOSC), also termed an altered state of consciousness (ASC). Researcher and psychotherapist Nathan Field wrote an article on altered states of consciousness, proposing the following benefits: lower tension—promotion of relaxation; the release of bad objects and restorative emotional experience—developing the ability to renegotiate and overcome trauma; facilitation of the working alliance—known as the therapeutic alliance in humanistic psychotherapy; and enhanced creativity. Entering into such transcendent states, according to Field (1992), "leaves them permanently enhanced, transformed, liberated, free of fear" (p. 226). This type of process works to liberate and expand consciousness. As Field writes extensively, it is about therapeutically combining the mundane and the sacred. Contributions such as this are important and clinically relevant to the field of psychology.

A published study by Holmes, Morris, Clance, and Putney (1996) investigated the use of Holotropic Breathwork in comparison to conventional group therapy and claimed it had

important therapeutic benefits. The study found “the Breathwork Group show[ed] greater change over time than the Therapy Group” (p. 117). Holotropic Breathwork is more similar to Sacred Breathwork than conventional group therapy, and therefore this study supports experiential investigation and promotion of future research in the area of NOSC for therapeutic use.

To illuminate the importance of the spiritual component in psychotherapy, Grof and Grof (2010), pioneers in the transpersonal field, discussed anthropologist Michael Harner’s censure of conventional psychology and psychiatry:

Harner’s criticism raises some interesting questions: What would psychiatry and psychology look like if it could overcome its ethnocentric bias—stop pathologizing all experiences and behaviors that cannot be understood in the narrow context of the monistic-materialistic paradigm—and treat with respect ritual and spiritual life of other cultures. (p. 11)

One avenue conventional psychology should address is the habit of clinicians to pathologize spirituality, or simply be ill-equipped to address it within the therapy room. Even a cursory review of the material uncovered indicates that conventional psychotherapists could benefit from broadening their understanding of the role a client’s spirituality plays in the healing process. This research not only highlights the need for a more holistic approach to therapy, inclusive of the spiritual dimension of the Self, it provides one way to integrate the two. The field of psychology could certainly benefit from a partnership of the psychological and spiritual.

### **Social Relevance**

Sacred Breathwork’s ability to enforce analysis, spark change, and revitalize the practitioner’s being can give life and create more resplendent communities by drawing together relationships rooted in existential human quandaries and spirituality. In addition, engaging in breathwork is an act of communion that can cultivate appreciation and empathy through opening the self up to be vulnerable and to journey with the others in the group. Society in general could

benefit from the presence of meaningful human collaboration as described above; transparent actions such as these intimate and conscientious efforts are not a common denominator in western society and therefore are often carried out with fragility. This dissertation is meant to be a positive contribution to seeding such actions and community.

### **Psychological Philosophies**

**Depth and transpersonal psychology.** The dawn of transpersonal psychology commenced during the humanistic movement in the 1960s, but some insist the evolution began much earlier with William James and behaviorism. James professed that the effect of spiritual experiences on people should be judged, instead of prejudged, based on orientation (Kaspro & Scotton, 1999). Following the emergence of Freudian psychology and as an outgrowth and extension of humanistic psychology, the transpersonal perspective of the human was born. The transpersonal evolved to meet our need to understand that a crucial element was missing – the spiritual dimension of the self. According to Grof and Grof (2010):

In 1967, a small working group, including Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, Stanislaw Grof, James Fadiman, Miles Vich, and Sonya Margulies met in Menlo Park, California, with the purpose of creating a new psychology that would honor the entire spectrum of human experience, including various non-ordinary states of consciousness. During these discussions, Maslow and Sutich accepted Grof's suggestion and named the new discipline "transpersonal psychology." (p. 5)

Transpersonal psychology acknowledges spiritual experiences and universal human connectedness. The transpersonal concentrates on esoteric mental experience, accessing and integrating stages of development by fostering higher human advancement beyond the adult ego, with a focus on human values and spiritual experience (Kaspro & Scotton, 1999). In healthy individuals, transpersonal development may arouse human qualities such as altruism, creativity, and intuitive wisdom. However, for a person without healthy ego development, the deep connectedness that transpersonal states can bring could lead one to experience symptoms of

psychosis (Kasprow & Scotton, 1999).

Sofia University, formerly the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, describes transpersonal psychology as a full spectrum psychology that incorporates scholarly interest in transcendent dimensions of human experiences. According to the Sofia website, the field “is concerned with expanding the frontiers of psychology and spirituality for the betterment of humanity and the sustainability of the planet” (2013).

As this research addresses concepts of consciousness, it is essential to provide some historical context for the psychological inquiry into the transcendent dimensions of the human experience as well as briefly discuss Depth Psychology, which explores the relationship between the conscious and unconscious. Existential psychoanalytic theory on the unconscious aspects of the human condition was made popular by Sigmund Freud initially, followed by Eugen Bleuler, Carl Jung, and later Stanislav Grof.

Transpersonal psychology evolved from depth psychology, "a term originally coined by Eugen Bleuler in a 1910 'apologia' for psychoanalysis entitled 'Die psychoanalyse Freuds: Verteidigung und kritische bemerkungen' published in the second Band of the Yearbook for Psychoanalytic and Psychopathological Investigations" (Craig, 2008, p. 229). He wrote that depth psychology encompasses many genres such as, "Freudians, Jungians, Adlerians, and Rankians, but also the so-called Sullivanians, Frommians, Horneyians, Kleinians, Bionians, Winnicottians, Eriksonians, Kohutians, Lacanians, and so forth" (Craig, 2008, p. 231). The variety of fields of thought contained under the depth psychology umbrella indicates the evolution of attempts to understand in depth the unconscious mechanisms of the human condition. However, for purposes of maintaining the focus on the sacred and not the secular, only transpersonal and Jungian theories will be explored in this dissertation.

Holotropic Breathwork is a contribution to depth psychology initiated by Sigmund Freud (Grof & Grof, 2010). Carl Jung further refined depth psychology with the inclusion of his archetypal and collective unconscious components. However, Freud's theories of the individual unconscious proved limiting to clinical psychedelic research (Grof & Grof, 2010, p. 4). The Grofs surmised a need for a more inclusive framework following the results of numerous psychedelic studies and Jung's theory. They postulated that experiences can come from a deeper level of the psyche, which happened to fit the holotropic paradigm. Their psychedelic research fit Jung's collective theory and in return provided a comprehensive attitude and approach to the concept of multiple dimensions of the Self.

To further substantiate the alliance between the unconscious and spiritual domains regarding Sacred Breathwork, Smith said it accesses:

the ontological foundations of being, for purposes of healing, deep worship, growth and transformation. C. G. Jung knew that the "real therapy," as he called it, "is the approach to the numinous" and it is only this that can release from the "curse of pathology." (C. M. Smith, personal communication, August 4, 2012)

When examining depth psychology, a transpersonal subject of relevance is Grof's expanded cartography of the human psyche. Grof organized an individual's consciousness into overlapping layers experienced in holotropic states. He called these levels The Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM). Grof and Bennett found these holotropic experiences were accompanied by memories that influence and shape consciousness as a result of prenatal life through birth (1993, p. 31). This transpersonal framework regarding consciousness will be reviewed further in Chapter II.

**Jungian psychology.** It has been said that the process of undergoing long-term psychoanalysis assists in making the unconscious conscious, and in so doing allows the individual to achieve freedom from undesired habits and behaviors, which are commonly referred to as symptoms. Jason Beers, psychological researcher on the changing plant-human relationship for inclusive health (2014), provides an explanation of this unconscious symptomology,

. . . all states that we do not wish to experience and thus we ban to the unconsciousness, become labeled as “symptoms” and it is these symptoms then that we have come to understand as something taboo, even aimless and pointless; for when they arise, we forget not only the often quick-knee-jerk act by which we banned them to unawareness with, but we forget even that they existed before this current experience of them. (p. 108)

The opportunity to slow down, surrender, observe, and expand consciousness beyond the normal waking ego state elevates a deeper connection to and interpretation of the self and life. It introduces one to universal myths and archetypes, which can encourage the potential to manipulate and renegotiate limiting conceptions.

The foundation of Carl Jung’s theory is the concept of archetypes, which is one of the more important theoretical differences separating him from his mentor, Sigmund Freud. Jung identified an archetype as a universal pattern producing meaning and guiding development through a special relationship, such as the analytical one between client and therapist (Roesler, 2012). According to Roesler (2012), Jung’s conceptualization of the archetype “is an innate pattern of perception and behavior which influences human perception and action and shapes it into similar forms. Archetypes are unconscious factors, affectively loaded so that, when we experience them, this often has a numinous quality. . . Jung claims that they are universal” (p. 225). The assertion that archetypes are a universally shared human experience supports a sense of interconnectedness, a transcending concept shared with indigenous spiritualities as mentioned



earlier.

The terms Jungian, Jungian analysis, and Jungian psychology all relate to the principles set out by Carl Jung and refer to Jung's theories. According to certified Jungian psychoanalyst Stephen Martz, Jungian analysis "seeks to assist the analysand to individuate. By individuation, Jung means a process of discovering and learning to live from our authentic selves" (2013). Martz also makes clear the individuation process is unique to each person and suggests it can promote growth. Both Jung's individuation and making the unconscious conscious are important elements of Breathwork. Chapter II will further discuss Jung and Jungian analysis.

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

This section will clarify key terminology and provide working definitions pertinent to this research, while summarizing the technical foundations of the Sacred Breathwork technique.

**Sacred.** The sacred in breathwork is a result of the shamanic influence and occurs as result of its primary ritual mediums, abdominal breathing and evocative music, in a 1-2-3 phase. The set, setting, group members or community, and facilitator are other factors that have ritual components. Sacred is commonly viewed as ineffable, yet vital to communicate in order for others to comprehend this psychospiritual methodology. To best define sacred is to describe it: It is beyond words and in the realm of knowing and feeling. It is something one lives for, something one would die to protect, something that can be touched and yet not. Altogether, it is a connection to the higher self and the divine. It can be something, someone, a place, an object, an emotion, or a state of mind. It is magical, beautiful, and pure all on its own. It is a gift from God the Creator. It means something is reserved, dedicated or made holy, not just in relation to religion but deserving of ceremonial use in connection with divinity. To nurture an operational understanding of sacred, Smith (2007) declared that sacred space cannot be manifested by human

will; however, it can be provoked and invoked, through various ritual means, which will be addressed in Chapter II. Smith (2007) asserted that humans have the responsibility to consecrate and maintain boundaries demarcating sacred space (p. 54). For purposes of the spiritual component within this study, it is proposed that the concept of sacred may be an act, object, or space innately possessing the nature of, or declared an emanation from and connection to, the divine, and it is worthy of the utmost veneration to the deistic.

**Sacred Breathwork.** The Sacred Breathwork methodology invites participants to discover the potential of their true Self, and to reconcile affairs of spiritual, emotional, and psychological conflict. Sacred Breathwork incorporates evocative music, judicious bodywork, and fast-paced diaphragmatic breathing. This type of breathing contracts the diaphragm, allowing air to enter the lungs, while expanding the stomach. According to Sacred Breathwork architect Smith,

Sacred Breathwork is a powerful healing and consciousness expanding sacred ceremony developed in a group and community context at Crow's Nest Center for Shamanic Studies, in the USA and Europe. It is the product of a 30 year practice and evolving synthesis by C. Michael Smith, Ph.D. (Mikkal) with major influences from the shamanic heart-path, the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung, the holotropic theory and breathwork technique developed by Stanislav Grof, M.D., from which it has been significantly influenced and departs, and from the practice of focusing on a felt-sense, developed by Eugene T. Gendlin, Ph.D. (C. M. Smith, personal communication, August 4, 2012)

Smith cites Holotropic Breathwork as an influence on the development of Sacred Breathwork, hence the importance to review this technique fashioned from psychology and spiritual philosophies.

**Jungian psychoanalysis and felt sense.** Jungian psychoanalysis and the felt sense are complementary therapeutic components to be used with Sacred Breathwork. Sondra Perl (2004) wrote, "felt sense refers explicitly to the body, and in particular, to the way body and mind are connected" (p. xiii). Perl also noted that psychologist Eugene Gendlin, author of felt sense,

described it as working with the body's pre-verbal formed sense, which is barely noticeable to the untrained or unaware mind. Through attending to the body-sense, one is just on the edge of thinking and diving into tacit knowledge. According to Perl (2004),

Felt sense points us to an aspect of our experience that often accompanies us when we are involved in a creative act. Felt sense is there, inside us, if we know how to turn our attention to it and listen to what it is suggesting. (p. 1)

This piece of the process is vital; it is a physical experience that expands on non-verbal aspects and that aids in understanding and integrating the mental processes of non-ordinary states of consciousness.

In collaboration with his wife Christina, Stanislav Grof created Holotropic Breathwork while Scholar-in-Residence at the Esalen Institute in California. Grof and Grof's (2010) working theory noted, "Holotropic Breathwork combines and integrates various elements from depth psychology, modern consciousness research, transpersonal psychology, Eastern spiritual philosophies, and native healing practices" (p. 7). As in Sacred Breathwork, Grof and Grof noted that the Holotropic therapeutic method of self-exploration combines accelerated breathing, evocative music, and bodywork aimed to release residual bioenergetic and emotional blocks. Bioenergetic is the concept that the human psyche expresses itself not only through the mind but also through physiological processes. These physiological processes can be stored within the body. This will be discussed further in Chapter II.

Detailed distinctions between Sacred Breathwork and Holotropic Breathwork include technicalities that will also be discussed in the second chapter. Another factor vital to note is that there are international professional organizations and currently several popular versions of sonic driven breathwork. However, this study will only explore the psychospiritual techniques of Holotropic Breathwork and Sacred Breathwork.

**Holotropic Breathwork and Sacred Breathwork connection.** As in Holotropic Breathwork, Sacred Breathwork's combination of evocative music and hastened abdominal breathing invites self-discovery and the resolution of psychological and emotional conflict because it engages and brings awareness to the unconscious. This in turn allows the breather an opportunity to explore and, if needed, reenact discord in a safe setting. Stanislav Grof outlined holotropic sessions as group work, but Sacred Breathwork goes beyond the group and works toward establishing a full sense of community. Over the course of at least a few days in which the group work is conducted, several ceremonial events take place that foster the development of continuing relationships between partners following the workshop. Individuals pair up to commune in breathwork, alternating as a breather and then an ally, with attentive, trained facilitators ready to step in to support or assist. The series of ritual elements, including psychoeducational groups, creative expression, and group processing, in conjunction with the breathwork session, strengthens the bond between partners and can act as a healing agent itself. In Holotropic Breathwork sessions, Grof and Grof (2010) specified that, "participants express their experiences by painting mandalas and sharing accounts of their inner journeys in small groups" (p. 7). Both techniques emphasize follow-up interviews between partners to facilitate integration of the experience. To summarize, Sacred Breathwork is defined as a sacred, shamanic-influenced, psychospiritual medium that promotes self-exploration through breathing and sonic induction into non-ordinary states of consciousness, to be used in a group setting.

**The spiritual-self.** The Western concept of the self limits the examination of life's circumstances to environmental and genetic dynamics as well as social conditioning. Depending on the school of thought and belief structure, these narrow definitions often leave out the spiritual aspects of the self. The spiritual-self revolves around an individual's belief system and

connection with the sacred, while bypassing the ego's perceptions of reality. In further defining the spiritual-self, it is relevant to consider both esoteric and psychological philosophies. Each calls attention to the paradoxical nature of the Self, a self within the self, or as some describe, a Self above the self, a divine Higher Self, also noted in some psychological literature as the superconscious. This spiritual-self is the Self that has the deepest knowledge of one's own nature, and is in chorus with the presence of God. Jean Hardy (1987) defined this Self, the Higher Self as:

not only the focal point around which many of the superconscious processes occur; it is also the cause of those processes and the source of the energy that makes them possible. So the Self is the unchanging, enduring reality; a stable centre of life on its own level, which has functions but is not a function. (p. 56)

Hardy then went on to describe this Self as a key to the entire psychic system of the human being (1987, p. 56). Hardy touched upon the transcendent duality of this spiritual-self by pointing out that it is both a cause and source for superconscious processes. In this statement, Hardy (1987) underlined the paradox, "It is astride the collective unconscious and the superconscious. It is also in a direct line to the 'I' and can become, in a person in touch with the transcendent, almost synonymous with the 'I'" (p. 56). Hardy proclaims this Self is an uninterrupted source for "our knowledge of archetypal qualities, of the wholeness of the universe, of transcendence and immanence, to everyday life" (p. 56). What is more, Hardy said, the concept of the soul is analogous to the notion of the Higher Self. This Higher or spiritual-self is within the transpersonal realm and Hardy included Yogi Ramacharaka's notion that a person with daily awareness of this Self is able to achieve a sense of feeling "at home" and oneness (1987, p. 57). In order to achieve this sense of feeling at home, one must break through false beliefs and limitations, something with which Sacred Breathwork can assist. Campbell (2008) said, "The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature,

myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization” (p. 163). To compound the notion of breaking through or individuating, patterns of culture can dictate and limit through implanting messages in art and philosophy. For instance, cultural myth and literature are patterns that can determine or influence behavior. They can also make the process of transcending conscious limitations agonizing. American anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher Edward Hall (1989) wrote,

It is not man who is crazy so much as his institutions and those culture patterns that determine his behavior. We in the West are alienated from ourselves and from nature. We labor under a number of delusions, one of which is that life makes sense; i.e., that we are sane. We persist in this view despite massive evidence to the contrary. We live fragmented, compartmentalized lives in which contradictions are carefully sealed off from each other. (pp. 11-12)

One might say that the very presence of agony fuels the will to break free from limitations created externally and internally. Hall concluded that the fragmentation causes linear thinking because of the deep, unconscious, cultural undercurrents that structure daily life. Sacred Breathwork offers an individual the prospect of circumventing linear thinking by ascending into the anarchic unconscious. In this space an individual can learn new ways to respond to cultural stimuli without being restrained by the ego. Chapter II will further explore psychological literature on the development of the spiritual-self in relation to defusing the ego’s perceptions, so that a more expansive consciousness can be achieved through which one can integrate the spiritual.

**Shamanic/shamanism.** Neither shamanism nor analytical psychology can be understood from within an academic context; textbooks, articles, and classes on the topic can only provide a structure from which one can intellectualize (Smith, 2007, p. ii). Therefore, a more accurate way to understand this phenomenon is to engage it with respect, rather than solely relying upon

reading books or listening to lectures. A question to ponder: How can one construct an informed opinion on the subject without actually witnessing the genuine shamanic first hand? It is no wonder that Native cultures tend to maintain traditions through oral transmission and abstain from writing down such processes, as to truly absorb and understand the shamanic requires engaging and living it.

A simple analogy is to consider the shamanic as a sacred construct for use when expressing spirituality and connecting with the divine. Gyrus (2007) indicated that

those in the West practically engaged with the ranges of human consciousness-magicians, occultists, psychonauts, whatever you like to call such folk. The manifest parallels between different cultures' spiritual traditions are of interest to people who are attempting to recover a working relationship with these processes, within a culture which has lost all traditions dealing with such matters. (p. 93)

Despite the enigmatic and mystical allure of engaging the sacred shamanic, academic exposure to shamanic-influenced techniques can help bring awareness to conventional clinicians about spiritual instruments which, in the hands of qualified technicians, can be used as another line of treatment and healing. Furthermore, when discussing the academic realm, it is important to acknowledge that at one time written language was the exclusive tool of the elite and carefully used to articulate important information. As proto-writing developed in ancient Sumerian Mesopotamia as cuneiform, it was primarily used for record keeping and to share mythologies, such as the story of Gilgamesh. Author Dominique Charpin (2010) wrote, “. . . protocuneiform writing was from the start created as a system for administrative purposes (p. 19). Furthermore, as a result of Egyptian influence Mesopotamian scribes decided to focus more on transcribing esoteric knowledge (Charpin, 2010, p. 53, ). This change prompted the focus of writing about mythologies and sacred rituals, and it was not shared with those considered unworthy or insincere. According to Charpin (2010), “Thus the diviner who began to initiate his son in

cuneiform had to make him swear not to divulge the learning he would acquire (p. 53). Also, Egyptian hieroglyphics are believed to be an expression of the elite and divine, and contain mystical wisdom. According to researcher James Allen (2010), “The term hieroglyph comes from two Greek words meaning ‘sacred carvings,’ which are a translation, in turn, of the Egyptians’ own name for their writing system, ‘the god’s speech’” (p. 2).

Something else to consider regarding the use of language is the concept incorporated throughout regarding the secular versus the sacred. Smith said, in reference to Sacred Breathwork,

The thing about this nonsecular language is that it is more intimate, it creates a deeper bond, probably get that oxytocin, that bonding hormone going, it’s just like when you are talking to your own child, or beloved family member, you are addressing them in a very intimate way, and when you can do that in a sacred ceremonial context, you can establish a dialogue, prayer after all is a conversation. It’s a shift in language, and therefore a shift in the quasi scientific psychological way of thinking about all of this into one that is spiritual and reverent, and I think for that reason, even more powerful. (C. M. Smith, personal communication, December 6, 2014)

Therefore, attempts to use language in a secular way to describe and define sacred notions complicate the ineffable qualities experienced. This complexity is manifested between the different cultures of western psychology and the sacred, where spiritual traditions are scrutinized purely for the sake of sounding academic. Secular inquiry can promote bias and indifference, which can interfere with the process of more intimately understanding the sacred.

Furthermore, since some of the original forces behind the development of writing were to subjugate and govern, it is important to refrain from using this research in that fashion.

However, there are some details that will not be shared because this dissertation is not intended to be a textbook on how to conduct Sacred Breathwork. The intention of this study is to share basic knowledge on the topic of healing through spiritual measures, such as NOSC and Sacred Breathwork.



Regarding the notion of words and their use, the words shamanic and shamanism originally described particular types of indigenous healing practices. The origin of these will be discussed in the next section. The definition of these terms has since evolved to reference traditional healing across indigenous cultures, even if the words are not used within the culture. This has caused some opposition to the generalized use of these words. Consequently, they have become less meaningful because of a superficial and at times romanticized fixation on indigenous spirituality, for both right and wrong reasons. For example, it is not wrong to have a desire to reclaim ancestral rights and achieve an untainted connection to the divine. Likewise, conscientiously recognizing the knowledge contained within research such as this is highly valued and can encourage readers to appreciate and further explore the subject. However, there has also been a degree of “co-opting” of such terms by the dominant society where the depth of the meaning of the work is ignored and the application is for purely commercial gain. An example of this would be cases where those who have not lived the traditions, and possess only a superficial understanding of them, present themselves as spiritual leaders and charge money to perform healing ceremonies.

Indigenous societies or clans historically have had a medicine woman or man present to cure ailments; in modern culture it can be argued that this role has been relegated to that of medical doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist. This brings up the significance of the word shaman, a term that is widely accepted to describe a medicine healer in some indigenous cultures. Jeremy Narby and Francis Huxley (2004) reported that the first time the word shaman was used in a published text was in the second half of the 17th century by a leader of the Russian clergy. This archpriest, Avvakum Petrovich, used this word in his autobiography to describe a member of the Siberian ethnic Tuvan group. Narby and Huxley (2004) cited Arnold van Gennep who, in the

early 20th century, identified the origin of the word shamanism as stemming from the Tungus, Buryats, and Yakuts, all ethnic groups of the region known as Siberia that used the word shaman (saman). Mircea Eliade (1964) wrote extensively about the complex marvel of the shaman and argued the shaman phenomenon is not confined to Central and North Asia: “Shamanism in this strict sense is not confined to Central and North Asia” (p. 6). Eliade concluded that shamans are intermediaries—also referred to as psychopomps—between the spirit and human worlds. Shamans are known to communicate with the dead and to assist spirits in treating various ailments. In addition, Shamans have been known to alleviate trauma, deal with soul loss, and restore balance to the physical body (Eliade, 1964, pp. 3-7). To reiterate the shamanic role of physical and spiritual go-between, Eliade (1964) said:

We need only define the shaman’s relation to his helping spirits. It will easily be seen wherein a shaman differs from a “possessed” person, for example; the shaman controls his “spirits,” in the sense that he, a human being, is able to communicate with the dead, “demons,” and ‘nature spirits. (p. 6)

Claude Levi-Strauss (1974) later described the occupation of the shaman as a courier providing the sick with a language “by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressible, psychic states can be immediately expressed” (as cited in Narby & Huxley, 2004, p. 109). Narby and Huxley further mention the shaman’s role in bringing order to what would be an otherwise chaotic experience so as to make the state intelligible and allow the subject to be able to cleanly release while maintaining an understanding of what occurred.

**Evocative music.** Music has been around since the dawn of humans as is evidenced by the artifacts of various ancient cultures including that of the Aurignacians, considered the first modern humans. According to *Psychology Today*’s Graham Collier, fossilized flute-like instruments were found in the Aurignacian site in southwest France that date to more than 30,000 years ago (Collier, para. 2, 2012). Author and music therapist Edith Hillman Boxill (1985)

states, “music reaches the human being on primordial and intricate physiological levels, from the basic to dynamic, and complicated cerebral levels” (p. 18). Collier contends that music comes in two forms, the evoking of impassioned responses, which call for action, and music that induces a state of transcendence (2012, para. 3). This action of inducing transcendence can be used purposefully in ritual, to promote relaxation and healing. To further elaborate on this concept, Jung (1938/1966) said, "A great many ritualistic performances are carried out for the sole purpose of producing at will the effect of the *numinosum* by means of certain devices of a magical nature, such as invocations, incantations, sacrifice, meditation and other yoga practices" (pp. 4-5). Ritual practices invoking the numinous are also a necessity within Sacred Breathwork with the exception of literal sacrifice.

The word *evocative* is defined by Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2013) as, “evoking or tending to evoke an especially emotional response.” According to Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2013), *music* is “the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity; vocal, instrumental, or mechanical sounds having rhythm, melody, or harmony.” These definitions are rudimentary in nature but will provide a basic framework of understanding upon which to build in Chapter II.

**Consciousness, holotropic, and the divine.** This section aims to explore the various factors surrounding consciousness that extend beyond the generic Freudian concepts of the ego, conscious, and id unconscious aspects. To begin, there are three theories to address relating to the structural process of function: (a) the biological perspective of consciousness; (b) the non-local theory of consciousness; and, (c) the orchestrated objective reduction (Orch-OR) theory. Each will be further explicated in Chapter II. The word *consciousness* is defined as awareness to

the world and self, but this designation limits our understanding of it. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2013) defines consciousness as, “the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself.” Consciousness needs an expanded definition, as the current conventional one seems to diminish its magnificence through underestimating and limiting its scope. Metzner proposes Russian physicist Victor Nalimov’s definition of consciousness being a continuum of meaning (2009, p. 10). According to Metzner (2009) this “continuum of meaning, like the sensorium of sense perception, conveys something of the dual quality of consciousness,—both stable and fluid, both integrative and differentiated” (p. 10). This notion speaks to the philosophical perspective of consciousness and bridges the gap of spirituality and the biological. The spiritual and mystical facets are, however, still without room in this conservative definition and, for those experiencing such occurrences, it constrains their ability to wholly process their encounter.

The transpersonal paradigm allows for the integration of superconscious, mystical, and spiritual dimensions. With reference to consciousness within the transpersonal model, Grof and Grof (2010) say, “In holotropic states, our consciousness can reach far beyond the boundaries of the body/ego and obtain accurate information about various aspects of the material world that we have not obtained in this lifetime” (p. 26). Moreover, Grof and Grof refute the material source of consciousness and contend that there is no scientific evidence to prove how brain processes could produce consciousness. Furthermore, they claim that observations have been made that prove consciousness can function separately from matter and the brain (2010, p. 26).

Grof and Grof (2010) effectively articulate that the definition of altered states “commonly used by mainstream clinicians and theoreticians is not appropriate, because of its one-sided emphasis on the distortion or impairment of the ‘correct way’ of experiencing oneself and the

world” (p. 8). Grof and Grof (2010) further delineate the difference between the terms *altered states* and *non-ordinary*:

[T]he importance of non-ordinary states of consciousness for ancient and aboriginal cultures is reflected in the amount of time and energy that the members of these human groups dedicated to the development of *technologies of the sacred*, various procedures capable of inducing them for ritual and spiritual purposes. (p. 9)

Furthermore, pioneer in the study of consciousness Ralph Metzner (2009) wrote,

But this linguistic strategy disguises the point that some alterations of state are extremely ordinary, usual and familiar . . . some indigenous people and shamanic practitioners object that what Westerners called “non-ordinary” states or realities, are to them very familiar and ordinary. There is a whole spectrum of states of consciousness, from the familiar and common to the anomalous and exotic extreme. (p. 4)

In academic terms, this spectrum is transpersonal in nature and beyond semantics.

Stanislav Grof suggests the transpersonal quality of reality includes three components: the psyche, cosmos, and consciousness. Grof’s work focuses on what he calls holotropic states. This is the point where he diverges from Sacred Breathwork, which acknowledges the holotropic but also emphasizes the divine life force that permeates the non-ordinary state of consciousness as inherently holotropic. From the research gathered, it appears that the holotropic framework primarily sees these states as something to use, transform, heal, and understand the selves. Holotropic implies a moving toward wholeness – that *what is* needs improvement, is not whole or perfect, and is missing something. However, it is more than simple movement. This researcher found that through the process of coming to honor the self and the NOSC states, the individual actually comes to *remember* wholeness, rather than moving toward it as something not innate. It is recognizing that the whole of the self is not defined only by those areas that need healing; the Self is whole as it is. The way of the Western world is that humanity is moving toward creating, fixing, and improving itself. However, mystical texts and teachings believe it is more about remembering who you truly are, emphasizing that life extends beyond the time spent in human

form, and the understanding that true achievement of the Self is gained through experiencing human existence. This is a difficult concept to relate in writing because it is so dependent upon understanding, recognition, acknowledgement, and acceptance. It is more than a state of awareness; rather, it is a state of being or even an achievement of coming to know the ultimate Self that is interconnected to all. The ego has filtered the memory and consciousness so as to be productive in the mundane routines of day-to-day life.

Mystics have historically recognized this paradox but academics tend to dismiss or quantify it. It is notable to acknowledge the irony in writing about inducing a state that in respect to the sacred is actually a technique to remember. For the purpose of presenting it in an academic context and providing clinical applicability, it is necessary to focus on the proper semantics to use in order to relate what may in fact be an un-relatable concept. The techniques discussed herein are presented as supporting the achieving of NOSC, but this research also recognizes that understanding why seems to be beyond the limitations of literal and academic intellectualizing. In his documentary, *With One Voice* (2009), Eric Temple said, “Mystics seek spiritual awareness by exploring their own intimate connection with the divine . . . Mystics dedicate their lives to experiencing a reality that the mind cannot grasp and language cannot explain” (Temple, 2009). This touches on what was written earlier regarding the origins of writing, which assumed that scribes were aware of the complexity involved with creating symbols to describe the ineffable.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Sacred Breathwork experience is dissertation-worthy. This chapter discussed the foundations for conducting an investigation into this psychospiritual technique. In addition, it brought to light the dynamics unique to the shamanic, spiritual, and psychological

approaches and revealed the intricate groundwork laid by people like the Grofs and Smith. The following chapter will examine the literature collected that relates to Sacred Breathwork.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

*“The creation of myth is the careful and unbiased observation of processes within the natural world that takes place over centuries. Myth-making is a way of parceling strategic knowledge so that it can be transmitted through time to the era when it is most needed.”*

*~ A.N. Dmitriev, as cited in Shodoev, 2012, p. 3*

### Introduction

This literature review aims to refine experiential knowledge and explore the existing theory of Sacred Breathwork. The goal of this research is to unite modern psychology with the spiritual and sacred. The heuristic methodology was chosen for this investigation because it is subjectively focused. Further, it allows the research to incorporate personal experience, which will be helpful when constructing a textual description of Sacred Breathwork. The heuristic methodology will be discussed at length in Chapter III.

As part of this literature review, current and historical analyses of overarching themes will be examined in order to better frame the experience of Sacred Breathwork. In order to help shed light on this phenomenon, the following essential areas will be examined: the spiritual-self, mystical states, the sacred, states of consciousness, the shamanic, ritual significance, evocative music, and transpersonal and Jungian psychology associations.

### Ancient Technique in Modern Times

Eastern yogis and indigenous tribes, such as the Kalahari !Kung of Africa, have been practicing breathing and rhythmic music methods as means to connect with the divine, as a route to self-awareness, or to achieve self-healing, since their cultures began. Author and researcher Paul Devereux’s life work focuses on the anthropology of consciousness and the study of sound in archaeological sites, called archaeoacoustics. Devereux notes one of the oldest shamanic-involved cultures, the San, operates in a healing trance dance still practiced by the Kalahari



!Kung (Devereux, 1997). These trance dances allow one to enter what is identified in this dissertation as a non-ordinary state of consciousness but can also be called a trance state. In this culture, a variety of trance dances supported by rhythmic sounds are aimed at achieving connection with the *n/um*, a metaphysical energy or force. Devereux (1997) highlighted one of the dominant dances:

[W]omen sitting around a central fire clap the rhythm of special songs while men stomp in a circle around them. Rattles are tied to their legs to enhance the rhythmic effect; sometimes sticks or staves add to the pounding beat. (p. 168)

Devereux goes on to say that with a lot of practice, individuals in this trance state can perform healing on others. Psychospiritual techniques such as breathwork incorporate evocative music, like the trance dances of the Kalahari !Kung, induce non-ordinary states of consciousness, and express the divine.

It should be noted that there are a variety of non-ordinary state induction methods combining breathing and rhythmic-evocative music used in western society; however, investigating these is outside the scope of this dissertation. Modern methods of inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness have many names and can be easily found through typing breathwork into an Internet search engine. There are professional networks that have international practitioners facilitating a variety of conscious breathworks. One prominent network is the International Breathwork Foundation (IBF). The IBF (2015) website reports, “For centuries Breathwork has been an element of Eastern spiritual traditions. Breathwork of various kinds is integral to the practice of meditation, yoga and tantra. In the West, the power of Breathwork was discovered in the mid-twentieth century by pioneers of psychotherapy such as Wilhelm Reich” (International Breathwork Foundation, 2015a). This statement echoes the message threaded throughout this study: the concept is not new, but rather a reawakening to

traditions used in sacred connection for healing. Similar to the breathwork applications described separately by the Grofs and Smith, other breathworks also allow individuals to release and resolve emotions, beliefs, and memories that conventional talk therapy finds inaccessible (IBF, 2015).

*Breathe Magazine*, edited by Robert Moore and in circulation from 1984-2009, focused solely on the varieties of conscious breathwork. This publication came out of an earlier one distributed by the *British Rebirth Society*. This, and other such publications and organizations, highlights a resurgence of interest in examining consciousness for the use of breathwork in holistic healing and connecting with the divine.

### **Holotropic Conduit Between the Shamanic and Psychology**

Dr. Annabelle Nelson (2007), a professor at Fielding Graduate University, touched upon the importance of marrying the development of both psychological and spiritual vectors in her spacious mind model. As she puts it, “the maturity of both are interrelated and promote holistic development” (p. 238). Like the work of Nelson, the intention of this investigation is to bring greater understanding and appreciation to the application and experience of Sacred Breathwork as an integrative holistic mechanism for transformation and healing.

Psychologically speaking, Sacred Breathwork falls under the psychosynthesis umbrella as a technique that suits both depth and transpersonal psychology due to its unconscious and Jungian applications. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2013), *psychosynthesis* is, “a form of psychotherapy combining psychoanalytic techniques with meditation and exercise.” Italian psychiatrist, humanistic, and transpersonal pioneer Roberto Assagioli (1965/2000), described psychosynthesis as, “the formation or reconstruction of the personality around the new center” (p. 26). Psychosynthesis integrates the dimensions of the

psyche and personality of an individual, which is parallel to Sacred Breathwork. Breathwork combines breathing and evocative music to induce and maintain a non-ordinary state of consciousness after which a creative expression is fashioned, followed by group processing to assimilate the unconscious and conscious processes.

The fundamental assumptions of this practice are therapeutic and healing in nature and create a bridge between psychology and the sacred realm. The fruition of Sacred Breathwork honors and recognizes Holotropic Breathwork, which was influenced by ancient and cross-cultural shamanic healing practices. Ancient cultures--and many existing indigenous cultures--valued non-ordinary states of consciousness. They saw them as a means to connect with sacred realities, nature, and one another. As previously mentioned, these non-ordinary states were also used to identify disease and heal, and were even considered a pathway to creative inspiration and developing intuition (Grof and Bennett, 1993).

It is necessary to pay homage to Stanislav and Christina Grof for introducing Holotropic Breathwork into the therapeutic field. The Grofs wrote extensively on important features of consciousness and developed a transpersonal cartography called the Basic Perinatal Matrix theory, a holotropic framework for consciousness that includes the *Systems of Condensed Experience* (COEX) that will be discussed later in this chapter. The holotropic mind is identified as fields of consciousness transcending space, matter, and linear causality (Grof, 1990). The holotropic mind is a collective cosmic intelligence expressed by and reflected as consciousness. Both Grof and Smith cite the work of physicist David Bohm as scientifically envisioning the universe in a holotropic manner. Bohm described the movement of all matter as a folding and unfolding, or holomovement, as he named it. Bohm (1987) said:

I propose something like this: Imagine an infinite sea of energy filling empty space, with waves moving around in there, occasionally coming together and producing an intense

pulse. Let's say one particular pulse comes together and expands, creating our universe of space-time and matter. But there could well be other such pulses. To us, that pulse looks like a big bang; in greater context, it's a little ripple. Everything emerges by unfoldment from the holomovement, then enfolds back into the implicate order. I call the enfolding process "implicating," and the unfolding "explicating." The implicate and explicate together are a flowing, undivided wholeness. Every part of the universe is related to every other part but in different degrees. (Bohm, para. 41)

Bohm suggested the universe was the result of this process of entangling and enfolding the past, present, and future. The notion of an infinite sea has some analogous properties to what Jung called the collective unconscious and may account for the hard to explain experiences, such as psychic phenomena that some experience. The act of entering non-ordinary states could be viewed as becoming consciously aware of this vast sea of possibilities that Bohm speaks of. This theory certainly makes room for the holotropic and transpersonal.

Stanislav and Christina Grof (2010) inferred that conventional psychiatry and psychology cannot account for the variety of experiences one may encounter while in a non-ordinary state of consciousness, and that these states have remarkable healing powers, which were used in ancient native cultures (pp. 7-8). The concepts of Grof's holotropic cartography of consciousness and Basic Perinatal Matrix will be explored next, along with gradations of consciousness states, such as the mystical.

### **The Embodied Breather**

As referenced earlier, connected abdominal breathing is also known as diaphragmatic breathing, or a deep belly breathing. This breathing involves contracting the diaphragm muscle located between the chest and stomach cavity. The goal is to expand the abdomen rather than the chest. The breathing starts off with slowing down and calming the body, and then over a period of time the pace is increased to a point that resembles hyperventilation. Theoretically, this assists in inducing a non-ordinary state of consciousness.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) recognizes breathing techniques as beneficial for relaxation, which is the initial step in helping an individual settle into the physical body. According to the NCCAM (2013), deep breathing exercises act, “to consciously produce the body’s natural relaxation response, characterized by slower breathing, lower blood pressure, and a feeling of calm and well-being” (para. 4). These measurable phenomena suggest that an alteration of the previous biological state has taken place. However, after centering, fast-paced breathing is executed to engage both the body and mind.

Anodea Judith, a mind-body specialist with a master’s in Clinical Psychology and a doctorate in Health and Human Services, wrote *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self* (Judith, 2004). In this book, she mentions the benefits of engaging the body in healing trauma. Judith outlines the eastern approach of the body’s energy system, focusing on the chakras – energetic and spiritual points within the body. These chakras have their own corresponding characteristics and color coding, resembling the range of the rainbow from red to violet going up the spine. Judith (2004) suggests the rainbow is an archetypal symbol and said, “crossing the rainbow bridge is a mythic metaphor for the evolution of consciousness” (p. 3). Judith wrote about eastern traditions like Hinduism, using various techniques to connect with the chakras for physical and spiritual growth. This chakra concept can be applied in Sacred Breathwork to help participants understand both somatic and spiritual experiencing.

Accordingly, there are seven chakras aligned in the center of the human body starting from the base of the spine and ending at the top of the head. Their names are the Muladhara, the Svadhistana, the Manipura, the Anhata, the Visshudha, the Ajna, and the Sahasrara. These flowing energy points are viewed as programs for operating the body, and as analogous to the

blood system, a life-force that sustains. Each chakra point is subject to blockages as well, however. The hardware is the body and the software is the programming (Judith, 2004). This indwelling corporeal energy is also referred to as the Kundalini energy in eastern traditions; this term comes from the Sanskrit kunda, meaning coiled (Khalsa, Rhada, Wilber, & Selby, 2009).

According to Andrew Newberg as quoted in Khalsa et al. (2009),

[i]n the Indian perspective, the life energy (also the energy of consciousness) comes into the egg through the sperm during conception, stimulates the growth of the fetus, and coils at the base of the spine – where it rests in stasis throughout our lives. (p. 23)

This energy is intended for connecting with the field of consciousness (Khalsa et al., 2009). When this coiled energy rises upward throughout the body it is called Kundalini awakening, in which the grounded energies of the body meet with the ethereal energies of consciousness. Judith (2004) states, “When difficulties persist, these coping strategies become chronic patterns, anchored in the body and psyche as defense structures” (pp. 16-17). These defenses can affect health and various areas of being. Judith also discusses bioenergetic charges and afterflow, writing that these charges may be experienced “when we become angry, excited, sexually aroused, scared, in love, or any number of intense emotional states” (p. 86). Afterflow and discharge are likely to occur following physical and energetic exercise.

Author Peter Levine holds doctorates in both psychology and medical biophysics. He practices body-psychotherapy and advocates learning self-regulation through somatic experiencing. Levine endorses the idea that trauma is not a mental problem but a bodily anomaly. In reinforcing the shamanic and indigenous intelligence behind healing, Levine (2010) noted, “The indigenous peoples throughout South America and Mesoamerica have long understood both the nature of fear and the essence of trauma. What’s more, they seemed to know how to transform it through their shamanic healing rituals” (p. 31).

Levine, like Judith, also wrote about the incidence of charges or bioenergetics. Levine (2010) explained that complications arise when:

These “discharges” are inhibited or otherwise resisted and prevented from completion, our natural rebounding abilities get “stuck.” Being stuck, after an actual or perceived threat, means that one is likely to be traumatized or, at least, to find that one's resilience and sense of OK-ness and belonging in the world have been diminished. (pp. 16-17)

Levine suggests that by conditioning the body to achieve high arousal states, people can learn to self-regulate in a more balanced way. This regulation can occur through the exploration of non-ordinary states of consciousness, and this mind-body collaboration can be considered a neurognostic potential, a limbic-cortex partnership. It is an artform and specialty that healers and medicine people of indigenous cultures have long practiced. According to professor and former APA division 30 and 32 president, Stanley Krippner (2000),

[n]eurognostic potentials provide the basis for those forms of perception, cognition, and affect that are structured by the organism's neurological systems. They are probably reflected in what Jungians call “archetypes,” which can be conceptualized as the predispositions that provide organizing principles for the basic modes of consciousness and elementary behavior patterns, including the intuitive capacity to initiate, control, and mediate everyday behavior. (p. 96)

The neurognostic potential is one biological perspective to understand how self-development through these high arousal states can occur. At the very least the metaphysical concept of chakras, charges, and discharges, can be a good owner's manual for categorizing the human experience of physical sensations. It helps make the spiritual tangible and exemplifies why it is so important to have a safe space with qualified facilitators ready to assist, should a breather have trouble navigating this terrain.

Judith described Stanislav Grof's Holotropic Breathwork as a regressive technique that activates the body, which happens to be only one aspect of the technique. Judith (2004) said Holotropic Breathwork “is a technique that releases deep tensions held in the body” (p. 100).

These tensions often cause the individual to make physical adjustments and shaky movements.

Levine (2010) described that

[s]haking and trembling reactions are also reported during the practices of traditional healing and spiritual pathways of the East. In Qigong and Kundalini yoga, for example, adepts who employ subtle movement, breathing and meditation techniques may experience ecstatic and blissful states accompanied by shaking and trembling. (p. 16)

These peculiar tremors have the potential to reset and resolve non-verbal trauma and blockages. As with yogic practices of mindfulness, meditation, and getting into posture, attuning and trusting the primal and instinctual intelligence of the body's system are essential.

### **States and Aspects of Consciousness**

Because Sacred Breathwork navigates conscious and unconscious psychological terrain, it is important to discuss states and aspects of consciousness. To recap Chapter I, conventional definitions of consciousness proved inadequate for this research. The idea that consciousness is just an awareness of the world and self is too simplistic. The conventional mechanistic and compartmentalized perspective is too limiting for the purposes of this research. It underestimates the human potential of consciousness described throughout this investigation. According to researcher Jurgen Kremer (2012) consciousness “thus can be productively conceptualized as [a] field of participatory events. Neither perspective (subjective or objective or somatic), is constant, but part of historical developments” (p. 50). At present, conventional psychology can be reduced to two primary opposing concepts of consciousness: the biological perspective and a theory that suggests consciousness is non-local. Conversely, there are the transcendent views of consciousness – such as the Buddhist yoga sutra, Jungian domains, and Grof's Basic Perinatal Matrix – that recognize a more extensive adaptation of theoretical perspectives of consciousness. Stanislav Grof's COEX system and the Jungian collective are transpersonal views of consciousness. Additionally, a third and even more controversial concept, quantum theory, has



emerged after 20 years of new scientific corroboration. The basics of each theory will be discussed.

### **The Biological Perspective**

This section will briefly attempt to illuminate how conventional reductionist and ego-based thinking may conflict with non-local, holotropic, and transpersonal empyrean experiences. René Descartes was a 17<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher whom many credit with being the father of modern philosophy. Descartes' *Discourse on Method* came in a series of visionary dreams that provided the foundation for modern science, an edifice of rational, reductionist thinking that can be applied to reject "subjective knowledge" (Grof, 1990). Cartesian philosophy concretely viewed the world as an exchange between mind and matter.

John Searle (2000) believes that consciousness is caused neurobiologically, that the brain structure is aware of what is occurring and that the biological structure of the brain itself makes reality. Searle (2000) says, "One of the chief functions of the brain is to cause and sustain conscious states" (p. 557). Searle asserts the primary function of the brain is to regulate consciousness. Another biological definition of consciousness, according to American biologist and Nobel Prize-winner Gerald Edelman (1989), is that

[c]onsciousness is a form of awareness and is thus a process, not a thing. It is personal (a property possessed by individuals or selves), and, as James observed, it is changing, continuous, deals mainly with objects independent of itself, and is selective in time. (pp. 4-5)

Edelman went on to discuss consciousness as a reflection of current or prior behaviors--relating to intentionality—that are used to make plans and act, thereby reducing consciousness to behavior. Edelman argued that consciousness arises from within the physical brain and can be explained by evolution and natural selection.

Biologically, there are five accepted criteria for consciousness: (a) self-awareness; (b) the

ability to perceive the relationship between oneself and one's environment; (c) subjectivity, a capacity to formulate personal opinion; (d) sentience, competence with feeling and perceiving the environment; and, (e) sapience, the ability to think about feelings or ideas and reach an intelligent conclusion (Gibb, 2007). These factors can be seen as necessary to an organism's survival but seem limiting when it comes to describing spiritual aspects of the self. The primary biological belief of consciousness can be briefly described as the result of sapient organic responses that perceptually categorize by discriminating through value-dominated memory called decision-making. For example, what is perceived now is a result of past experience or stimuli organically hardwired from birth. These criteria provide a framework for the biological perspective but do not account for understanding the multiplicity of consciousness that extends beyond these primary functions of surviving.

Recent neuroscientific research suggests there are reciprocal dynamic relationships of nested interconnectivity in various parts or levels of the brain (Kremer, 2012, p. 53). The examination of later Orch-OR theory will touch upon this neuroscientific interaction. Non-local, transpersonal, and holotropic concepts are more inclusive of spirituality and the notion of a higher self. Integrating these theories can assist in understanding the basic role of the brain's function when exploring the mystical quality of consciousness.

### **Quantum Microtubules Vibrations and Orchestrated Objective Reduction Theory**

In January 2014, *ScienceDaily* published a review of a controversial theory of consciousness introduced by mathematical physicist and philosopher Sir Roger Penrose along with anesthesiologist and University of Arizona professor Stuart Hameroff. Orchestrated Objective Reduction theory, also known as OR Orch-OR, was first proposed about 20 years ago. In layman's terms, Orch-OR proposes that consciousness operates in a wave-like fashion, and

that it selectively self-moderates. Hameroff and Penrose (1996) postulated that consciousness is projected or emanates from the microtubule component of the neuronal cytoskeleton. Penrose suggested that not all of conscious mental activity can be decoded or found, that a portion of consciousness is non-computable and deduction cannot be achieved through algorithm.

According to Hameroff and Penrose (1996),

[w]ithin the OR scheme, we consider that consciousness occurs if an appropriately organized system is able to develop and maintain quantum coherent superposition until a specific "objective" criterion (a threshold related to quantum gravity) is reached; the coherent system then self-reduces (objective reduction: OR). We contend that this type of objective self-collapse introduces non-computability, an essential feature of consciousness. (p. 36)

Quantum superposition is best described as timeless and spaceless until observation occurs.

Viewed another way: if something happens, it is always happening, and many possibilities coexist in uniform, wave-like functions. This suggests that consciousness is infinite and not bound by mechanistic and biological realities as proposed by certain theories. At the point of observation, the wave collapses based on the observer's subjective perspective. Furthermore, this indefinite superposition and orchestrated self-collapse creates more questions than answers, which in turn opens doors for both spiritual and biological approaches to consciousness. It appears scientists are not yet capable of quantifying this invisible component of this action. Perhaps this mysterious third component could be the missing connection to the sacred realm of which spiritualists speak.

The *ScienceDaily* article (Elsevier, 2014) suggested the theory has validity based on recent findings that support the microtubule Orch-OR expression of consciousness. Penrose (1994) said, "Physicists, who are more directly familiar with the puzzling and mysterious ways in which matter actually behaves, tend to take a less classically mechanistic view of the world than do the biologists" (p. 50). Penrose alluded to the platonic and mystical aspects of the

structure and processes of the mind, like the self-collapse of that which is non-computable and beyond intelligence. Hameroff and Penrose (1996) wrote, “the system must choose and decay (reduce, collapse) to a single universe state” (p. 507). This self-orchestrated collapse is an element of the mysterious and can be considered mystical in arrangement. According to Hameroff and Penrose (1996), “It can be argued that present-day physics has no clear explanation for the cause and occurrence of wave function collapse” (p. 38).

What’s more, Hameroff and Penrose hypothesized that consciousness is a result of a deeper level of quantum activity within the cytoskeletal, crystal-like structures located in the microtubules inside neurons. *ScienceDaily* acknowledged that the recent finding of warm temperature, quantum vibrations in these microtubules – research led by Dr. Anirban Bandyopadhyay at the National Institute for Materials Science in Japan—corroborates Roger and Penrose’s Orch-OR theory (Elsevier, 2014). Hameroff and Penrose (1996) identified microtubules as possessing the following: “crystal-like lattice structure, hollow inner core, organization of cell function and capacity for information processing” (p. 507). They further postulated that the microtubule vibrations could impact the electrophysiology of the brain (as measured by electroencephalography or EEG), which indicates an ability to stimulate brainwave frequency. According to the *ScienceDaily* article (Elsevier, 2014), “Clinical trials of brief brain stimulation aimed at microtubules resonances reported improvements in mood” (para. 6). This finding may support the idea that the application of music may stimulate or shift brainwave frequency. This will be briefly explored later in the section on evocative music, entrainment, and the third space.

This is cutting-edge science that needs more research, but growing evidence is building a solid foundation for Orch-OR theory. Hameroff also suggested that the fields of quantum theory

and quantum coherence describe fundamental behaviors of matter and energy that could be used as a path to understanding consciousness and that relate to music and even the structure of the universe. “Quantum vibrations in microtubules interfere to give beat frequencies seen as eEEG, and resonate with deeper level vibrations in the structure of the universe. So consciousness occurs at different scales, like octaves” (S. Hameroff, personal communication, June 18, 2014). Hameroff proposed that the mechanism of the microtubules’ vibrational expression of consciousness is similar to how music functions as a deeper mechanism of the universe, and went on to further suggest that consciousness *is* music.

A theological perspective proposed a vibratory notion of consciousness long before quantum theories. Hazrat Inayat Khan, founder of the Sufi Order in the West, was said to read and respect sacred texts from many religions, which assisted his own spiritual growth, beliefs, love of music, and understanding of reality. As result of his eclectic studies, Khan believed that humans are not only formed by but also live within vibrations. Likewise, the research above submits that consciousness is vibration-based and influenced. Khan advocated that moods, emotions, feelings, and thoughts are contingent upon these unseen vibrations. Khan (1923) said,

[t]here are two aspects of vibrations, fine and gross, both containing varied degrees. Some are perceived by the soul, some by the mind, and some by the eyes. What the soul perceives are the vibrations of the feelings; what the mind conceives are the vibrations of the thoughts; what the eyes see are the vibrations solidified from their ethereal state and turned into atoms which appear in the physical world, constituting the elements ether, air, fire, water and earth. The finest vibrations are imperceptible even to the soul. The soul itself is formed of these vibrations; it is their activity which makes it conscious. (p. 16)

Perhaps the invisible third component science has yet to quantify could be what Khan refers to as this finest imperceptible vibration of the soul. Conceivably this self-awareness in the origination of vibrational consciousness itself could prevent the ability to observe. Similar to the quantum theory, the point of observation is where the wave collapses based on the observer’s subjective

perspective.

### **The Non-Local Theory**

For the past 20 years, Pim van Lommel has studied near-death experiences (NDEs) in relation to the mind and consciousness (2013). Van Lommel is the first cardiologist to undertake a full, systemic study of patients who have survived near-death experiences. In 1986, van Lommel began asking his clients who had undergone cardiac resuscitation if they had any recollection of the period prior to being revived. What he discovered motivated him to study this phenomenon in depth.

Van Lommel asserts that the current view of consciousness held by physicians and psychologists is materialistic and is too restricted (2013). He states that an authentic near-death experience cannot be attributed to oxygen deprivation, one's imagination, or psychiatric disorder-based hallucination. Van Lommel (2013) found NDE to be, "an authentic experience which cannot be simply reduced to imagination, fear of death, hallucination, psychosis, the use of drugs, or oxygen deficiency. Patients appear to be permanently changed by an NDE during a cardiac arrest of only some minutes' duration" (p. 7). Van Lommel further inferred that consciousness could be experienced separately from the physical body as a non-local phenomenon. Additionally, he questioned if there is any biological basis to consciousness. Van Lommel (2013) wrote, "according to most people with an NDE, death is nothing other than a different way of being with an enhanced and broadened consciousness, which is everywhere at once because it is no longer tied to a body" (p. 11). This position, that self-awareness is not tied to the body, intersects with notions of a greater self that is expanded beyond material limits commonly referred to as "the soul" and which many psychospiritual theorists refer to as "the higher self." This is a complicated hypothesis but the notion can at the least provide reassurance

to a person experiencing such an event because it reduces the feeling of isolation.

Breathwork experiences, like shamanic ones, often include virtually indescribable non-verbal experiential encounters. Embarking on such journeying with the ego as guide can impede the process of broadening consciousness. Smith stated:

The Self who journeys in breathwork is higher than the ordinary ego-self identity and all its sub-persons or part-selves. It is the dream self in a dream body, and it is more connected to the Spiritual Self, so it is more conscious, more free, more creative, and can explore trauma history and zones of transpersonal experience – it is, in effect, a more awake self in service of the Spiritual Self and the everyday self. (C. M. Smith, personal communication, July 13, 2013)

Central to consciousness knowledge is recognizing that the non-local consciousness concept could be either threatening or liberating to the ego. Again this is important to note because of the ineluctable and transcendent qualities the mind can encounter during non-ordinary states of consciousness.

Van Lommel and psychologists Ruud van Wees and Vincent Meijers provided qualitative evidence for Van Lommel's non-local theory through a study he conducted on 344 patients at several Dutch hospitals between 1988 and 1992 (Van Lommel, 2013). Subjects were chosen without any advanced screening. The only criteria were that they had survived cardiac arrest during a proven, life-threatening crisis and, during the arrest, had experienced a period of unconsciousness. His team carefully recorded the subjects' medical information, including the length of unconsciousness and arrest. Also, data proving clinical death was collected from supporting medical devices such as the electrocardiogram (ECG) and defibrillator. Van Lommel (2013) identified clinical death for his purposes as "the period of unconsciousness caused by total lack of oxygen in the brain (anoxia) because of the arrest of circulation, breathing, or both" (p. 12). It is necessary to rectify such a condition within five to 10 minutes or the patient could suffer irreversible damage or even die. This is very close to the generally accepted concept of

the term *clinical death*, defined by the online Oxford English Dictionary (2014) as “death as judged by the medical observation of cessation of vital functions. It is typically identified with the cessation of heartbeat and respiration” (clinical death, 2014). However, it is still possible for a person who has experienced clinical death to be resuscitated and either restored to normal function or kept alive by artificial means such as life support. Van Lommel studied 344 patients; 18% of these reported a near-death experience. He reported his results as follows:

Of these 62 patients with memories, 21 patients (6%) had some recollection; having experienced only some elements, they had a superficial NDE with a low score. And 42 patients (12%) reported a core experience: 18 patients had a moderately deep NDE, 17 patients reported a deep NDE, and 6 patients a very deep NDE. The following elements were reported: half of the patients with an NDE were aware of being dead and had positive emotions, 30% had a tunnel experience, observed a celestial landscape, or met with deceased persons, approximately a quarter had an out-of-body experience, communication with ‘the light,’ or perception colours, 13% had a life review, and 8% experienced the presence of a border. (Van Lommel, 2013, p. 13)

These findings suggest varying degrees of awareness and consciousness unique to the individual; however, van Lommel was unable to account for any differences in consciousness in relation to the duration of clinical death and method of resuscitation. The length of unconsciousness experienced by the study’s subjects ranged from five minutes to three weeks in a coma. Despite this wide range, van Lommel did not detect any statistical significance related to the period of unconsciousness or resuscitation method. In addition, van Lommel (2013) noted, “Whether or not patients had heard or read anything about NDE in the past made no difference either. Any kind of religious belief, or indeed its absence in non-religious people or atheists, was irrelevant and the same was true for the standard of education reached” (p. 14).

When summarizing his findings, van Lommel explored areas such as the notion of change within these patients’ lives post-experience. He reported that all subjects expressed a feeling of having a new awareness of life following the near-death experience. For example, van



Lommel (2013) summarized these NDE survivors as:

less afraid of death and [possessing] a stronger belief in an afterlife. We saw in them a greater interest in spirituality and questions about the purpose of life, as well as a greater acceptance of love for oneself and others. Likewise, they displayed a greater appreciation of ordinary things, whereas their interest in possessions and power had decreased. The conversations also revealed that people had acquired enhanced intuitive feelings after an NDE, along with a strong sense of connectedness with others and with nature. (p. 16)

Coincidentally, these are all feelings that have been expressed by individuals embarking on a personal exploration or consciousness expanding effort such as Sacred Breathwork.

Demonstrating another connection to this type of work, van Lommel (2013) noted, “And it is also well established that people without any lack of oxygen in the brain, like in depression or meditation, can experience an ‘NDE’” (p. 14). This statement appears to draw conclusions relevant to the techniques used to induce a non-ordinary state of consciousness during Sacred Breathwork.

Furthermore, researcher and psychiatrist Mark Germain capitalizes on the experimental and emerging theory of consciousness, quantum measurement, and nonlocality. Germain (2015) developed the Holographic Principle Theory of Mind, which

holds that the information in any region of space and time exists on the surface of that region. The holographic, universal “now” goes from the inception of the universe to the present. Universal Mind is the timeless source of actuality and mentality. Information is experience, and the expansion of the “now” leads to higher and higher orders of experience in the Universe, with various levels of consciousness emerging from experience. (p. 2)

This holographic theory proposes a framework for the Universal Consciousness and makes room for spiritual implications. Universal Consciousness is another way to describe the collective consciousness. According to Germain (2015),

[e]vidence from a wide variety of contexts indicates the capacity of the mind for total recall of past life events and for access to universal information, indicating connection with the Universal holographic boundary. In summation, the Holographic Principle can help us explain the unity and mechanisms of perception, experience, memory, mind, and

divinity. (p. 2)

Additionally, this holographic process includes the potential observation of all experiences, even going back to the universe's inception, which can establish a cosmology of high orders of information experience that is naturally consciously developed and expressed on the surface of the Universal Boundary (Germine, 2015, p. 6). The following will include a review on the transcendent perspectives of consciousness, as the breathwork experience appears to align more with the non-local and transpersonal paradigms.

### **Transpersonal, Buddhist, and Jungian Perspectives on Consciousness and the Higher Self**

*“Without the transcendent and the transpersonal, people get sick, violent, and nihilistic, or else hopeless and apathetic.” ~ Abraham Maslow (1968, p. iv)*

The transpersonal viewpoint of consciousness is outside the domain of uncovering where consciousness originates, and more about the being or multiplicity of consciousness. In the documentary by K. Page, *Science of the Soul: The Story of Transpersonal Psychology* (2006), Stanislav Grof states: “Transpersonal psychology deepens the connection to a higher meaning and purpose to life. It’s a system of thinking that covers all varieties of the human experience, including non-ordinary states of consciousness.”

To further develop an understanding of states of consciousness, professors Allen Combs and Stanley Krippner (2003) offered a middle ground characterization of what states of consciousness consists of, being, “—ordinary wakefulness, sleeping and dreaming states, meditative and drug-elicited states, etc.—occur when elements of our experience such as thoughts, memories, emotions, and perceptions, combine to form the unique dynamic patterns of activity that characterize each such state (Combs & Krippner, 2003, p. 55).

However, these collective psychological functions, especially in spiritual experiences, act in

complex ways that even these specialists cannot fully explain without incorporating a mystical description: “in many wisdom traditions these are said to be more than states of consciousness, but independent realities or realms of being (Combs & Krippner, 2003, p. 55).

In spite of this, much of conventional psychology is focused on the Freudian concept of consciousness or the behavioral approach to treatment. The Freudian attitude is to concentrate on making behavioral adjustments by altering and controlling impulses or eliminating destructive behaviors, rather than on personal growth and developing altruistic qualities.

The Buddhist perspective, achieving Samadhi, the experience of inner unity, is a timeless, boundless, and changeless state. It extends beyond Jung’s collective unconscious and includes the idea of karma and intuition as influences on non-Samadhi consciousness. The Samadhi is known as the fourth state of human consciousness and is a transcendent and spiritual type of consciousness that exists outside of the definition of psychological theories. According to Mike Sayama (1986) the Buddhist theory “postulates the storehouse Unconscious (*alaya vijnana*) which contains the images of cosmogenesis. Beyond the storehouse unconscious is the transcendent Unconscious which is beyond the duality of consciousness and unconscious” (p. 10). Buddhist metapsychology also goes on to note nine structures that comprise the development of consciousness: “the five senses (*vijnanas*), the intellect (*manovijnana*), the ego (*manas*), the storehouse unconscious (*alayavijnana*), and the transcendent Unconscious (*adarsanajnana*)” (Sayama, 1986, p. 91). The Self in this tradition is the awareness of the field of our own intersubjectivity. This calls to mind the earlier concept suggested about group intersubjectivity and the awareness of personality development. If one has the opportunity to individually experience, beyond the limitations of these nine structures and outside influences, would one then have a better chance for transformation or for remembering wholeness?

As discussed previously, Sacred Breathwork offers the opportunity to address issues such as personality peculiarities, unconscious behaviors, personal growth, and development of the spiritual-self, through accessing this non-ego based Self. These issues can be addressed through the acts of participant commitment, engagement, re-enactment, and the experience of catharsis; each will be explored later in this section.

Understanding the dominant theories that predated and influenced transpersonal psychology is pertinent to recognizing and developing appreciation for the Sacred Breathwork process. Although the perspectives of Assagioli and Jung share transpersonal similarities, there is a key difference between them. Hardy (1987) noted this and said, “Assagioli parts company with Jung, because Assagioli regards the Self as a part of the person, even though it is also astride the Infinite. For Jung, however, it is an archetype” (p. 57). Subsequently, Jung’s personality theory and archetypes will be discussed.

Jung’s personality theory involved archetypes within the collective unconscious and is best understood as a construct of all consciousness without the limitations of culture, space, and time. According to Tepes (2013) it

indicates the presence of some form of universal psychic spread. Mythological research calls them reasons, while in the psychology of primitives they correspond to the concept of representation collectives and in the comparative study of religions they were defined as a category of imagination (p. 66)

There are 12 widely accepted universal archetypes that Tepes highlights, according to research conducted by C. S. Pearson and H. K. Marr in 2002, are: innocent, orphan, warrior, caregiver, seeker, lover, creator, destroyer, ruler, magician, sage, and jester (as cited by Tepes, 2013). Jung mentions the Great Mother, the Trickster, Anima, Animus, the Shadow, the Child, the Puer/Puella, and the Self as archetypes (Jung, 1959/1968). Robert McPeck (2008), research director at the Center for Applications of Psychological Type, wrote that archetypes are “evident

in the commonality of characters and storylines in our myths, fairy tales, novels, and films” (p. 53).

A client-centered approach to delivering the archetypal theme is preferred when narrating the client’s tale in a manner that is relevant to them. Jung identified the collective unconscious as distinct from the personal unconscious and as a part of the unconscious that permeates all of humanity and life forms. What some academics have found hard to accept is that Jung proposed that this collective unconscious is inherited from pre-existing life forms. Nevertheless, these archaic images and myths are a means to recognizing purpose and resolving conflict. This conflict was often a part of what Jung coined “the Shadow.” Jung (1959/1968 said,

Filling the conscious mind with ideal conceptions is a characteristic of Western theosophy, but not the confrontation with the Shadow and the world of darkness. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. (pp. 265-267)

Jungian archetypal psychology brings an awareness to unconscious activities by identifying them as themes of shared human experience, a process of symbolic story telling that helps normalize and frame the client’s own behaviors and experiences.

In *Psychology With a Soul*, Hardy discussed psychosynthesis elements such as working on subpersonalities and impulses that derive from the lower unconscious (1987, p. 60).

Regarding the nature of the self and sub-personalities, Assagioli described these personalities as roles, rather than selves. Assagioli (1965/2000) wrote,

each one of us has different selves—according to the relationships we have with other people, surroundings, groups, etc., and it is well for us not to identify ourselves with any of these ‘selves,’ and to recognize that these are all roles that we play. (pp. 74-75)

Like Jung, Assagioli also put emphasis on developing conscious recognition of unconscious driven behaviors in the various roles humans play. Jung called such roles a persona, a subpersonality, “the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the

mask of the actor” (Jung, 1959/1968, p. 20).

Jung referred to the spontaneous unconscious surfacing of feelings, impulses, and images and maintained that they could be resolved through cathartic confession. He wrote:

The psychoanalytic aim is to observe the shadowy presentation—whether in the form of images or of feelings—that are spontaneously evolved in the unconscious psyche and appear without his bidding to the man who looks within. In this way we find once more things that we have repressed or forgotten. Painful though it may be, this is in itself a gain—for what is inferior or even worthless belongs to me as my Shadow and gives me substance and mass. (1933, p. 35)

The full catharsis promoted by Sacred Breathwork not only serves as an opportunity to observe unconscious material but, at the very least, to make available the ability to engage, re-enact, recreate, and re-negotiate unconscious material. An individual could become deeply entranced, experience unity, or Samadhi as mentioned earlier, and might not have total recall of the event. However, this is where the felt sense and creative processing assist with bringing the non-verbal and ineffable to consciousness. Also, the breather’s ally, the facilitator, and other group members can respectfully share their observations should the individual desire to know details.

Also deserving of examination is the client’s attitude relative to preparedness and level of commitment to engaging Sacred Breathwork. Being unprepared or resistant to the mechanisms behind NOSC may serve as a block to the full range of the experience. It could prevent an individual from having a transformative, transcending, or at the least relaxing experience. Potential clients should be screened objectively about readiness for such an experience and willingness to dis-identify with the conscious ego-based personality. A client’s ability to dis-identify with the ego self and the limitations of ordinary consciousness will assist in accessing this pure self-awareness. Clearly, transpersonal and Jungian perspectives on consciousness can be readily applied to help understand the psychological underpinnings of Sacred Breathwork.

**Grof's Basic Perinatal Matrix and COEX System**

In addition to being integral to the development of Transpersonal Psychology, Stanislov Grof created an in-depth mapping of the human psyche, a comprehensive theoretical pre- and peri-natal psychology. Through observing thousands of people engaging in non-ordinary states of consciousness, Grof found that these events included early fetal and neonatal phenomenon. Grof then discovered a wide range of themes that challenged orthodox Freudian and conventional psychology, which supported his extension of consciousness. He concluded that there are three overlapping layers of experience in an individual's consciousness. First is the biographical, which consists of the material that shapes the human psyche related to environment and experience. Second is the perinatal, which includes the experiences that deal with gestation, birth, labor, and delivery. The perinatal layer has four levels, which Stanislov Grof termed the Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM) and will be discussed in the next section. The third layer is the transpersonal, where an individual accesses information and memories beyond the first two levels of experience; this is the realm of the collective and the divine.

The first BPM is the amniotic universe, characterized by oceanic feelings of union with the mother; BPM II is a no-exit and cosmic engulfment; BPM III is the death-rebirth struggle; and, BPM IV is birth, death, rebirth and separation from the mother. Grof said these holotropic experiences were accompanied by memories that recreate uterine conditions of safety, unity, and connection (Grof and Bennett, 1993).

Perinatal Matrix I consists of the intrauterine unity between fetus and mother. Grof said individuals accessing these memories relive the chemical and emotional conditions of the womb. Some examples would be the mother experiencing significant stress, using or abusing substances, having feelings of ambivalence toward the pregnancy, or considering termination of

the pregnancy. Perinatal Matrix II is the encounter with uterine contractions and the exit from the womb. Grof and Bennett (1993) identified this stage as pertaining “to our experiences when contractions begin but before the cervix opens” (p. 30). In Perinatal Matrix II, a person may feel as though he or she is experiencing the stress and anxiety caused by natural and toxic-feeling chemicals being emitted prior to the cervix opening. In Perinatal Matrix III, a person may relive the trauma experienced during passage through the birth canal, complications such as the umbilical cord wrapping around the neck, or not being able to be born naturally (i.e. by caesarian section). Perinatal Matrix IV was described by Grof and Bennett (1993) as “the culmination of the struggle in the birth canal, the moment of birth itself, and the situation immediately following delivery” (p. 72). The passage between BPM III and IV is often associated with ego death and rebirth. Individuals have reported accurate details regarding their birth experiences without previous knowledge, such as delivery with forceps or being born in breech position (S. Grof, 1990).

Grof also identified problematic patterned sequences of trauma and re-traumatization that he termed “Systems of Condensed Experience” (COEX). These are akin to the Buddhist ideas of karma and intuition in that they influence consciousness and impact behaviors and personality development. According to Metzner (2009), “the relationship of consciousness to self-perception is mysterious and elusive: becoming conscious of different aspects of one’s self is seen in psychology as a positive, healthy development” (p. 8). The transpersonal position suggests that using the COEX system can promote healthy self-development. This scheme is considered a constellation of emotionally charged memories in non-linear fashion that organize one’s psyche. According to Grof (1990),

COEX systems affect every area of our emotional lives. They can influence the way we perceive ourselves, other people, and the world around us. They are the dynamic forces



behind our emotional and psychosomatic symptoms, setting the stage for the difficulties we have relating to ourselves and other people. There is a constant interplay between the COEX systems of our inner world and events in the external world. External events can activate corresponding COEX systems within us. (p. 25)

This COEX system is best described as a deeply rooted emotional script that influences perceptions and attempts to draw opportunities to resolve conflict. These are things that relate not only to the individual but also to cultural propensity – the perception and treatment of other cultures. The following section will address the need to attend to cultural significance when utilizing ancient healing techniques.

### **Culture and Misappropriation: Addressing Ethnicity Ethics**

There is a very real tendency in certain parts of U.S. society and disciplines to appropriate Native American culture in a disrespectful and mindless fashion. It is important to address the ethical dilemma of delivering this spiritual modality in academia, because the basis of this technique pre-existed in an indigenous society, one that continues to endure misappropriation, racism, colonization, and oppression.

There are nine areas of cultural appropriation: archaeological finds, human remains, genetic material, artistic content, tangible works of art, artistic subject matter, traditional knowledge, and religious beliefs/practices (Young & Brunk, 2012). These last two, traditional knowledge and religious beliefs/practices will be discussed as they are directly related to Sacred Breathwork. Ziff said cultural appropriation, “speaks of takings ‘from a culture that is not one’s own’” (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 2). Cultural misappropriation is complex, but it is important to note that Sacred Breathwork was not taken from one particular tradition. The evolution of humans from cavemen to modern Homo sapiens was a natural, necessary, and instinctive process—the same should hold true for healing techniques. Although the traditions must be carefully maintained and held sacred, in some cases adaptation to the contemporary needs of humans is

inevitable. While western medicine has proven to decrease and control some physical illnesses, it has yet to address psychological and spiritual ailments adequately. Moreover, it would be a great disservice to the future of humanity should psychology not sincerely incorporate shamanic, eastern, and Native American traditional healing modalities. A sincere attempt to integrate these practices with western medicine would mean that individuals are not participating in misappropriating knowledge and traditions nor are practitioners reducing or oversimplifying the ineffable simply to insure accessibility or commercial success. As mentioned before, the knowledge of Sacred Breathwork shared in this study is not intended for use by unqualified individuals.

When using a spiritual approach to psychotherapy, one must consider the importance of learning to respectfully navigate and honor cultural borders and boundaries. A facilitator must not dishonor a long-standing tradition by acting blindly or imitating. This extends to respecting a client's personal belief system and having the ability to be spiritually neutral. If dogma regarding religious or spiritual orientation creeps in to the experience, a person may feel criticized or confined, which may result in injury to self-esteem and identity. Just as clinicians are asked to evaluate non-spiritual transference and counter transference, spirituality is another dimension of such potentials.

As mentioned earlier, Sacred Breathwork evolved separately but was influenced by Grof's Holotropic Breathwork. Like Holotropic Breathwork, Sacred Breathwork integrates insights from contemporary consciousness research, anthropology, depth and transpersonal psychology, the felt sense, and various mystical indigenous traditions of the world.

The term "indigenous" is being used throughout this study as it presents as the most suitable and respectful when referring to the peoples associated with the ancient and innate

wisdom of cultures in balance with multiple realities. The rise of New Age romantics and neoshamans interested in indigenous teachings has led to exploitation of Native American traditional teachings. Since the term “shamanic” originated in Russia as a term used to describe individuals of the Tuvan of Siberia (Narby & Huxley, 2004), the habit of American literature and research to popularize the term and to generically apply it to Native American medicine people is understandably objectionable to some Native American traditionalists.

Sensitivity is also needed when referring to indigenous ethnicity. For example, the terms American Indian and Native American may be offensive to some and not others. Furthermore, some individuals in Native American tribes identify more with their tribal, clan, or nation name. Something else to bear in mind is that, “Healing is only one aspect of culture, and spiritual healers are in the minority, no matter what their ethnicity” (Cohen, 2006, p. 12). This speaks to the tendency in Western society to stereotype all Native Americans as universally spiritual, shamanic, alcoholic, dependent on welfare or casino revenues, running around every day wearing traditional clothing and feather war bonnets, and living in tipis. Conversely, some things to appear consistently among indigenous groups are that worship is exclusive to a creator that inhabits all living things and that nature is to be honored and revered. Lastly, it is important to remember that just because people possess indigenous heritage, it does not mean they can’t be interested in and a part of contemporary living or Western religions.

### **Dr. C. Michael Smith**

Dr. C. Michael Smith, architect of Sacred Breathwork, is a clinical psychologist with medical, anthropological, and theoretical foci on the study of cross-cultural indigenous healing systems, including the shamanic. It is important to illuminate the shamanic roots of Sacred Breathwork, since techniques similar to this have been practiced in one way or another in

indigenous cultures from ancient to modern times. On the subject of evolution, to progress means that anticipation, planning, preparing, and adjusting will insure a better future individually and collectively. “The principle of evolution requires that its progressive movement not only anticipates a future but is ‘born’ from that which has gone before” (Gustafson, 1997, p. 101).

Smith, also known as Mikkal, was previously an ordained Christian minister and theologian. He holds two doctorates from the Chicago Theological Seminary and a certificate in Analytical Psychology from the C G Jung Institute of Chicago. Smith has written two books, *Psychotherapy and the Sacred* and *Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue*; both were of considerable use in this exploration of Sacred Breathwork. Smith follows Mircea Eliade in calling the shaman a technician of the sacred and cites the impossibility of understanding the opulence of shamanism without first acquiring a basic acquaintance with the sacred’s role and the shaman’s or technician’s relation to it.

Smith says the shaman experiences a strong urge to enter into the sacred vocation, which suggests the individual believes there is a personal duty to carry out this calling. Smith (2007) wrote, “the shaman is the ritual master of the sacred, being able to effectively locate, guard, and utilize the creative and sometimes dangerous energies of the sacred for therapeutic or other socially beneficial purposes” (p. 37). In a personal correspondence, Smith outlined the differences between his Sacred Breathwork and Grof’s Holotropic Breathwork. He said that his background as a medical anthropologist gifted him with the cross-cultural knowledge of an important factor, that non-ordinary states and therapeutic ecstatic trances are frequently socially witnessed participatory community events in traditional societies (C. M. Smith, personal communication, July 13, 2013). Smith claims that Stanislov Grof sees the holotropic principle as analogous to an immune system for the psyche that is responsible for the healing. The main

items Smith uses from Grof are in the areas of cartography and bodywork, reframed in a sacred context. According to Smith,

I have crafted what I learned from him into a ceremony. Perhaps the number one defining feature of Sacred Breathwork, that distinguishes it from Holotropic Breathwork, it casts the whole ceremony in sacred context. It is the invocation of the divine, or the sacred or ultimate reality, and of beings in that reality, who are angelic, spiritual in essence, and serve as guides. Grof defines the healing force in the psyche in secular terms calling it the holotropic principle, which moves the language of the sacred, that is devotional, prayerful, reverent, and like indigenous cultures, they don't use abstract secular principles, they tend to think of whoever is behind the ceremony is of divine origin, and quite numinous. (C. M. Smith, personal communication, December 6, 2014)

Smith believes a central distinction between the two types of breathwork is that Sacred Breathwork does not recognize the holotropic force as the primary factor for transformation and that Sacred Breathwork is more explicitly transpersonal (C. M. Smith, personal communication, July 13, 2013). Smith (2013) further explained an original element of Sacred Breathwork, noting,

The theory is rigorously structured on the rites of passage model, and ritual process developed by Robert Moore, into three phases, and the music follows these phases: 1) Separation (destructuring habitual consciousness) 2) Initiation into personal and transpersonal realms of psyche or soul, 3) a return to the local social order and everyday reality, with the Facilitator self-identified, and holding in theory and practice, as a responsible ritual elder. This three-fold structure mirrors the archetype of the hero's journey and is the implicit and necessary template. (C. M. Smith, personal communication, July 13, 2013)

Smith went on to articulate the role his shamanic-influenced ceremonies play in a workshop; concepts such as the sacred fire, sacred pipe, and vision quest are combined to enhance Sacred Breathwork's communion with the sacred and to support the efficacy of completion. He also identified the music structure as based on ritual process in three phases, with an emphasis on evocative sacred music, emotionally soothing and releasing music, and to close, grounding, nature-infused music. He also asserts, unlike Grof, that an unequivocal component of difference is that one must incorporate within the music sequence the opportunity to attune to the Divine (C. M. Smith, personal communication,

July 13, 2013). Smith also provides a psychoeducational introduction to the breathwork process prior to commencement, as well as added hypnotic suggestion in the induction and closing.

It is important to acknowledge that approaching the sacred for research purposes might be seen as violating the divine elements within breathwork. For this reason, the researcher assiduously advocates veneration for the sacred and divine while at the same time recognizing that thoughtful, qualitative research can help shed light and foster appreciation for those who engage the sacred. The remainder of this chapter will explore viewpoints that conventional psychology often overlooks and appears to underestimate; ideas that transpersonal and Jungian psychology embrace, such as the mystical or numinous.

### **The Spiritual-Self**

The spiritual dimension of the self often befuddles academia because of its elusive, transcendental, and cosmically inclusive nature. This literature review revealed an assortment of theories pertaining to the dimensions of the self that relate to spirituality. There are various speculations that postulate the existence of a Self, sometimes referred to as a true, a higher, or core self; the essence of this self has been briefly touched upon in earlier sections, such as that of Eastern perspectives on consciousness, but will be discussed at more depth at this point.

Nelson (1993) states that the Sanskrit term used to identify the Self is called the *atman*:

[T]he unconscious mind holds many benefits for the individual. It holds what the Hindus call the *atman* or the spirit self, which is connected to the life force that pervades all things. It also holds what humanistic psychology calls the actualizing tendency or the unconscious force that creates healing and self-fulfillment. (p. 8)

There is a belief that humans are spiritual beings, having a human experience. These notions indicate a complex multiplicity of the Self. Many psychologists agree that there is an overall, core self, but the focus on the spiritual-self in this research is more aligned with what

psychologist Dr. Franklin Sollars identifies as the transcendent or immanent elements of the core self (2014). He suggests this core self lives from the heart in relation to others. Sollars (2014) said, "when real understanding and empathy are possible, appearances become less important, and rules and laws are secondary to the dictates of the heart. The other rests inside us in a felt, not intellectualized, capacity" (p. 4).

Sollars also proffers that a transpersonal position of the core self is dependent upon a liberated ego. For Sollars (2014), "Only when self-defensive anxieties, impulses, and wishes have been significantly resolved can the ego surrender itself to the core self, with its firm but fluid boundaries between self and other" (p. 6). Sollars' description of the core self speaks to the dimension of what this study recognizes as the spiritual-self, which is heart-centered and transcendent of the ego.

Hardy (1987) wrote on the spiritual psychotherapy and psychosynthesis created by Assagioli (1965/2000), who subscribed to the transpersonal nature concept of humans. The psychosynthesis model incorporates mystical and spiritual content of both eastern and western paradigms. The core Self, according to Hardy, is a universal and individual blend of being that embodies purity, peace, and serenity. She notes that the universal self remains at the core, unlike the individual self, which can lose itself because it is ego based. Hardy says there are ways in which an individual could awaken and connect to a transcendent existence. Hardy describes seven psychosynthesis paths to the Higher Self, but the last is the most pertinent to this research. Hardy (1987) wrote, "The final way is through ritual or ceremony, through rites of initiation which can awaken the spiritual consciousness" (p. 59). This seventh and final psychosynthesis path is shamanically characteristic because of its ritual and ceremonial aspects. Furthermore, Hardy (1987) asserts, "In transpersonal psychotherapy terms, the search for spiritual meaning is

also the search for the Self, the ‘God within,’ which is linked to the soul of the world” (p. 61). This universal, Higher Self exists in a transcendent state that can be reached through the use of ritual and ceremony, of the type that is the nucleus of Sacred Breathwork, and can assist in accessing the inner healer.

Smith offered this well-defined explication of the Spiritual-self:

The Spiritual-self is our higher or deeper Self, our center of freedom and creative agency. It transcends the human, but seeks full incarnation . . . Psychologically speaking we are multiplex beings with many selves, and many centers of consciousness, at various levels. (C. M. Smith, personal communication, July 13, 2013)

Smith also claimed that this Spiritual-self is the orchestrator of all these selves.

A definition proposed by this research is that the spiritual-self is the core life force within the human vessel that is intrinsically altruistic and desires full integration of all Selves in connection with the collective and divine. It should be considered the crux of a person's identity, one's natural state of being, the Self that presides over others and is directly in union with the divine. The spiritual-self has a dilemma in that, as a result of the materialistic world and the ego's distortions, it is often the most enslaved part of the Self. As Sollars (2014) alluded, the liberation of the ego from anxiety and impulses is crucial to actualizing the core self, or in this orientation, the spiritual-self.

Joseph Campbell, writer and mythologist, wrote and lectured extensively on the human experience concerning spirituality. With reference to liberation and transcendence, Campbell (2008) wrote, “Finally, the mind breaks the bounding sphere of the cosmos to a realization transcending all experiences of form—all symbolizations, all divinities: a realization of the ineluctable void” (p. 163). Campbell draws attention to the ineffable quality of this ineluctable void, a state of awareness outside of anxieties, impulses, and even defense mechanisms that experiences a part of the self beyond ego-based consciousness.



Campbell long ago articulated the importance of having an open awareness and appreciation for religious experiences. He said,

The ultimate is openness—the void, or being, beyond the categories—into which the mind must plunge alone and be dissolved. Therefore, God and gods are only convenient means—themselves of the nature of the world of names and forms, though eloquent of, and ultimately conducive to, the ineffable. They are mere symbols to move and awaken the mind and to call it past themselves. (Campbell, 2008, pp. 221-222)

This openness can only be achieved through the transcendence, not annihilation, of the ego; otherwise, anxiety and impulse can disrupt the process of recognizing the value of the spiritual-self.

William James, an American philosopher and psychologist, set up one of the first psychology laboratories in the United States. James (1902) advocated for the importance of being apprised of the religious and mystical experience. James emphasized the importance of acknowledging and appreciating the spiritual genius. An ego-based quandary, which interrupts the actualizing of the spiritual-self, is that visionary spiritual experiences are pathological. For instance, James spoke about experiences that a dedicated religious or spiritual person might have that were viewed as pathological by conventional psychology. He attributed religious fervor to that of genius-type ability, James (1902) said,

but such individuals are “geniuses” in the religious line; and like many other geniuses that have brought forth fruits effective enough for commemoration in the pages of biography, such religious geniuses have often shown symptoms of nervous instability. Even more perhaps than other kinds of genius, religious leaders have been subject to abnormal psychical visitation. Invariably they have been creatures of exalted emotional sensibility. Often they have led a discordant inner life and had melancholy during a part of their career. They have known no measure, been liable to obsessions and fixed ideas; and frequently they have fallen into trances, heard voices, seen visions, and presented all sorts of peculiarities, which are ordinarily classed as pathological. Often, moreover, these pathological features in their career have helped to give them their religious authority and influence. (pp. 4-5)

James touched upon the dissonance between spirituality and conventional psychology.

Reflecting on the notion that conventional psychology may not wholly value the spiritual-self, a client with religious or spiritual vigor looking for therapy might be apprehensive about receiving conventional psychological services, and that individual might not receive fair or appropriate treatment. James (1902) further stated,

To the psychologist the religious propensities of man must be at least as interesting as any other of the facts pertaining to his mental constitution. It would seem, therefore, that, as a psychologist, the natural thing for me would be to invite you to a descriptive survey of those religious propensities. (p. 2)

James suggested at the very least, a psychologist should be open to inviting religious propensities into the therapy space. This justifies on a core level the importance of marrying psychology and the spiritual, with the intention that a client with religious proclivity receive fair treatment. This is a central rationale for including spiritually honoring techniques, such as Sacred Breathwork, in the therapeutic process. The remainder of this section will elaborate on the characteristics of the Spiritual-self.

There is a long-standing assertion that the spiritual dimension of the self is essential and alive with consciousness that extends beyond the standard operations of the physical self.

According to Mann (1998):

In the spiritual or metaphysical view of the self, the essential Self or soul exists within each of us. The soul has consciousness that continues throughout eternity, and this consciousness is not bound by time and space. Life, as consciousness, began before we were born and continues after the death of the physical body. Consciousness moves through the illusion of time from one incarnation to another, adopting the form of the current physical body. (p. 85)

The concept of soul is difficult for academia to digest; the term Spiritual-self is therefore used in its place. Mann vividly articulates the metaphysical or mystical view of the self as something that is beyond time and space, a notion that demands transcendence of scientific enculturation. Furthermore, the metaphysical and mystical distinction of the soul comes

from a different reality of thought, a reality that does not espouse epistemological inquiry but rather relies on the experience of the incorporeal, as well as on faith and belief. Therefore, since offering an epistemological definition of soul is not appropriate, the term “spiritual-self” has been introduced in an attempt to satisfy the intellectual inquiry of this numinous aspect.

It is important to convey the complexity of positioning the sacred in an academic manner, when academia is secularly and scientifically based. The sacred in context of this research is a division of the mystical and concerns spiritual matters. Justin Poll and Timothy Smith, counseling psychology professors at Brigham Young, (2003) said, “Though James (1890) argued that experiencing the ‘spiritual me’ may be understood as strictly psychological and physiological processes, he acknowledged the plausibility of more *metaphysical* explanations provided through the concept of the soul” (p. 130). This statement inadvertently calls attention to the necessity of acknowledging the concept of the soul in relation to the multiple dimensions of the self. However, this multi-dimensional self can acknowledge that humans have multiple states of consciousness, personality features, and habits of being that are lived out through the influence of beliefs, the material world, and the senses. The belief component is inclusive of the incorporeal divine, the metaphysical, and the mystical.

### **Mystical States**

As evidenced thus far, there is an epistemological and psychological espousal of thinking about the self in terms of dimensions – as, instead, the selves. However, it is important to make clear the sacred and mystical nature of the self so that the quantum expression of consciousness that extends past matter, space, and time can be comprehended. Temple (2009) said, “Many

spiritual traditions throughout history have shown us the way to this timeless reality.” For example, ideas such as reincarnation, free will, the collective conscious, and destiny are each relevant to the spiritual aspect of the self and applicable to experiencing a mystical state. James wrote about the mystical state and argued for the need to accept and appreciate mysticism. James (1902) said,

Personal religious experience has its roots and centre in mystical states of consciousness, so for us, who in these lectures are treating personal experience as the exclusive subject of our study, such states of consciousness ought to form the vital chapter from which the other chapters get their light. (p. 292)

James went on to discuss his role in providing treatment as coming from a place of objectivity, to be receptive to the reported significance of these states. Furthermore, James noted the value in decreasing the debate over mystical states’ legitimacy.

James outlined the features of the mystical states of consciousness: (a) the ineffability in that the state of the mystical challenges verbal expression; (b) noetic quality, such as what he called feeling states or mystical states that are experiences of gaining profound insight and knowledge and can best be summed up as increasing sagacity; (c) transiency in that these states are impermanent and can be sustained anywhere from a half hour to two hours. James (1902) wrote, “Mystical states cannot be sustained for long. Except in rare instances, half an hour, or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day” (p. 293). The final trait, (d) passivity, means that participants enter into such a state voluntarily; however, at the point of engagement of such a state in which the individual experiences trance, “the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power” (James, 1902, p. 293). In a true mystical state this phenomenon of engaging with another personality or entity is not interruptive and most of the participant’s memory remains intact. The next area for discussion is the nuclide of inspiration for

investigating the experience of Sacred Breathwork.

### **Non-Dogmatic Spirituality**

Spirituality as covered herein is not centered on positioning principles as incontrovertible truths nor, as mentioned earlier, on finding fault with religious spirituality. This section will examine the non-dogmatic nature of spirituality. For this dissertation the phrase *spirituality* or *spiritual-self* will be used in a non-religious manner; the discussion will be brief because it is impossible to cover in its entirety in this review. Historically speaking, spirituality is most studied in a religious context. Spirituality and religion are separate and distinct concepts, but both may employ transposable traditions. Spirituality is more esoteric and mystical because of its quest for hidden mysteries, it calls for exploration and to rely upon oneself in connection to the divine. Religion focuses on separating the divine from humanity and requires individuals to pursue an outside force that's godly. Sacred Breathwork does not require one to subscribe to a particular religion but rather to be appreciative and respectful of spirituality and the many facets through which it can be expressed.

Spirituality is also a term that is most commonly used in a religious context, which contributes to the perplexity generated by its use. Spirituality is a state of being, and according to Merriam-Webster online (2013) *spiritual* is, "of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit; of or relating to sacred matters" (spiritual, 2013). To achieve spiritual growth and openness, an evasion of incontestability and attention to the sacred and spirit appear to be indispensable. Therefore, it is important to note the divide between the perspectives of religion and spirituality. The irrefutable truths encountered along the shamanic path are not about morality but are more concerned with one's level of reverence, intention, service to the collective, attentiveness to the spiritual-self, or interest in transcending the ego consciousness. The next section will discuss the

value in the shamanic ritual underpinnings of Sacred Breathwork.

### **Shamanic Ritual Underpinnings of Sacred Breathwork**

The accompaniment of ritual and direct communion with the transcendent in Sacred Breathwork are shamanic constructs. A series of ritual phases commences with the act of ceremony, inviting the sacred, cultivating sensitivity toward the craft, consecrating the space, formalizing intentions, hypnotic induction, tranquilizing the body, attuning consciousness to the divine, and activating the auditory sense. An important factor to keep in mind is that the breather must acquiesce to the experience. This subsection will delve into the foundations of ritual and the shamanic.

Shamanic rituals become traditions through the meaning ascribed to them and by habituating to the action. The perceived value of the ritual experience is not only viewed as an agent for transformation but as an intermediary for assembling community, which is a core feature in Sacred Breathwork. To the extent that its practice can ascribe meaning and habituate action, in addition to its procedural elements, psychotherapy itself can be viewed as an unorthodox ritual and include the sacred. If conducted properly, it can be a powerful and inspiring experience. Regarding of ritual and therapy, Smith (2007) states, “Each of the elements of traditional therapeutics are related in a part-to-whole manner, so that each makes sense only in relation to the others” (p. 53). This observation can be made of conventional psychotherapy as well. Smith (2007) goes on to make a distinction between sacred and secular approaches to healing: “It is in the ritual structure that the ordering myth is recited, diagnosis is made, and the method of treatment determined and applied. In traditional shamanic therapeutics, it is the sacred which is the healing and transformative power” (p. 53). Because conventional therapy lacks sacred structure, it can be surmised that clients with a spiritual penchant could benefit from an

alternative technique that incorporates the sacred.

Anthropologists suggest that the practice of communal rituals has been around since the dawn of humans. An article on the origins of theatre notes, “Early societies perceived connections between certain actions performed by the group or leaders in the group and the desired results of the whole society. These actions moved from habit, to tradition, and then on to ceremony and ritual” (Robinson, 2002, para. 2). Additionally, historians insinuate that early humans may have engaged in ritual not just for survival but for other purposes as well. Catherine Bell (1997), writing on the early period of ritual behaviors, states, “Human beings have been involved in ritual activities of some sort since the earliest hunting bands and tribal communities” (p. 1). She goes on to declare that it was not until recent times that historians began to investigate data gathered for ancient ritual occurrences in relation to the origins of religion. For example, some scientists believe humans assembled religion out of a search for meaning and purpose. Renowned physicist Bohm, in dialogue with spiritual leader Krishnamurti, declared that in an effort to give profound purpose to life, humans created religion. Krishnamurti (1985) responded:

In the past people were more religious and felt that the ground of our existence was in something beyond matter—God, or whatever they wish to call it. And that gave them a sense of deep meaning to the whole of their existence . . . In the past people somehow gave meaning to life, long before science had been very much developed, in the form of religion. And science came along and began to deny this religion. (pp. 49-50)

Interestingly enough, the investment of belief in the eternal or beyond ordinary matter was a social occurrence.

There are clear indications that, like religion, rituals create meaning in that “rituals create that subjective space, a shared ‘could be’ where such selves can exist—in relation with other selves” (Seligman, 2009, p. 1075). This bestows purpose and promotes the evolution of consciousness through the act of sharing spiritual space. Seligman (2009) writes, “The meaning

of ritual is the meaning produced through the ritual action itself” (p. 1077). The act of ritual, such as that within Sacred Breathwork, invites the diversity of other spiritual frameworks, despite its indigenous, spiritual influence. If facilitated in a way that avoids including religious dogma, this experience also could prove to be meaningful for creating interfaith coexistence among spiritual belief systems. This technique does not discriminate, especially when it comes to religion, as it holds a neutral but sacred space for all participants.

Although organized religion has a particular doctrine, both religion and the shamanic acknowledge the sacred, the spirit, a higher power, and the mystical. They each value tradition, ceremony, and the idea of having a place designated solely for worship. Researcher Seligman (2009) describes ritual as providing an enduring field of “creativity and tradition, acceptance and obligation. Ritual practice becomes the arena where the dynamic of that third space, the potential space within which cultural creativity takes place, is worked out” (p. 1093), hence the importance of having a consecrated space for ritual and ceremonial engagements, such as Sacred Breathwork. This third space is contained by a physical, unprofaned space, but the consciousness slips into its own evanescent cosmic and ethereal domain. This third space is beyond material reality.

Mircea Eliade, a Romanian philosopher and religious historian, established influential standards in religious studies, such as the idea of the *eternal return*. Eliade’s eternal return theory is based on the idea that it is possible to engage archaic myths in a contemporary fashion, such as occurs within Sacred Breathwork. Eliade wrote about the transitory shamanic technique that engages the cosmic realm and said this was made achievable by organization of the universe – this is also a common theme among indigenous cultures. Eliade (1964) said,

As we shall see presently, the universe in general is conceived as having three levels—sky, earth, underworld—connected by a central axis. The symbolism employed to express the



interconnection and intercommunication among the three cosmic zones is quite complex and not without contradictions. (p. 259)

When employing the shamanic cosmology in breathwork, it is important to take note that inconsistencies may be the result of a lack of understanding of indigenous traditions or the act of unsuccessfully combining traditions of differing origins. It is important to be completely transparent regarding influences when utilizing indigenous techniques. Hence, there is a need for cultural ambassadors that can maintain the integrity of the exchange between western and indigenous paradigms. It is important to acknowledge that some traditions should not be altered because modification could jeopardize their integrity and intention, but this is something that would need to be considered on an individual basis. To aid in the understanding of the shamanic cosmology, Smith (1995) summarized this realm through Eliade's description, writing,

The three-storied cosmos typically has an underworld below (hell), an overworld of celestial beings above (heaven, sky), and the world of humans in between (the earth). "Our world" is always situated at the center, the "*axis mundi*" at the intersection of heaven and hell, the meeting place of celestial and underworld beings. This structure is not only found in the religions of the Mediterranean but in societies employing a shamanic cosmology. (p. 58)

This three-tiered cosmological construction provides a cartography of the mystical realm, or what psychologists sometimes call the superconscious. This tri-part universal cosmology is also a component of Sacred Breathwork. It is an imaginative, sacred apparatus that incorporates experience, archetypes, and mythology. "To reiterate, myth and sacred cosmology provides [*sic*] the patient with a meaningful and ordering framework that both comforts and inspires a hopeful attitude, and thus contributes greatly to the therapeutic effect" (Smith, 1995, p. 58). Smith echoes the cosmological component of the psychological cartography in traditional societies through respectful and structured application, which promotes self-realization and healing. He writes, "A conception of health and disease presupposes a corresponding conception of human nature.

Traditional societies provide understanding of their views through their ordering myths and cosmologies. Thus, to discover their views on human nature, health and disease, requires inquiry into those myths and cosmologies” (Smith, 1995, p. 58).

Another view, previously touched upon, is the spiritual concept of the soul, which is much like the psychological term *self*. The soul is important to take into account, since in shamanic tradition the soul is an interactive component and strongly associated with shamanic healing. Smith (1995) states that

The person typically has a body, one or more souls, and a mind. In sacred or demonological idiom, the *main soul* is permeable and is open to invasion, possession, threat, or benign influence. Demons, angels, ghosts, spirits or animals, and ancestors are among the entities that can invade or affect the soul for good or ill. (p. 58)

Moreover, he noted that the maintenance of health in these dimensions is identified as order and that disorder is disease. Smith (1995) felt that good relations with the sacred—maintained by engaging in proper performance of ritual – can aid good health (p. 58). Additionally, there must be harmony among all factors involved when engaging the sacred in ceremony. Part of this maintenance of health in relation to ceremony requires Sacred Breathwork facilitators to prepare well in advance. The ceremonial mechanisms and incorporation of myths brought forth by the facilitators activate the sacred in an opportunity to restore psychological and spiritual homeostasis. The following will elaborate on the ethics and integrity of the shamanic dimensions related to restoring and promoting good health.

The energetic start of ceremony is the moment when an individual sets the intention to engage. But not until physical and mental dedication has taken place does the real shift to entering sacred space commence. Demarcation prepares the setting by cleansing out and opening the space for the sacred. The specifics of these processes deserve protection, and specificity regarding how to ritually employ these would be a profane act. Again, this dissertation is not

meant to be a guide on how to employ specific rituals. Willingly sharing sacred information with an uninitiated audience could compromise the integrity of those processes. Therefore, Cohen suggests,

We must also consider such ethical questions as the integrity of the source and the appropriateness of information for the audience. For example, I would not wish the *New York Times* Travel Section to describe the location of my private Vision Quest site. (2006, p. 12)

Therefore, only the general parameters of the ritual aspects will be discussed here. Time and setting play a role, just as facilitator and participant agreement to the exchange and attunement with the divine does. The stages of music are carried out in a 1-2-3 sequence, spanning two hours. The ceremony is then brought to an end by closing out with a nature-infused melody. The individual is then assessed for completion prior to advancing to creative processing. The final juncture integrates the experience through a creative activity, such as drawing a mandala, writing poetry, etc., and later, verbal expression in dyads. The group of breathwork participants then collectively processes before closing out the experience. It is important to note that in Sacred Breathwork, there is a subtle acknowledgement that healing comes from within the individual seeking treatment as well as from the divine – it is considered to be a collaborative process. As a result, part of what is being cultivated and reinforced in the ritual process is a relationship with both the Self and the Divine.

Healers that provide shamanic medicine, like psychotherapists, do not assert complete control over disease or dysfunction; they acknowledge limitations, call upon the divine, and explain the journey that needs to be traveled in order for any healing to occur. Seligman (2009) says, “There is no final solution to this problem, only the creation of temporary and contingent spaces where we agree (and this is crucial) to eschew final understanding and just do what has to be done—the pragmatism of practice” (pp. 1083-1084). In many ways, ritual is not just a remedy,

it is an occasion to create space to entertain and explore ambiguities that might otherwise be ignored or repressed. A policy of openly permitting ritual is critical. For Seligman (2009),

Ritual unshackles the mind from a need to believe in a dogma of our own choosing, as long as we act properly. This can leave us much more open to the complex and hence necessarily ambiguous nature of reality, while still retaining the possibility of acting within and upon it. (p. 1075)

When engaging in shamanic healing, it is necessary for the ethical practitioner to acknowledge the multitude of possibilities that could occur. This speaks to the discovery of what non-conventional healing may look like when the shackles of ego and society have been lifted. It may seem chaotic and appear unhealthy but those moments are indefinable from the perspective of convention and western medicine. A person engaging a NOSC for healing may portray animal behavior, cry deafeningly, laugh uncontrollably, or scream out loud. Preparing an individual for what to expect is crucial to maintaining a safe space for all parties.

Shamans would call this multitude of possibilities a manifestation of the sacred. Such a manifestation can be commonly observed in ceremonial acts, when they conducted properly. When therapeutic catharsis or hierophany, as Eliade called it, occurs in Sacred Breathwork, the breather feels a purification, and an emotional release will often transpire. Rappaport (1999) said,

It seems to be an empirical fact that participation in some rituals heightens emotions, in others it has a calming effect, while in yet others it has more complex emotional consequences, and students of both animal and human behavior have generally taken ritual's emotional correlates to be significant to their understanding of it. (p. 472)

The arousal and palliative emotional effects are not only worthy of being termed "sacred" but are also deserving of therapeutic merit. The phenomenon of acts experienced in a sacred space is anticipated to emerge in the co-researcher's revelations. This concludes the discussion of the shamanic ritual underpinnings of Sacred Breathwork. Another element widely associated with

emotional influence is the role of music; this will be explored next.

### **Evocative Music, Entrainment, and the Third Space**

The musical element of Sacred Breathwork extends beyond the conventional acoustic encounter to a place in which music itself takes a role as an active collaborator in the experience. Appropriately, the ritual aspects present in the musical arrangement of Sacred Breathwork sounds are carefully prepared in layered stages, synced to the dynamics of the facilitator's personality and with the aim of producing a sacred, conscious-raising journey. This experience is genuine and unique to the receiver, the one who senses and perceives the assembly of fluctuating silence and sounds. The father of American Music Therapy Everett Thayer Gaston (1968) said, "All the senses bring to us aspects of reality. To hear a chord of music is no less real than to smell a rose, to see a sunset, to taste an apple, or to feel the impact of striking a wall" (p. 24). Thus, in a Sacred Breathwork presentation, music becomes both a guide to and portal through which the breather traverses through the mind's eye and heart's feeling.

Music possesses a number of relational aspects. Sounds are bound to complement one another energetically, which creates that third space, an ethereal consciousness, where the listener becomes an active component in the process – experiencing and creating by perceiving. A community thus exists between sound and breather. These energy-infused sounds have an eminent element, an ability to bypass the intellectual, penetrate the physical, and become visceral. Sound healer Renée Brodie (1996) said, "Sound is an energy form generated by a vibrating body. Depending on its frequency, the human body will react to and perceive this energy in different ways" (p. 108). Music therapy is considered a complementary medicine supported by corresponding scientific research. However, it is not typically seen as spiritually oriented or devoted to inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness. There is a growing field of

sound healing, of which Sacred Breathwork is a part, that invites spiritual purpose and aims to expand consciousness, heal psychological ailments, encourage relaxation, and promote brain coherence. There are also research studies in the area of cymatics, which “can be best described as making sound visible [b]y using sound waves to excite liquids and solids” (Cymatics, n.d., para. 1). These studies attempt to explain the vibration and frequency effects of sound. While an exploration of these is outside the scope of this dissertation, sound healing falls within the spiritual realm and is therefore relevant.

The evocative nature of music allows one to develop the self in an incorporeal space through music entrainment. The basic concept of entrainment is that two rhythmic processes interact with one another and lock into a phase (Clayton, Sager, & Will, 2004). Music entrainment is gaining recognition as having therapeutic value, and outcomes observed by some include syncing the two hemispheres of the brain for improved attention and concentration. Brainwave frequencies are associated with mental states. The commonly known frequencies that can be observed with an EEG are: (a) Beta, known to have the fastest cycles per second and associated with heightened mental activity; (b) Alpha, a relaxed state of mind, associated with the meditative mind; (c) Theta, a high state of mental focus, associated with dreaming and accessing unconscious material; and, (d) Delta, deep sleep, the dominant brainwave state in infants under one year old.

The entrainment model can be applied to several areas of social science and social psychologists describe phenomena of music entrainment as synchronizing an individual's activity cycles according to Clayton et al. (2004),

The biophysicism of rhythmical entrainment leads to the attuning of other psychological realms, to the transformation of persons' state of mind, which is also a form of periodicity. By disconnecting the mind from its ordinary cycles (regularities or irregularities), inner oscillators and oscillations set up an affected perception, sensitivity

or emotional availability. (p. 59)

This disconnection may be seen as bypassing the ego, tuning into the unconscious frequency, and opening up to the collective.

A factor to contemplate with group work in relation to music entrainment and Sacred Breathwork is the notion of group participation and something called “groove” that, according to Clayton et al. (2004), is

the experience of “being together and tuning up to somebody else's sense of time.” Among the many things that “groove” signifies, we suggest that “groove” could also be understood as the socio-musical process of being entrained at the preferred degree of synchronicity. (p. 20)

What this suggests is that a relation is developed between the dynamics of both the music and the individuals participating. A connection is made and a third space is created. Moreover, McGrath and Kelly (as cited in Clayton et al., 2004) say that “temporal patterns of behaviors of individuals and sets of individuals become collectively entrained to certain powerful external pacer events and entraining cycles” (p. 10). This phenomenon alone can cultivate an appreciation of group music entrainment; it could also support developing relationships between allies and breathers while in the ceremonial and sacred third space. To further articulate this third space, psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden speaks about a familiar concept he calls the analytic third. Aron and Mitchell (1999) say that Ogden “portrays the minds of analysand and analyst as essentially permeable to each other, with their confluence generating a ‘third’ subjectivity, an intersubjectivity, distinctly different from the forms of subjectivity” (p. 460). This co-created space can allow each person to non-verbally tap into the ethereal, a space where the unconscious exists.

In addition, Aron (1999) writes, “The analytic third is a creation of the analyst and analysand, and at the same time the analyst and analysand (qua analyst and analysand) are

created by the analytic third” (p. 483). This brings forward the notion that the third experience creates the interaction between parties. Aron (1999) Ogden declares, “The analytic third is experienced by analyst and analysand in the context of his or her own personality system, personal history, psycho-somatic make-up, etc.” (p. 483). Although analysis and breathwork each need safety and openness, unlike the analytic third, the third space in breathwork calls for an employment of the sacred and openness as vast as the universe absent of analytic interpretation. What’s also notable is that the breather has many allies to assist in breaking or flowing through the experiences encountered. To assist, there is a personal ally, the facilitators, the self, personal faith in the divine, and the music. Using music in order to expand consciousness and healing is the focus of both Sacred Breathwork and this study. Therefore, healing through consciousness expansion and music is a focus in relation to exploring Sacred Breathwork.

Composer R. J. Stewart wrote a book on the spiritual dimensions of music for altering consciousness (1990). In addition to examining the spiritual aspects of music, Stewart explores the allure of music and describes the various ways this influence can be used. He asserts that since the 1980s, American music has become a sweeping tool of manipulation by mass media and indicated that the special chords used to do this are imperceptible to the conscious mind. He criticizes this abuse, saying that it has stunted the creativity and religious coherence of music and has had a negative impact on American culture.

With regard to musical influence, Stewart (1990) says, “Ultimately, magical, alchemical or metaphysical music, which is music that has a psycho-logical application, must have a grounding in the essential nature of the psyche, of consciousness itself” (p. 21). This calls attention to the necessity of studying the psychological applications of the mystical genre of



music and being open to accepting music as an influential sonic vibration. In Sacred Breathwork, music is the tool with which the facilitator induces the non-ordinary state of consciousness.

As with sacred music, primal music comes from and connects with a deep place within the human psyche. Stewart (1990) explains the role of primal music and its originative power in relation to sacred music. He says originative, primal music is not only rooted in the unknown but arouses the mysterious within the listener. He also submits that the presence of music in the physical and metaphysical realms is essential. Stewart adds that ancient metaphysicians taught that the physical emission of sound in particular frequencies is a reflection of spirituality (1990, p. 44). As Stewart suggests, this reflection of primal quality has the energy to transform consciousness. Could applying quantum theory to allow one to utilize musical sound in this way be related to stimulating brainwave frequencies as mentioned earlier and induce a shift in consciousness? Recalling the earlier discussion surrounding music and consciousness Hameroff and Penrose (1996), postulate that consciousness is music and that the two act similarly. The close connection between the two can be observed through electroencephalography.

Stewart refers to the ancient technician as a magician, as someone who used music to prove the existence of other dimensions as well as induce altered states. He writes about the magical mode of consciousness achieved through certain music patterns and says that the most profound spiritual revelations are found because music is an echo of the original impulse of divine creation (1990, p. 45). Stewart (1990) also states:

Modern physicists have postulated several creation theories which are hardly different from the concept of Primal Breath or Creative Word found in magical, metaphysical and religious beliefs the world over. Our present thesis, however, is not an orthodox religious one, and the musical/psychological argument is not going to lead to any specific religious cult, church or practice. It deals with mystical and vital themes that underpin all religions, all creative discoveries about reality, and all aspects of consciousness. (p. 45)

Furthermore, Stewart reveals a Hermetic approach to music that appears to correspond with the

relationship of mythology, music, psychology, and Sacred Breathwork. This approach includes four distinct elements that Stewart identifies as four archetypes of Hermetic Speculum mythology: “Air, Fire, Water and Earth were idealized archetypes of aspects of existence” (Stewart, 1990, p. 72). Stewart indicates these are observable principles and their sequence is important because they are relational states of awareness. This supports the sequential approach of Sacred Breathwork’s evocative and sacred music. A vital attribute of breathwork is reflected in Stewart’s (1990) outline and formalized sequence: “Air begins; Fire accelerates; Water culminates; Earth concludes” (p. 74). This sequence not only provides a construct but also can be applied to the breathwork process. Sacred Breathwork acknowledges these elements as incorporated. However, at this time, these ideas are not an official part of the program. Music has always had an enduring and profound impact on humans; it is not difficult to see music as a means to evoke the sacred, expand consciousness, and promote healing.

### **Creative Processing, Sacred Art Becomes Visionary**

*"The painter channels the creative force into the artifact, and this artifact then becomes a battery, ready to zap the viewer into a new way of seeing the world."*

~ Alex Grey (2013)

During the creative processing portion of Sacred Breathwork, the goal is to integrate the ineffable and mystical qualities, to manifest the experience in a form that can serve as an expression of and communication with, the Self. This phase requires allies to continue supporting, protecting, and acting as neutral guides. Breathers create mandalas to assist in their transition out of a non-ordinary state. They draw or paint a large circle on paper to convey a boundary and represent the closure of the non-ordinary state that then acts as a medium for re-entry into the ordinary physical world. Inside this circle, to the best of their ability, the breathers draw or paint a rendition of their experience. The unconscious contents fall into place and are

held by the protective circle (Jung, 1961/1989).

The Sanskrit word “mandala” means center or circle with four aspects: “[T]his form of symbol is not only to be found all through the East, but also among us” (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 396). This symbolic concept was seen in Christianity during the Middle Ages, where images frequently depicted Christ at the center with four flanking him at cardinal points. Similarly, in Egyptian representations, Horus is shown with his four sons arrayed around him (Jung, 1961/1989). Jung sought importance in this symbol of integration, which can be found in almost all ancient cultures, indigenous traditions, and religious iconography. He referred to this archetypal symbol as a magic circle and a “psychic totality; self-representation of a psychic process of centering; production of a new center of personality” (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 396). The quadrants of this circle combine to form a psychological constellation that provides the structure to translate the indescribable.

During a long period of great introspection and what some might classify a mid-life breakdown, Jung confronted troubling visions and illustrated material streaming from his unconscious in mandala configurations; these can be found in his *Red Book*. Jung (1961/1989) said, “I drew the conclusion that they had to do with me myself, and decided that I was menaced by a psychosis” (p. 176). The focus here is not on what the perceived psychosis was but the level of awareness Jung possessed and his ability to draw conclusions through utilizing his creativity to explore his experiences. Jung’s *Red Book*, a manuscript written and illustrated between 1914 and 1930 but not published until 2009, is full of his geometric visionary expressions. Jung discovered the paradox of his experience in this realm. Jung (1961) wrote, “It is of course ironical that I, a psychiatrist, should at almost every step of my experiment have run into the same psychic material which is the stuff of psychosis and is found in the insane” (p. 188). Jung

points out the value in understanding unconscious imagery and its role in the healing process.

Alex Grey, a renowned artist who is himself familiar with the visionary realm, says, “visionary art matters because the visionary mystical experience is the most direct contact that we have with the divine and all sacred art and religious traditions are founded on this mystic state” (Grey, 2013). Grey also states in his essay on visionary art, “The visionary realm embraces the entire spectrum of imaginal spaces; from heaven to hell, from the infinitude of forms to formless voids” (Grey, 2012).

Using creativity in this way requires deep listening and the ability to trust the Self. The inner voice must be more resounding than the ego (the critic), so that one can be a conduit to communicate the encounter. The stew of information can be used as a map for integrating subjective and communal realities. The end result is not standard art; it is sacred and a window into an otherwise unfathomable world. Understanding the experience through creative expression can be a complementary mediator for empowerment.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The blending of science with spirituality has long been recognized as a complicated endeavor. There has been a relentless quarrel between psychological spiritualists and psychological scholars. Each group of theorists asserts legitimacy: spiritualists strive to maintain organic sacred integrity and the empirical prefer to promote systematic, quantifiable evidence. Experiential engagements such as Sacred Breathwork rely on a client’s openness and can gather valuable qualitative information directly from the client, which in turn can be used to inform the holistic treatment approaches that will be most successful for the particular individual.

The breathwork technique should not be generalized to function for clientele as a sort of “one size fits all” process. Also, some individuals may be opposed to non-indigenous

practitioners acting as facilitators. However, this concern can be alleviated so long as the practice is not misappropriated. The facilitator must dedicate him- or herself to the realm of the sacred through ongoing experiential exploration and growth, and become intimate with the indigenous traditions and myths of choice to employ. The underlying mechanisms of consciousness and the sacred require a balance of sincerity, openness, command, and honor from all who engage non-ordinary states of consciousness. Like any other treatment modality, a client-centered approach is necessary for integration, but a Sacred Breathwork facilitator must employ structured ritual. Similar to conventional psychotherapy interventions, adherence to treatment is a major factor for consideration and the client should also be aware of the commitment needed to follow through.

In conclusion, the information reviewed aimed to provide reference and to explain Sacred Breathwork as a therapeutic treatment approach. An honest attempt was made to marry psychology, the shamanic, the spiritual, and the sacred. Concisely, Sacred Breathwork is best understood through the transpersonal and holotropic lenses discussed herein. The collective analysis of this chapter suggests value in the employment of breathwork but also recognizes the present disconnect from conventional psychology. The next chapter will outline the heuristic methodology used to investigate this phenomenon.

### Chapter III

## **Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the heuristic research design and methodology employed in this study will be discussed. The value of a qualitative research method, such as heuristics, is that it is inclusive and extensive; it embraces the subjective experience while employing scientific inquiry.

### **Heuristic Research Design and Methodology**

**Grounds for heuristic model.** Heuristics is the study of a human experience that incorporates the researcher's familiarity with the topic. Critical to this methodology is the researcher's relationship with the investigation, "Heuristic inquiry requires that one be open, receptive, and attuned to all facets of one's experience of a phenomenon, allowing comprehension and compassion to mingle and recognizing the place and unity of intellect, emotion, and spirit" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16). This researcher's encounters with breathwork prompted the decision to use a holistic method that openly allows for the experience of non-ordinary states of consciousness free of quantitative reductionism. Additionally, the heuristic approach resonates with this researcher's own natural process of investigation.

Sacred Breathwork straddles the realm between traditional healing modalities and conventional psychotherapy. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) state that "since human science research investigates problems, the answers sought are typically different from other psychological approaches, where the research usually demands different methodologies" (p. 4). Heuristic research addresses information that cannot be generalized and is strikingly different than what is contained in conventional approaches – such as the analysis of the experience in words and not numbers. In this approach, there is emphasis on understanding versus explanation; the

uniqueness of the individual is appreciated; continual interpretation throughout the study occurs; and lastly, the treatment phenomenon is investigated holistically. Heuristic research is meticulous in exploring and uncovering phenomena and entails the operation of phases, as explained below. It is process-oriented, with a multidimensional bearing that could contribute to defining the clinical applications of Sacred Breathwork.

### **Phase Elements of the Heuristic Process**

The following definition attempts to provide a more complete understanding of the model before outlining the various phases. Robert Goldenson (1984) defines *heuristic* as, “leading to new discoveries or promoting new conclusions” (p. 342). This statement relates how the methodology focuses on the process rather than the solution, unlike in quantitative reductionism where the reverse is frequently the case.

**Initial engagement.** This is phase 1 of the heuristic process; for the duration of this stage the researcher investigates a topic that has social, clinical, and personal relevance. A question regarding the topic is developed and this question drives the investigative journey. This phase involves the awakening of preliminary interests and development of passion that invites the researcher to investigate the meaning and experience of the phenomenon.

**Immersion.** In the course of phase 2, the researcher is engrossed in the question versus the subsequent phase, incubation, during which the researcher withdraws from the question. Personal relevance is essential because it allows for natural expansion and growth of the topic. If one has a particular lived experience regarding the phenomenon, the study of the topic will likely garner positive benefits. Dr. Clark Moustakas (1990) wrote, “Virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion, staying with, and maintaining a sustained focus and concentration” (p. 28). This process is not stagnant; a researcher can often find him- or

herself vacillating between immersion and the other phases throughout the investigation.

**Incubation.** The third phase involves the researcher moving away from being absorbed by the exploration of the topic. This is a time to let go of the active and conscious pursuit and withdraw to permit tacit knowledge to emerge exclusively and to promote innate integration and assimilation of the data.

**Illumination.** The fourth phase requires knowledge and experience in the researcher. The researcher's inner compass and/or processor begins to consciously and intuitively create a more sensitive and well-formed understanding. Unexpected discoveries and deeper meanings about the research topic can arise; it is a conscious-expanding period of time during the investigation. Moustakas (1990) observed that "the mysteries of the situation require tacit workings to uncover meanings and essence" (p. 29). The illumination phase requires receptivity and open-mindedness to reveal any new understanding.

**Explication.** This fifth phase includes the researcher observing the communications of the participants and ingesting their experience so that further insight and knowledge can be produced. Moustakas (1990) asserted that this stage is "where concentrated attention is given to creating an inward space and discovering nuances, textures and constituents of the phenomenon which may then be more fully elucidated through indwelling" (p. 31). To clarify, Moustakas (1990) stated indwelling is a "heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature of the meaning of a quality or a theme of human experience" (p. 24). During the focusing, the researcher guides his or her attention to the innermost value of the experience.

**Creative Synthesis.** The final phase involves a unique creative narrative by the researcher assimilated by the explicated data and themes. The data thoroughly studied is coupled



with the researcher's own intuition, birthing a creative rendition of the collective participants' subjective experience. It requires the researcher to rely on self-dialogue, introspection, and conscious exploration, while involving intuition and tacit intelligence. This is a creative integration, where the researcher would benefit from engaging silence, meditation, journaling, or listening to palliative music. It is a process of communing with the data and experiencing the journey.

The next section will examine the concept of validity regarding qualitative research. This will be followed by a discussion of method implementation.

### **Qualitative Validity**

There are many challenges to investigating spiritual phenomena within a secular psychological framework. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the epistemological and psychological approach of reducing incorporeal concepts to data on a piece of paper proves difficult for a variety of reasons. Quantitative methods of cognitive inquiry focus on the structure of apprehending material to quantify and replicate in order to systematically prove its legitimacy. However, methods of statistical reason and intellect are unable to adequately apprehend immaterial items such as consciousness and spirituality. According to Richards and Bergin (2005), "The study of such phenomenon [*sic*] was excluded from psychological research more than 100 years ago because many researchers believed it was impossible to study 'subjective' and 'invisible' experiences" (p. 309). This dilemma still prevails today as the emphasis in the sciences is on being objective and seeking to quantify and replicate the assessable and concrete for generalizability.

The heuristic qualitative method is more Socratic and aimed toward gaining an understanding of the nature of the subjective experience—not simply on producing

generalizability. Through this process, beliefs, misconceptions, and values can be clarified. The goal is not only to provide a model of treatment but also to uncover the diversity of meaning.

“The heuristic researcher is seeking to understand the wholeness and the unique patterns of experiences in a scientifically organized and disciplined way” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16). Through reviewing a phenomenon in this manner, one can develop a deeper understanding while deepening the critical thinking pertaining to the subject. This is a lengthy process that requires the researcher sit with – and meticulously sift through – the material collected. Moustakas (1990) wrote, “The heuristic researcher returns again and again to the data to check the depictions of the experience to determine whether the qualities or constituents that have been derived from the data embrace the necessary and sufficient meanings” (p. 33). The researcher must have passion, perseverance, and openness to pursue a phenomenon connected to his or her individuality. Additionally, qualitative research validity can be verified through its method of application to uncover the meaning of interconnected psychological phenomena. The unique format of qualitative design according to Constance Fischer (2006) has five types of interrelated validity:

- 1) witness validity—Do readers of data and findings following the researcher’s method come to basically the similar impressions; 2) touchpoint validity—Do the findings connect with theory and with other studies in a productive way; 3) efficacy validity – Are the findings useful? Do they make a difference for theory and/or practice; 4) resonance validity—Do the data and findings resonate with readers’ lives, both as familiar and as holding personal implication; 5) revisionary validity—Do the findings aid readers to revise prior understandings, either academic or personal (p. xvii).

Fischer further suggests that validity in qualitative research is also established through participant selection, authenticity of data analysis, and representation of findings (2006). The field of psychology could benefit from more qualitative research on spiritual phenomena for all the reasons presented in this section, but most importantly, to enhance a neglected domain that is inherently significant to many. “One cannot understand human actions without understanding the

meaning that participants attribute to those actions—their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 57). Through the use of the heuristic method, this study sought to uncover the depth of this experience through its demanding process of continual questioning, authentic self-dialogue, and attention to the subtle elements of meaning. One of the ways this study addressed this was through the continual processing of diversity, clarifying participants’ personal beliefs and the belief systems that influence the Sacred Breathwork ceremony. Also, the attention to the subtle elements of meaning and co-researcher accounts had a transformative effect, which required the primary investigator to take positive and authentic action in conveying this research. This method intends to facilitate a deeper understanding of the diversity of meaning, the collective experience, and personal transformations, as reported by the participants.

### **Methodology Implementation**

**Recruiting.** Recruitment of participants occurred through electronic posting of formal flyers (see Appendix A) via social media website forums hosting the Crow’s Nest international community that engages in what Dr. Smith calls indigenous heart psychology. This community was established by Dr. C. Michael Smith, the architect of Sacred Breathwork. It exists in North and South America, Europe, and South Africa. Other methods of recruitment were word of mouth and the distribution of flyers at the Crow’s Nest for Shamanic Studies in Dowagiac, Michigan.

This study had eight co-researchers. Candidates were asked to e-mail their interest to NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com in order to be considered for the heuristic interview. Of those who responded, participants meeting the criteria designated below were chosen. Prior to the interview, selected participants were contacted by phone to verify participation, be educated

about the research, and answer any questions they had regarding the study. In addition, a date and time was identified for the heuristic interview. Interviewees were asked to have their sacred creative artwork near them during the interview to assist in their immersion in the experience.

The interviews were held at a mutually convenient time and the interview procedure utilized Skype, the free software program that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet. Participants had to establish they were proficient enough in this computer technology and the Internet in order to participate in the interview. Skype conversations are encrypted for maximum security. However, interviewees were instructed on how to protect their personal information and confidentiality by following these procedures:

- creating a new Skype account that was solely used for the purpose of this research;
- deleting the Skype account after the interview(s);
- creating a new password to be used only for the Skype account;
- participating in the interview alone at a computer in a secure room;
- participating in the interview at a computer with a wired connection (as opposed to a wireless connection); and
- ensuring that the computer was free of viruses prior to the interview.

The researcher also followed the above security recommendations when conducting the interviews and recognized her responsibility for the security implemented on her end of the Skype connection.

After the phone call, but at least one week prior to the interview, participants were provided the informed consent (see Appendix B) via e-mail, USPS, or if possible, personal delivery. The informed consent included instructions to promptly return the signed form prior to

the interview. Participants were notified that if the informed consent was not received by the interview date, the interview would be rescheduled for a later date. Participants were permitted to e-mail a copy of the informed consent to the e-mail address identified for this research. E-mailed copies had to be received before the interview. Participants were given at least one week to return the completed forms. Forms could only be submitted electronically, via e-mail. Each interview commenced on the scheduled date once the participant had signed onto Skype and agreed that he or she was ready to start the interview. A pseudonym was assigned prior to turning on the recorder. The participant was notified when the stand-alone digital audio recorder had been started; only one recorder was used.

The interview included six demographic questions and 10 guiding questions (see Appendix C) for the actual interview. The intention of the demographic questions was to complement the 10 guiding questions (see Appendix C). All questions focused on uncovering the breather's overall Sacred Breathwork experience.

If the participant was not ready once he or she signed onto Skype, time was allotted for the participant to settle in. Due to time constraints, no more than 10 minutes was allowed for this process. The participant was encouraged to sit in silence and take some relaxed, deep breaths during this time to acclimatize. If the participant was still not ready following the 10 minutes, the interview was rescheduled for another, mutually convenient date and time. Again, the interviews were limited to an hour and a half.

**Criteria.** Study participants had to be at least 21 years old. All were also required to have participated in at least five successful breathwork sessions no less than one year prior to being interviewed. It was also required that the most recent (the fifth) experience had occurred at least two weeks before, but no more than two years prior to, the interview. The purpose of

these time requirements regarding commencing breathwork and partaking in the study was to insure that all had adequate time post-breathwork to reflect and potentially integrate the experience. Also, if they were not actively in psychotherapy, participants had to have an identified spiritual support and/or a psychotherapist familiar with Sacred Breathwork.

Participants could not have active suicidal or homicidal ideations. One of many ambitions of this study was to embrace diversity, which is why the international Sacred Breathwork community was included and Skype was used. Diversity was considered when selecting participants; attention was given to achieving a balance between gender, age, and breathwork experience.

**Data collection.** Material collected on behalf of the participants included informed consents, contact information, and an audio recording of the interview to be transcribed for incorporation into the study. All material and data collected was stored safely in a locked drawer in the investigator's home office. All material and data collected will be kept for five years. Once five years have passed, all material and data related to the project will be destroyed using a shredding machine. The audio recordings were destroyed once transcription was completed, which was within two weeks of each recording. All appendices are included in this submission.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, this research model procedure was carefully organized and applied. This chapter discussed the heuristic applications to research so that the reader can develop a better understanding and sense of why this process was chosen.

## Chapter IV

### Presentation of Findings

#### Introduction

This chapter will articulate the process and analysis of this study and report the research findings – consisting of themes, depictions, portraits and a creative synthesis – in order to qualitatively examine the personal encounter and intentional use of Sacred Breathwork. The primary question leading this study is, *What is the experience of Sacred Breathwork?* In posing this question, the author hoped to uncover how the co-researchers expansively perceived their experience and ongoing process with Sacred Breathwork. The data will be reported thematically, with each co-researcher identified by a pseudonym. A composite depiction will discuss subthemes of personality commonalities for the co-researchers from the Sacred Breathwork Crow's Nest International Community, followed by an outline of the core themes associated with the 10 questions the co-researchers were asked. Brief individual depictions of each co-researcher – including basic demographic information—are provided as related to the core themes, followed by two detailed depictions to further elucidate the experience of Sacred Breathwork. Additionally, a composite depiction, comprised of a combination of the co-researchers' and primary researcher's experiences of Sacred Breathwork, is offered. Following this, two co-researcher portraits are included as a representation of the unique characteristics of the Sacred Breathwork experience. Also, a creative synthesis from the principal investigator and co-researchers will be incorporated to illuminate the often ineffable qualities of the Sacred Breathwork experience.

#### Themes and Subthemes

Themes began to emerge organically through repeated review and analysis of the data,

allowing the collective experience to be understood. The data collected from the co-researchers was rich in intimate experience description. The co-researchers openly shared their unique and inspiring stories of Sacred Breathwork. Table 1 (Appendix D) contains complete information on the demographics of the co-researchers.

The following are the shared personality traits of the co-researchers:

- an interest in alternative medicine and holistic approaches to healing;
- inclination toward non-dogmatic spirituality;
- traumatic life experiences or a series of significant relational ruptures igniting the quest for self-growth;
- a desire to belong to a non-dogmatic spiritual community;
- resiliency despite adversity;
- propensity to work in a capacity to better humanity;
- inability to accept status quo;
- proclivity toward using ritual and ceremony for self-discovery and growth;
- openness to life's mysteries;
- a belief in exploring life's purpose and direction; and
- belief in fostering interconnectedness.

Each of these personality themes emerged naturally as the co-researchers shared their life and breathwork stories. These commonalties became apparent and presented unconscious characteristics that seem to have propelled their experience. These shared commonalties also served to enhance the voices and stories of the experiences reported and can be used to assist in developing topics for future research.



Although the each co-researcher's experiences was unique, their reports shared similarities. Ten core themes were explicated through the heuristic progression that, for the primary researcher, relied heavily on a tripartite process of investigator receptivity, immersion, and incubation. These themes, with participant depictions, were:

1. a lack of familiarity with Sacred Breathwork;
2. psychological breakthroughs were experienced;
3. importance of safety, community, and facilitator commitment;
4. impact of disruptive intellectual and outside influences;
5. emotional regulation improvement; self-confidence and maturation regarding life issues;
6. limitations restricting acceptance and surrender to the anomalous;
7. both intentional and unintentional occurrences aided profound experiences;
8. struggles with the creative portion of the breathwork process;
9. participation in a sacred ceremony that fostered self-directed, profound, and sustainable change; and
10. the community fostered vulnerability and honest self-growth.

**Theme #1:** All the co-researchers shared a lack of familiarity with Sacred Breathwork despite being drawn to the Crow's Nest workshop. However, each made an intentional commitment to the process once there. Co-researchers were forthcoming regarding their preliminary unintentional goals as well as their uncertainty about Sacred Breathwork. Most were unaware of what it was but all were curious to experience it once the concept was introduced.

Ky, who is from Midwest North America and identifies as a spiritual being on a human journey, said,

Yeah, well on a point like this in particular, I had my reasons for going, and I wasn't really conscious of what breathwork really was, so it was newly significant to me, how powerful it was without intending that, you know, how after that I was really clear with continuing with the ceremony, as a healing path thing, then it became intentional.

Cernunnos, a Midwesterner who identifies as Pagan, stated,

Well my intentions were to meet him, to learn about his take on soul retrieval and Shamanic counseling work to see what he had to offer in that regard and then when I heard about that Sacred Breathwork that weekend I wanted to try it out of curiosity.

Amadeus, who was raised as a Seventh Day Adventist Christian, identifies as a spiritual seeker. He said,

My intentions were not centered on Sacred Breathwork. My intentions were centered on a deliberate community. Sacred Breathwork turned out to be a part of that deliberate community and a very significant part of it. So, it was by no means of bait and switch but it was an unexpected thing that was sort of rolled out when I got there. Um, so I had no expectations of Sacred Breathwork until I was a part of the community.

Clearly, each of these co-researchers had individual and sometimes not clearly defined—even in their own minds – motivations for participation. However, once involved, each was moved to commit to the process.

**Theme #2:** Each participant reported experiencing psychological breakthroughs during the Sacred Breathwork workshop that rivaled what had been achieved in conventional therapy. However, many cautioned that this modality is not for everyone and requires a great deal of personal preparation, effort, and ongoing commitment. Participants described a variety of psychological, emotional, and physical health benefits, but all agreed that Sacred Breathwork is the most profound method of healing they have engaged in to this point in their lives.

For example, Cernunnos discussed his perception of the workshop compared to the therapy he himself does:

I think for me it's been the single most hopeful self-exploration tool, method, experience that I have ever engaged in. I feel like for me, speaking for myself, it's been far more

effective than therapy has been. I would not knock therapy. I still you know, I am a therapist, I do therapy with clients. Um, I do think it's useful. But for me, I never experienced in therapy the kind of breakthroughs, the kind of insights and epiphanies and frankly the mystical dimensions that I experienced in Sacred Breathwork. So in terms of it being an adventure in self-discovery, it's the only thing I've found that really is par excellence in adventure and self-discovery.

Similarly, Amadeus also addressed how the Sacred Breathwork experience had been more meaningful for him,

The one year that I have worked in sacred breath work has been more useful, useful to me therapeutically than the rest of the years of therapy that I've done on my own. Which is why I want to experience ayahuasca as badly as I do because everybody seems to say it is a condensed, stilled, version of therapy in a way that breathwork touches on but can't even get close to. But my experience with breathwork has been exceptionally tiring, exceptionally demanding and exceptionally worthwhile. . . and cognitively functionally, I'm operating at a level much higher than I've been in the last decade.

Artemis, who is from Belgium and has three years of experience with breathwork, mentioned,

In one line it just, it changed me 360 degrees I mean I just; I am a different woman, definitely. Um, it has helped me um, definitely um, how do I say it. Emotionally it has helped me, um, go through emotions rather than keep them back or repress them. Now I'm not afraid. If I have to cry, I will cry. If I have to be in fear of something, fine, let this fear be. At some point, you just, you will cross and you will get to the other side. Having experienced it. So I think that this, them, that the, a fear of experiencing things that I had, I no longer have.

It is notable that each co-researcher seemed to be describing not just a more successful therapeutic process but also a more arduous one. A sense was relayed that although each had experienced some insight through conventional therapy, the effort to fully commit to Sacred Breathwork somehow enabled each to experience more progress.

**Theme #3:** In a sacred context, a sense of safety, community, and facilitator commitment are vital to the individual and collective process. The co-researchers described the importance of feeling safe and knowing there was “buy-in” from all community members, including the

facilitator. They also reported the need for the experience to be contained in a sacred space.

Artemis: The true ingredients, (1) it needs to be sacred and (2) it needs to be safe. though safe in the sense of, um, you feel safe because you've got your ally, you feel safe because the surroundings are safe, you know that it's going to remain confidential there. Whatever happens there will, you know, won't be talked about in other circles

Cernunnos: I would say um, careful attention to how you create the container and the container involves the music and the progression of music. The container involves the situation in which you're doing the breathing and you are being sort of guarded or watched over by an ally as you're doing it, the creation of a space of safety and security that allows for that work to be done in a very self-conscious kind of way where you can kind of let go of you know worrying.

Maat, who chooses not to identify by gender and who spiritually identifies as nondogmatic, said,

I think that in the long run, if you're really going to get anywhere with it, it's something that you have to make a commitment to. And I don't think it's absolutely necessary to make a commitment to a community but I think that it makes it easier. Okay? I think that the community that we have created makes things much easier. But I, I'm not sure that everybody could say, okay I can do this on my own.

Other co-researchers also noted this idea that the specific structure of the Crow's Nest experience allowed for a fuller and more complete experience of Sacred Breathwork due to the sense of security created.

**Theme #4:** The impact of disruptive intellectual or outside influences cannot be discounted when committing to this type of process. Participants reported difficulties due to such factors that often inhibited the surrender to the experience. They cited a variety of blocks—such as personal resistance, financial constraints, etc. – that threatened to impede their Sacred Breathwork process. Intellectualizing and environmental nuisances were the most common distractions.

Amadeus: I'm probably the most critical music listener you know. I can tell you exactly what frequency range the speakers in the main room are damaged at.

In Crow's Nest, it's full of potential problems for how I might want to experience breathwork. So if I go further back with all the expectations of what Breathwork should be I'm headed to major problems. Now, I kind of want to go in and be so fucking close to somebody that I can barely move. That I, I want it to be like on a Victrola, you know, and the cone, and it's scratching and it's skipping, and I think it's so, I think I can pull it off. you know, so what it's changed in me is by dropping my expectation, and how do you say this when you're charging \$250 a weekend? You know, and that's a huge deal. Because, and especially for me as I sort of reveal, I've got a money thing but you know what, if I pay for this, get your shit together, get somebody to cook in the kitchen so that I don't have to fucking deal with it at the end of this. Or wait, are you such a fucking clever individual that you've even got that worked out and that somehow kind of ties into the experience? You mean, cleaning the shit house is going to help me in breathwork because I'm a part of the community that I'm paying to be a fucking part of? I don't understand! [laughter] If I think too much about it, if I bring that critical edge to it, there's problems there. But, as an experience, if you think about it as a horse that you just happen across as you're walking through the woods and you can just get onto a tree and jump on it unexpectedly and hold fucking tight. That horse is going to take you someplace pretty interesting. But it's not just, it's just, I'm a full believer in randomness and chaos and the useful.

Hekate, a South African who describes her spirituality as including large cosmology, holographic, and shamanic beliefs, said.:

Okay so look it was not more like letting go but more of being told what to do. You know, do it like this you know, and I wasn't sure that I liked the music in the beginning. After the first song, I was able to manage but what got me out of that, I was quite shy. I was not this person and all of a sudden the lights were down and it was full swing into this full thing, and I took a glance over, at someone next to me and she was, she was masturbating, and I went OH, well sure if you can do that, then I can do whatever I need. It was bit of a shock but it gave me what I needed, to not waste my time with the resistances.

Cernunnos: I think initially trying to let go of the need to create a story. You know I was really, I mean in one respect it was great, I could see the value of a mythic framework like Joseph Campbell's Hero's journey . . . keeping me from going deeper and then later I was able to let go of that and just sort of surrender to the body experience.

It appears from the statements that mindfulness of one's own triggers can greatly reduce the distractions that could disrupt the Sacred Breathwork process. Awareness of the need for personal space, a conscious decision to ignore "real world" concerns for the duration of the

workshop, and an honest presentation of potential environmental triggers can prevent such distractions from detracting from the success of the experience.

**Theme #5:** Co-researchers reported clear and identifiable personal progress through participation in the workshop. Improvements in emotional regulation, self-confidence, and maturation regarding life issues were noted. The co-researchers were honest in revealing their imperfections, describing themselves as “works in progress,” but all reported significant changes after participating in the Sacred Breathwork.

Persephone, who identifies as an eclectic spiritual seeker believing in a higher altruistic lifeforce, noted,

I think it has helped me, you know, it's the thing that has helped me continue my work as a clinician, work with others in trauma. It has helped me relieve many of my symptoms that years of therapy hasn't been able to do for me. And with that, all my symptoms of PTSD have been alleviated, umm, you know. I would avoid people for long periods of time, if I was or were having an episode. Having to do as much avoidant things no longer, this has opened up opportunities for me, to be more effective at work, in my credits at school, in my community, my personal life, very broad applications.

Hekate: Breathwork, it lets me bring back some very important pieces for me, like after that big break up I had, umm, it was actually one I had at Crow's Nest but 4 -5 years ago. And, uhh, it was a terrific one. But I had realized that things are probably a lot larger for me than they need to be. And, uhh, so yes, it did let me put myself back together through movement and breath.

Maat: You kind of get to a point where, and it's like, there was one particular session that I found myself in the middle of all of the pain that was in my family and I found myself holding people and most of them were dead already and now I'm saying okay, you know it wasn't right but it's done. It is okay now. And there are situations in my family with my siblings that I can't fix. And I've looked at it and there's this deeper understanding that comes and I've come to the point that I accept that it's not okay and I can't fix it so it's that makes it okay. You know, I no longer was in a spot to have to fix that. Um, I mean I realized that my original sacrifice was probably the wrong thing to do but at 10 years old I don't have to listen to anybody telling me that I made the wrong decision even though it was. Okay? I made the only decision that the 10-year-old sister of a bunch of little kids could do. So I made that decision.

The ability to translate progress made in the intimate and protected environment of the workshop to the outside world was an achievement remarked upon by each participant.

**Theme #6:** Another common theme presented was the need to overcome assorted limiting factors that were preventing breakthroughs or progress. Although the breathwork experience was identified as allowing individuals to reconcile some of these issues through consciousness-expanding reexamination and exploration, participants noted difficulty that arose due to intellectualizing, ruminating, and allowing fears to be triggered, both cognitively and emotionally. These difficulties varied depending on the person, but the experience was described as feeling limited and having to break through the block by surrendering to the non-ordinary state.

Pan, who doesn't identify with any particular religion or spirituality but believes in a higher power, said,

There was an in between point, in which, for some time, I literally just had to accept, to tell myself, "I could very well be going to hell then, ok." I was just so, so very fucking tired of being told what I could and couldn't do. And the one doing the telling was me. I was starting to see past the bullshit. I've slowly learned to accept and approve of my own way of reasoning, morally speaking, but it's been a hard road, seeing that I literally embodied the belief that I would fucking burn in a goddamned fire for all of existence.

Persephone: Well I was having some memories that I was remembering and re-experiencing that were very difficult, that the emotions were very painful, terrifying and were why they were blocked, those things were even hard to remember, but harder to re-experience. That would be the residue, I think oddly, I would come back from breathworks and I would be going on with the work, I noticed things were coming up that were forcing me to face things. Very synchronistic things that were making me respond during and after breathwork, that were just coincidence but a result of opening my self up, and being presented with opportunities to fix it, which started at the workshops. Like, okay, so I'm supposed to be working on this, to me the universe, intelligent creator, gives us the chance to work on what we need to heal and sometimes those can be, umm, reminders of pain, unbearable pain in compelling circumstances that just couldn't be by chance, which is hard to ignore and tackle at the same time because I'm aware of it.

Maat: Occasionally the fear that it's not real . . . I don't know. You know there's times when, that's probably internal. There are times when I just get, um, dealing with too

much, it's like wow is this all a waste of time and it's not real? But that doesn't happen too often. Pretty much I know that it's real. It's a place that I'm, it's a place that I will be in.

Although this sense of having to “power through” in order to progress was a common theme, participants seemed to have been able to achieve this type of surrender relatively quickly during the Sacred Breathwork process.

**Theme #7:** The music that is part of the Sacred Breathwork process contributed to the profound experiences the breathers reported regardless of their aversion to or appreciation of the compositions. With the exception of a few individuals possessed of a higher degree of musical knowledge or background, most co-researchers agreed that the music was satisfying. All noted that, however they experienced the music, it turned out to be what they needed to move forward in their overall process of self-growth and achievement of a positive attitude toward the experience.

Hekate: Well sometimes I'm ready for the next part, and, umm, sometimes I find that always in breathwork session there's one piece that is jarring and kind of throws me out, but I take that as, this can happen to anybody, because everyone has different tastes, and, uhh, you know if the next part comes on and I'm not ready, I can't say, 'Hey, hang on, can you just play that piece again?' If I was on my own, I might, but it's something we have to work through, generally a good experience with the music. I'm not keen on breathwork music that emphasizes too much electric music, or the kind you hear when you go and have a massage, I don't like that but I think that some people do use this kind of music in their breathwork, and that's part of my resistance, when people use this kind of music, it's an insult to use this, as if I were getting a massage. I find it irritating, when I get into it, I know it's okay and that being irritated is part of it, and what does it bring up for me, so it's okay.

Artemis: I find it profoundly helpful to feel that people are actually also going through their own process next to me when I'm journeying even if it's screaming or I don't know. It could be whatever emotions or catharsis or what other people are experiencing but I find that very helpful. It really assists me in kind of surrender and allowing myself to go through the whole process in a very deep way.

Ky: This ally's COEX system came into contact with mine, and I came to learn another person breathing at the same time were having something very similar going on in their breathwork, and was experiencing some agitation outside of their breathwork, umm, so that's an example of external disturbance, another could be someone else breathing and



getting into your space, someone screaming, that used to startle me, or asking to make sure someone does not come into your space, if your ally has to leave or assist with someone else but then that particular person ends up standing in anyways because that's just the way things go sometimes . . . interrupting my process, they seem more like acts of god, but that COEX experience seems to disturb the experience because they have some sort of power over you.

**Theme #8:** All participants reported that the creative process involved in Sacred Breathwork was arduous but that it acted as an agent that manifested the experience, evoked remembrance, and later allowed for further discovery of the self and the unconscious. All participants reported this process as necessary and meaningful but were honest about experiencing a multitude of frustrations during this initial, integration phase.

Persephone: Well, while I do them, I feel frustrated, and I feel like I can't ever capture it, and I want to but it's a feeling of, uhhh, if I can hold onto this, if I can get this down, if I can create a complete thing of what happened, and so feeling the frustration of not feeling like I can do that, and sometimes it's a lot frustrated. Afterwards, I usually tuck my pieces up over fort kick ass in the spider web, so it's over me while I am sleeping, I have these feathers hanging off of it, so for someone who has PTSD, and nightmares, my breathwork arts have really helped hold these things for me in my dreamtime, I think. I don't know if it's the breathwork itself or the art but I noticed I have had less nightmares. So having them there, over my bed, is a source of comfort for me, it's a reminder about the work I can do, umm, helps me lucid dream more, and you know, just help comforting, a reminder of the different people in the community too, that I have had help, and they have seen me, I can get through this. So that's how I continue to use them.

Cernunnos: The Mandala making, um, I guess there, to be completely honest, there are times where I feel like it's been more helpful than others. There are honestly times I'd be perfectly happy not to have done a mandala but I always end up sort of glad anyway that I do. It does give me sort of a focus where when I'm reporting to a group or debriefing about it, it gives me something as a point of reference and then, you know, I can... again I guess it helps me integrate at a deeper level.

Artemis: In the beginning I had the feeling that it didn't assist me at all because I had this belief that I was not an artist and I couldn't draw so I wanted to make beautiful drawings as comparing myself to others and I was like, oh he or she had seen some beautiful drawings and I'm just like with three little bits of paint here and this is not a drawing. This is nothing. It's just shit. So in the beginning the first, that's what I really thought about it. Not that I was doing shit but that my creative thing was like absolutely worthless. The funny thing is that there's a progression, um, and some things that I drew maybe two or three years ago they are actually things that are present in the recent ones. So there is there is a pattern.

The co-researchers shared the sense that having a concrete item to reference, as a sort of anchor for the achievements and progress of the process, was very useful.

**Theme #9:** It was reported that the Crow's Nest method of conceptualizing Sacred Breathwork as a sacred ceremony fostered self-directed, profound, and sustainable change. Participants described Sacred Breathwork as a profound healing tool that allows individuals to explore their history, flaws, strengths, and vulnerabilities, while connecting to the sacred.

Amadeus: So, the difference between the Sacred version Breathwork of that and the self-medicating, self-driven alternative therapeutic is the intentionality or the ritualistic or the sacramental. I'm very comfortable right now sharing with everybody that I am working with ritual in my daily life to provide center, or focus, healing, purpose, needing anything. And Breathwork is ritual of a very high order because it's entered into deliberately the way ritual is meant to be entered into. And then there are moments and steps and ideas of the ritual that allow you to experience it in a somewhat reproducible sort of way. And the focus of the intentionality gets you to a destination, or gets you an experience, or gets you something other than the just knee jerk reaction, the "I just don't want to feel like I feel, make me feel something different." May get you part way there but that's ultimately unplugging and disconnecting, whereas this is a plugging in and connecting to.

Cernunnos: Your higher self is the therapist or, you know, the sort of wise part of you guides the process, that part of you that's not normally accessible to everyday consciousness and you're not always aware of where it's going to take you. But it always takes you to these great places and the work you can do as a result seems like it's quicker, deeper, more thorough than conventional psychotherapy because you know there's nobody there to be defensive with, there's nobody to engage in resistance with except yourself. And, um, you know, I've had a much easier time getting past my own resistances, I suppose, in those circumstances, than I would with a therapist. You know when you're with another person, you're projecting all kinds of things onto them, you know. There's complications, you know, that I think arise from that, and all valuable in its own right but there's also something to be said for removing that screen and letting the journey be into yourself.

Hekate: I think psychology, I mean yes, there are wonderful and constructive benefits to help people see the cosmologies and, you know, ways and patterns and things, but geez, it takes a long time, you know. I mean just to compare it as briefly to shaman work, I can get in there and hook onto something, in one or two sessions people can be done, where in psychology it can take years. And the same with breathwork, it can let things out in a far more organic fashion, without having to find words because not a lot of people are good with words, they don't know how to express words, especially men. People yap on

and on and on, and not get to the point of something, they are all about my story without actually getting to what it is really. Also, breathwork can let people into places without them having to find the word.

Persephone: I think the shamanic stuff, has more of a, like breathwork, who knows what shamanism is but the way I'm deciding it is, it is a ritual process, and you bring a touchstone out of it, this imagery, umm, I think that can be placed around you, and you can use your conscious mind by using those objects to tap in, heal and integrate, I can reach those places faster, and my thoughts more effectively.

Maat: For me, Sacred Breathwork has more to do with me and my authentic self. And sometimes we don't even know who our authentic self is, ok? But it's a space for me and my authentic self that tries to straighten out all this shit that we've been wandering through the universe. And, um, conventional work, um, sometimes you deal too much with the ego.

Again, it is notable that participants are remarking upon the very personal nature of the progress achieved through Sacred Breathwork, which is interesting in that this is a process that necessitates a closeness with other participants. Despite this, the co-researchers reported more personalized progress, more personally driven progress, than in conventional therapeutic methods.

**Theme #10:** The co-researchers all described experiencing a flawed – although open and spiritually driven – community that fostered vulnerability and honest self-growth. They also noted that the members of the community associated with Crow's Nest International and Sacred Breathwork were possessed of a healthy balance of dysfunction and function and were able to be vulnerable and flawed, yet simultaneously spiritual, supportive, and healing. The Crow's Nest community imparts a sense of tribe.

Cernunnos: [A] sense of tribe and the sort of consistent container that holotropic sessions have lacked because they're too big and they're transitory. The Sacred Breathwork sort of demands or asks for a stronger community container and it feels like a smaller tribal sort of thing and I think that that's important if you're really going to engage in relationships with people, um, along the lines of those parts of you that come to the surface through breathwork. Those parts are now engaging in relationship. What better way of playing certain things out than with people that you've learned to trust on that level and rather

than not having any opportunity to do that in the world where you're encountering people that you don't trust on that level. You don't have that same opportunity.

Persephone: Working with what comes out of the journey part of the bigger community experience shows that things are happening outside of the breathwork, with COEX systems, so I've conceded to deal with these things, with the traumas that were being triggered.

Amadeus: Completely flawed, no further ahead than any other flawed organization or community in terms of their abilities. Seemingly quite different in their heart space and intentionality. Which for me personally makes a huge difference in how I am willing to put up with you and accept you and work with you. And absolutely essential for how I have experienced breathwork and anything outside of Shamanic teachings of that community. It's like one of those Mobius strips, if you keep going around you're always on that surface. It's woven deeply, a two dimensional thing that defines a three dimensional space by some fucking trick of the light. I don't know how it works but it's almost, you can't separate it and you can't have one without the other. It seems like to me.

Artemis: Basically you just go in naked, not literally naked but you just, uh. People go through this process between them and them but you're there through a system and to help them protect them. It's a great honor, I find, to be an ally for example. For me it's just as rewarding as being the journeyer. You get so much out of what the other person is experiencing. Not only the person who you are the ally of but also of somebody else in the room. So it's just sharing, its constant sharing of experiences. What Mikkal always says is the dream of one is the dream of all of the community. But also the experience of one person. . . yeah, so I think it's extremely rewarding and what one person is going through actually helps the whole community so the sense of community for me is, some people of the community have basically become my family. My soul family.

Given that the overall “container” of Crow’s Nest is such an integral part of the Sacred Breathwork experience, it is not surprising that the co-researchers agreed that the community was a very real and valuable aspect of the success they reported.

### **Individual Depictions**

The following individual depictions reflect the essential qualities of the core themes presented through the unique and personal accounts of two co-researchers.

**Amadeus.** At the time of the interview, Amadeus had been actively participating in

Sacred Breathwork for over one year. As most study participants reported, he had encountered challenges along his path in life that led him to seek out alternative, holistic experiences of personal growth, which ultimately caused him to commit to using Sacred Breathwork as a mechanism to self-discovery and healing.

Amadeus stated that being raised in a Seventh Day Adventist Christian family had a great impact on his life, overall identity, relationships with others, and it ultimately influenced his personal growth explorations. He also described his recipe for life as “Utter fucking chaos.” He said, “It's the recipe I follow for my life. Grab as much interesting shit as you can, put it in a room somewhere, and interact with it. Something's going to happen with it.”

He went on to describe an interesting juncture early on in his life:

I had a bad experience in high school with a girl and my instinct at the point was total rejection of former religious stuff and I started buying all the Llewellyn books I could on like Wicca, witch craft, that type of thing sort of just explored there and got really hammered hard by the family at that point when they found out, and it and they were like “this is unacceptable and you could be the outcast if you continue down this path.” That would have been in my late teens, early 20s, and that put a damper on me for probably a decade.

I was a complete teetotaler, non-drug user; deliberately slow all the way through my life especially up until I was 21, and then it wasn't really until I was in my 30s that I even started to experiment with anything outside the norm. The refinement of my spirituality has been learning what I actually like and what I actually want versus what my Seventh Day Adventist Christian upbringing told me a good boy should want and like. Here it is in a nutshell, what I'd learned through the last five years and looking back over my life, my life is a complete pursuit of the psychedelic without actually using psychedelics. You can see this in my choice of music, my choice of literature, movies, the way that I visually represent myself, what I create, what I do. I have been very fearful of actual of actual psychedelic use of drugs which is why some of these alternative methods have been as appealing to me as they seem to accomplish similar things to what I've read, such as altered states and expanding consciousness.

Amadeus reported feeling resistance, uncertainty, and unfamiliarity with certain Sacred Breathwork protocols and ritual language used for inductions. But he also described undergoing an evolution through surrendering to these experiences and learning more about the teachings

behind Sacred Breathwork.

I don't believe, and I don't know this, I don't think Grof would tell you to put down gold and silver cords into the center of the earth to protect you and bring you back. I was literally struggling with that because I learned about dream gates before I learned about the process for breathwork, so I was building a space in my head for when I journey to go put my roots down there. As this female facilitator told me, less deliberate intentions and more body experiences is necessary. It was like I don't even know where to put down my roots right now. There is where Mikkal came in, he grasps everything, and has a huge ability to pull in information and assimilate it. He's constantly moving his talks and wherever you happen to come into the community, you hit at that moment in time, and it's a unique moment in time. I happen to hit at dream gates. Soul fragmentation and bringing it back came before, and I knew nothing about that but that it's pivotal to understand. I would imagine where people join in the workshops; they experience breathwork differently because they were brought on during specific teachings. So the other things unrelated to Sacred Breathwork affect the sacred breathwork. That's what I'm saying there, and yeah the teachings behind it help deepen the experience and your understanding of it to give you a framework.

From what I understand, the commitment to the community and the fact that the community is intuitive, and that I've experienced individuals that are intuitive at that moment in time when it's the exactly right thing needed for me to experience, it was encouraging. For example, there was a moment when I was breathing and experiencing something and I was in my own space going through it and a female facilitator leaned in, and said, "Go for it. Get it. Do it now. Make it louder, and give it as much voice as it needs." At that moment I was like ok, I will move in that direction. I was yielding to the fact that this person had tons of experience here, has been there, done that, and knew me as an individual, and that she was committed to this process. So I decided to go down that path, and the further I went down that path, the more physical pain I was in. It was the day before Valentine's Day and there were two of us, both males, breathing in a room full of women. They held me, they secured me, and they pressed into me physically into my arms and legs. And in that moment I could let go completely of my physical body in that room and follow that process the way it needed to be processed.

In the following, Amadeus discusses his progression and values of the Sacred Breathwork experience.

I've described this to a therapist I've talked to who's not a part of the community but understands somewhat what it's like. I'm not sure you could have had this experience at any other point in time than after the worst fucking winter you've ever been through in your life, and it's starting to be sort of springy. The amount of feminine nurturing, love, experience that went into that process and what I was actually going through . . . I don't think would have had happen if it wasn't for somebody poking me and saying yes you can, do it, feel free. Which is why now when I breathe, I tell people if you think or feel something, act on it, and if I don't want it I'll say no. I now feel comfortable enough now

that it's not going to break what I'm doing, and because I'm committed and I believe in that process. I'm committed to the process and I'm giving you permission as an ally to commit to that process as deeply as you'd like to as well.

I, however, incredibly value the shamanic parts of breathwork and this is the big thing. I don't think Sacred Breathwork is journeying. Sacred Breathwork for me is all about that releasing and letting go and just going to where it goes. Journeying with the shaman is deliberately entering a space and interacting with that space for a purpose. Seeking something, healing something, finding something, and understanding something. As I approach breathwork with the view of, if you know if there's a cork floating in the water and if you try to punch it, it's going to pop back up. But if you just steadily push it down, it will stay down but eventually it will pop back up, so ultimately just let the cork do its own thing. That works better for me in breathwork. Let the breathwork do its own thing.

I haven't received my greatest rewards yet. I'm fully convinced that they're going to come. Which is not to say the ones that I've gotten haven't been good. This is going to seem kiss ass-ery but it's genuine and it's in the spirit in which I've described it. The greatest benefit that I've received from Sacred Breathwork at this moment in time is the fact that I've had a three-hour conversation with you about it today. And you've left my realm of influence. This is a part of your life that is matterful and meaningful to you and you've carved time out of your day to do it and we've connected in a meaningful way for it. This is not going to sit in a drawer unused. It will grow into something larger, it will be beneficial to you, it is beneficial to me, and it will be beneficial to the people who read it. This conversation matters and we wouldn't have had this conversation if I hadn't had been a part of the Sacred Breathwork community, and, if I hadn't showed the initiative to respond to your initiative for request to do this. You pulled something back, you honored the seed, you let it go, you asked for connection, I responded, right now we've grabbed the seed. We're shaping it a bit together and were going to let it go in honor of that connection. That's the most important thing that breathwork has done for me right now.

**Maat.** At the time of the interview Maat had been actively participating in Sacred Breathwork for almost three years. Like Amadeus and the other co-researchers, Maat had experienced varied levels of life challenges, as well as familial dysfunction. And also, as with the other co-researchers, Maat admitted to having initial resistance to Sacred Breathwork but had developed an appreciation for its gifts.

Maat noted being raised in a Christianity-identifying environment but as an adult self-describes as an open-to-truth, nondogmatic believer in a higher power. Maat reports this is an important factor in relations with self and others while journeying toward self-growth and

healing.

Maat said:

To start off, I have no fucking idea what's out there. Okay, none whatsoever. I do believe that we are all part of the universe and there's this thing that goes directly into your heart and soul, and connects you with the very center of the universe. Also, that you're here to have an experience. Um, my personal existence is to try not to cause damage to other people. I talked to a man the other day at a Lutheran church and I said to him, that if you really listen to your heart, then you'll know the right thing to do. He said that he didn't think that was true, and that you needed the Bible to tell you what to do because you can't rationalize things and he said he didn't trust his heart. For me, especially after going to South America I see that most spiritual teachers really are looking for a certain amount of power and influence over other people, and I don't need a leader but at the same time I recognize that a lot of people do. It's just that you've got to be so careful. You know, you never know, that leader could turn into a Jim Jones.

I don't feel superior to anybody but I feel very lucky to have a brain and um, I'm driven to find as much truth as I can. I'm not driven to the point where some people get into the nirvana thing. They often go "I just want to go back" and I go, then what the hell are you here for? You're here and there are things that you can only figure out here. There are things that you just can't do from back there. I just want to make my life as relevant as I can. I want to but I can't fix anybody else and I can't save anybody else. Not even my kids and that drives me crazy but I can only hope that I can plant seeds so that other people can go out and find whatever their truth is.

As for Crow's Nest, I'd seen things about Crow's Nest and I had talked to Mikkal on the telephone probably two years before I got there and I made an appointment with him. He said, "Breathwork is 10 times faster than psychotherapy" and to be honest with you, from the therapy that I've gotten, although it kept me from killing people so that's good, but somehow didn't feel like it was helping me deal with all the icky issues I had to deal with. So this sounded interesting. And here's a man with all these degrees doing that sort of shamanic thing. I didn't want to pass judgment and I think talk therapy is very important. It gives people that rope with a knot in it to hold onto but in my experience, it doesn't necessarily solve anything. Actual psychotherapy can help sometimes because you do get hours, and hours, and hours of listening to yourself. So when he says this was ten times faster I went okay, I'm going to try it. I was afraid at first, to be honest with you. The first two times were just getting my feet wet. I wanted to make sure that my ally was there and could hold my hand if I needed my hand held. By about the third time I realized I didn't need anybody to hold my hand and my initial reaction as an ally was that I needed to mother people because that's what I do but I realized that I didn't need to do this, and only that person can help themselves. I realized that I am there to support and protect them from harm in the room.

I'm constantly realizing more about myself; even now there are still things that I haven't dealt with. The reason that I haven't dealt with them is because I never dealt with them to



begin with, before breathwork. Horrible things happen but under no circumstances, in no way in hell should I let that be a main focus of my life, that's what I thought. Some things have happened in my past that I don't feel should dominate my life. Is that a healthy way of looking at it? Who knows? I may never deal with some things. I was always afraid if I did, if it came up and it spilled out, and I fell apart who's going to put me back together? But I'm finally at a point where I think that it would be safe to go ahead and fall apart, in this community. Somebody there would help me pick up the pieces and put me back together. And that's just where I'm at with it.

It was at my third session where I really made a commitment. Breathwork helped me deal with my father's situation, and his death last year helped me deal with looking at my mother completely different today, and my mother's been gone since 2005. My mother was very young when she had me. And um, she was not in a position to be a really supportive mother. She abandoned me when her boyfriend tried to molest me and she blamed me for every ill in her life. It wasn't until I was talking to myself one day after breathwork and I said, I just wouldn't have done things the way she did. I was 26 when I had my first child, so I really wasn't in a position to even judge how she was handling the shit she was handling. She and my father were typical Fifties kids; just before she was 17 years old, she had me. My father joined the Air Force and when he came back, they got married. At my father's funeral, I learned about a lot of really weird shit she had to deal with. I received a final piece from my aunt that helped me stop being hurt, angry, and being mad.

Maat discusses the evolution of a growing appreciation for Sacred Breathwork:

The one thing I've done a lot more since I started breathwork is um, I don't even know what to call, it but I do my own version of breathwork at home, and I give myself time to regularly breathe. I put some cords down into the earth and I can handle when things start to come up for me. Also, where I really started to work, is that I now allow myself to look at myself as the patient instead of the constant mommy taking care of everybody else and realized that I have to make this part whole. Because if this part's not whole, there's not a whole lot you can do for anybody else anyway.

There was one particular breathwork session that helped me come to understand there are situations in my family with my siblings that I can't fix. I've looked at them and there's this deeper understanding that comes, and I've come to the point that I accept that it's not okay and I can't change what happened. You know. I'm the oldest of seven children and I literally sacrificed some really hard parts of me for those children and have gotten kicked in the teeth by it. I speak about two of them and realize that nothing I do is going to make things okay for them because of who they are and where they're at is just the way it is. For a long time, when this one thing came up between my one sister and I, I would feel devastated – but that's no longer. Breathwork did help me come to a point where I had to accept her brokenness and accept where she was at and realize that she's the one who has to fix it.

### **The Composite Depiction**

The composite depiction reflects core themes, meanings, and the essence of the experience of utilizing Sacred Breathwork through combining the accounts of the co-researchers' experiences. After reviewing the data collected and my personal experiences, it is evident that Sacred Breathwork has been a transformational experience for both the co-researchers and the primary researcher. This composite depiction will paraphrase the collective statements from the various participants and the primary researcher.

I really didn't know much about Sacred Breathwork when I started and I was hesitant about how much it would work, but since I have committed and engaged the sacred in this way, I have experienced transformational healing. Through this nurturing, open, and supportive community, I was able to be vulnerable and heal on a level much deeper than any previous attempts I had made. This method of self-discovery and healing is not for everyone, but I found it very beneficial for me. Surprisingly, even the unplanned, the accidental, and very existence of COEXes have worked to my advantage. Rather than playing into the act of resisting, I have reluctantly and willingly confronted my oppositions, which have in turn helped me heal myself more. There are many ingredients to this method that have provided me the opportunity to grow and heal in a safe, sacred space. This transpired as a result of the committed, intentional environment; the teachings and ritual underpinnings of Sacred Breathwork; and the wisdom, strength, and knowledge of the facilitator.

Using my breath and allowing carefully chosen evocative music to induce a non-ordinary state to thereby expand my consciousness has been rewarding. The creative process has been challenging for me but I know it is yet another element essential to facilitating my intentions, namely positive change. I have experienced positive behavioral and psychological changes, often

encountering the numinous, in ways that have promoted the evolution of my personal growth and spirituality.

At times finding comparable and adequate words to elucidate the ineffable experience of Sacred Breathwork was a challenge. Words often prove to fall short of adequately articulating an experience that must be lived because this type of phenomenon communicates more directly through the language of the heart. The variety of feelings I've experienced during this healing journey are better expressed viscerally because they stand outside the realm of academic, intellectual, ego-based consciousness.

Because of breathwork, I was able to step out of ego-based ruminations and routine and in turn expand my consciousness regarding my world-view, relationship with others, and myself. The personality and behavioral impacts of my traumas and the psychological wounds from intimate relationships and familial-dynamics-gone-wrong have now become less painful, and I am more capable of managing my emotions and reactions. I initially engaged this ceremony out of curiosity, but I now embrace, trust, and value this sacred ritual as a means to grow, explore, and heal.

### **Individual Portraits**

The next section presents two co-researcher portraits that exemplify the characteristics of the experience of Sacred Breathwork and qualities of the individual experience. These portraits will incorporate the researcher's impressions with autobiographical material derived from the interviews.

**Portrait of Persephone.** Persephone is a lively, cheerful, warm-hearted woman, a survivor of adversity and a seeker of truth. She is not afraid of trying unconventional traditions and applying them to her personal journey. She has the intrinsic determination and desire to

understand indigenous and spiritual teachings, and she reported being a believer and seeker for most of her life. She is a mother and a graduate student, pursuing a degree and necessary credentials to support her dream of assisting others on their life paths.

Persephone minored in religious studies as an undergraduate, and she described her spiritual beliefs as untraditional but disclosed her family of origin as Catholic. Persephone revealed that she “hated Catholicism” and was raised without religion because she rejected it from early on. She said:

I do think that there is some intelligent, creative, altruistic life force that guides us and the whole universe. I think that's part of us, inside of us, and I think it's hard to conceptualize what that is, but I do believe in it, and not in a cold, scientifically calculated way.

Persephone noted that at times her work as a social worker and the demands of graduate school have triggered her childhood trauma, which was a big motivator in her effort to overcome and better manage her symptoms.

Persephone described her upbringing as dysfunctional; her opening statements during the interview revealed that she received therapy at a woman's shelter when she was just four years old. Persephone later experienced conventional forms of psychotherapy and psychiatric treatment when she was 15 years old. Persephone said, “I was actually hospitalized and locked away for a month when I was 15, and I've been in and out of therapy ever since then.” She reported that conventional therapy for her seemed to be “too dependent,” and she indicated a preference for modalities that emphasize client independence. She recounted an array of psychological and spiritual treatments used to address her symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Persephone noted participating in hypnosis, cognitive behavioral therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, Reiki energy healing, entheogens, and a variety of shamanic practices.

Persephone stated that Reiki and shamanism-based methods are the most appealing and rewarding to her. She said:

I guess I've always been interested in them and always been part of those kinds of groups. As soon as I was old enough to find and get to them, I did. Even when I was a little kid I would sit out in nature and believe that nature was healing me, you know, some kind of nonconventional psychotherapy. It's hard to explain it but it wasn't necessarily the structure. I've always believed there were other ways of healing that we didn't have in the western model, and I always tried to explore the mysteries of that kind.

Persephone found out about Crow's Nest through a friend and expressed interest in connecting with likeminded individuals. She was unfamiliar with Sacred Breathwork when this friend invited her to join the Crow's Nest workshop opening community gathering and fire talk. Once she arrived she quickly became intrigued with the promise of breathwork working faster and more profoundly than conventional therapy. Persephone ultimately ended up staying for the duration of the workshop. For the past year, she has experienced positive benefits from breathwork. Persephone credited Sacred Breathwork as the tool that helped her continue her work as a clinician over the past year, working with other trauma survivors. She reported that her many PTSD symptoms "have been alleviated." Persephone said, "I'm not having to do as much avoidant things; this has opened up opportunities for me to be more effective at work, in my credits at school, in my community, and my personal life."

**Portrait of Hekate.** Hekate is an artist and self-proclaimed wild woman. She exudes confidence and wisdom, and has a personality that is raw and intriguing. She personifies the modern day shaman by practicing shamanic customs and ritual daily. She was immersed in shamanic tradition through the immediate culture and environment in which she was raised in South Africa, and has used a variety of shamanic techniques for personal healing throughout her life.

Invoking the sacred and engaging non-ordinary states comes naturally to her. They are

something she has been doing since she was a child. Hekate's city is filled with individuals who call themselves shamans and conduct energy work, and she reports they are aware but unstructured. Hekate has always thought in the way a shaman might think, and said her first real shamanic experience was when she was six years old. Hekate recounted an experience of helping her cousin with epilepsy. While sleeping next to her, her cousin began to have an epileptic fit. Hekate's cousin communicated with her during this episode as Hekate lay down next to her. She described journeying to a place where she found the cousin trapped in a cupboard, and she set her free. At the time, Hekate did not know much about what had happened but eventually became familiar with what it was when she grew up. Hekate defined this experience as an opening to something deeper, an opportunity to access something more within her.

Hekate has an intrinsic understanding of indigenous practices and is also proficient in the ethics pertinent to engaging the sacred in non-ordinary states of consciousness. She is certified as a Sacred Breathwork facilitator through Crow's Nest International and presents as a woman with great integrity. When she speaks of the spiritual knowledge she has, she refers to it as her "cosmology" and accredits spirit and the spirit world as the container from which she retrieves and downloads this information. She related this spirit world as resembling the concept of the holographic, comparable to Grof's holotropic concept.

Hekate said, "My shamanic training was seven years' worth of, of um, digging around in my stuff you know. And I wanted to become hollow bone, so a good seven years' worth of just about every week having to work on this stuff was a lot, a lot of work." Hekate said she has actively experienced Sacred Breathwork for approximately five years. However, she reported being familiar with a variety of breathwork practices previously. Hekate's first breathwork was here in the United States, rather than back home in South Africa. She attributed her lack of

engaging breathwork back home to the loose boundaries and unsafe practices going on there. Hekate liked that Mikkal and Grof's versions of breathwork were more grounded in theory and ethics, and they were seemingly more intense than what was being offered in South Africa. Hekate said, as a result of the structure and the way the breathwork technique was applied, she experienced significant growth in her emotional self. Hekate regularly facilitates Sacred Breathwork groups and occasionally participates in Sacred Breathwork for herself.

### **Validity of Heuristic Research**

Investigating this spiritual phenomenon within a qualitative framework allowed the opportunity to deeply explore this incorporeal and sacred experience. The heuristic approach focuses on gaining an understanding of the nature and meaning of the subjective experience, and not just for reasons of replicating and producing generalizability. Moustakas (1990) indicated the, "question of validity is one of meaning" (p. 32). This process made room to explore beliefs and misconceptions, and it assisted in clarifying values. In addition, it introduced a model of treatment unique to individuals interested in indigenous and spiritually-influenced healing. It is also valuable to understand the subjective experience of Sacred Breathwork in order to discern how healing occurs and how it can be applied in this context. "[R]esearch can help psychologists learn a great deal in this domain" (Richards & Bergin, 2005, p. 310).

The patterns of experiences and meaning were uncovered through the heuristic method's structured and organized design, a design that required continually returning to the data and clarifying the depictions of the experience to illuminate the significant qualities inherent in the Sacred Breathwork phenomena.

### **Summary**

A breathwork participant's ability to attend to the healing process requires an innate

desire and commitment to self-growth, and spirituality is a main well-spring to tap into in order to achieve this. These individuals must have a pre-existing interest in complementary alternative medicine and holistic approaches to healing, an appreciation for non-dogmatic spirituality, a proclivity for using ritual and ceremony for self-discovery and growth, an openness to life's mysteries, and a belief in exploring life's purpose and direction.

Of equal importance, the facilitator and community must be able not only to have knowledge of, but also be able to cultivate and contain, ceremonial space for a wide array of cosmologies, traumas, and eccentricities. They must be able to safely create this sacred space while allowing for personality imperfections to manifest. For this study's co-researchers, this has proven to be a way to dig deep into their histories, minds, and bodies; to let down their guards and become completely vulnerable.

Lastly, the creative synthesis from the principal investigator, as well as the collaborative co-researcher creative synthesis (collective artistic renderings), will be presented to illuminate the ineffable qualities of this work.

### **Creative Synthesis**

The immersion into uncovering the Sacred Breathwork experience left the primary researcher with a great sense of gratitude for the Crow's Nest community and creator Dr. C. Michael Smith (Mikkal). This artistic synthesis can take the form of a written narrative, a drawing, painting, or even poetry. It is a comprehensive, creative expression that synthesizes the essence of meaning regarding the investigated phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). The following is a photo journal series of images taken onsite of Crow's Nest by the primary researcher. Following these photographs is the collaborative co-researcher creative synthesis, a collection of images and utterances from several of the co-researchers.

























### Co-Researcher Creative Synthesis



~Artemis

#### *Row, row, row your boat...*

For the past three years, I have been very fortunate to be a member of a healing community that regularly comes together for powerful psychospiritual workshops. This community offers ample opportunities for deepening self awareness and healing for ourselves and each other . . .

#### *Gently down the stream...*

As the drumming begins, and then intensifies, our breathing alters, finding a new communal pattern as we inhale the sweet and transcendental fragrance of burning palo santo. The candles flicker, casting Otherworldly shadows on the walls . . .



~Ky

The sights, sounds, and smells combine to transport us out of the mundane spaces of our lives. I feel as if a breeze from a faraway place stirs my hair, a sense of numinous Presence arising within my body and pressing gently in on me from all around me . . .



~Pan

*Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily...*

In this moment, such a sense of wonder and joy sweeps over and through me—a peak experience! The bonds of kinship and affection for those who are with me are palpable. Even those whom I have just met for the first time feel now as familiar and comfortable as longtime friends. In non-ordinary states of consciousness, relationships and connections are fluidly transformed, and the normal social distances between people somehow do not seem as daunting or important . . .

*Life is but a dream...*

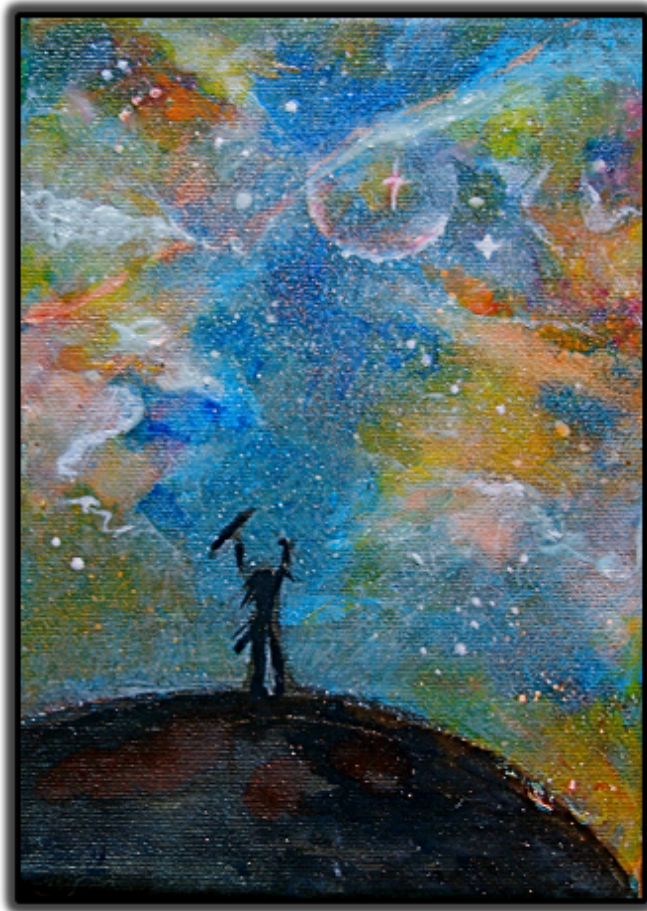
Within this waking Dream we listen together, we sing, we chant, we pray, and we send love and healing where it is needed. It is not at all a question now of skepticism or belief. It no longer feels like something strange or foreign, or even symbolic or psychological. It is compassionate community action that arises organically out of our will and our mutual sense of deep longing for wholeness. It is desire and deep concern—for ourselves, for each other, and for the planet. It is a reaching out from the vacuum, the emptiness, the lack of completeness, the dissociation we all know and live and experience as quite normal in our daily lives . . .

. . . if we could accept the dreams of sleep and non-ordinary states of consciousness as real—as additional or alternative means of living our lives and experiencing our worlds—then perhaps we might experience less of a painful disconnect between our waking and sleeping psyches. We might not lose track of our sense of self during sleep or other non-ordinary states, remaining able to fully experience more of ourselves and the universe of which we are a part . . .



I am reminded here of aboriginal and indigenous ways of dreaming, which have not been utterly lost in those contexts. Perhaps we could return to a similar way honoring of Mystery that was once very familiar to our more animistic ancestors, no matter what ethnicities we embody.

~ *Cernunnos*



~*Hekate*

## Chapter V

### Discussions and Conclusions

#### Introduction

As mentioned in previous chapters, the purpose of this qualitative examination was to uncover the intentional use of Sacred Breathwork by inquiring: *What is the experience of Sacred Breathwork?* In exploring this question, the expansive perception of the eight co-researchers regarding their experiences and ongoing processes with Sacred Breathwork were explicated. The study was conducted over two years, with a six-month period of immersion in the interview and illumination process.

#### Review of Chapters I-V

The first chapter described and discussed the motivations behind this research. Key terms were introduced and defined, and the personal experiences of the primary researcher were presented. The second chapter reviewed an extensive array of psychological, spiritual, and scientific literature related to the topic. Chapter III discussed the design validity and theoretical implementation of the research model; the rationale for the choice of model; and a description of data collection, handling, and analysis. The research findings in Chapter IV reflected individual and collective themes. Chapter IV also included: a composite depiction, an examination of the 10 core themes that arose from the investigation, two individual depictions, two individual portraits, an enumeration of the points pertaining to heuristic research, and a creative synthesis developed by the co-researchers as part of their Sacred Breathwork experience.

In this final chapter, identified themes of the literature review will be compared to the findings of the study. Clinical applications and implications to the field of psychology will also be discussed. Also, limitations of the study will be noted to aid in the development of

recommendations for future research. This chapter will conclude with a statement of personal meaning regarding this research study.

### **Findings Compared to Relevant Literature**

Several findings of this study reinforce and build upon those found throughout the literature review. These include the experience of profound psychological, emotional, and consciousness transformation through utilizing indigenous and ancient spiritually influenced traditions and ritual. The literature review explored the roots of the modern Sacred Breathwork movement in ancient traditions. It also examined Sacred Breathwork as a conduit between traditional shamanic technique and modern psychology. The technicality of the breathwork process was explored as were various states of and philosophies on consciousness. The review also addressed issues of cultural misappropriation and the importance of maintaining respect for traditional method and peoples. The pivotal role of the creative in breathwork was also highlighted, specifically in the areas of the use of music and the post-session creative processing.

The following section will discuss findings relevant to this profound transformational experience, specifically by: exploring the impact of both the individual and community on the process; examining the concept of breathwork through the multiple lenses of academia, the secular, and the sacred; discussing how the literature implies that consciousness extends beyond the physical through focus on a few, relevant themes of the review; investigating traditional attitudes on healing; and addressing the issue of how the language of science can be unwieldy when applied to matters of the sacred. The information will be organized as follows: influence of consciousness, ego, and community; academic, secular, and sacred reflections; the extension of consciousness beyond the corporeal; Theme #1—a lack of familiarity with Sacred Breathwork; Theme #10—the community fostered vulnerability and honest self-growth; Theme #8—struggles

with the creative portion of the breathwork process; indigenous perspectives on healing; language as a barrier; implications and applications; limitations of the research; recommendations for future research; and lastly the personal meaning of the study.

**Influence of consciousness, ego, and community.** Despite individual uniqueness of consciousness, spiritual adeptness, and ego development, participants collectively report the Sacred Breathwork experience as influential to their psychological, communal, and emotional states. This finding resonates with van Lommel's findings regarding those who experienced NDE: regardless of religious belief and spiritual aptitude, participants in his study expressed having a new psychological and emotional awareness, including an appreciation and strong sense of connectedness with others (van Lommel, 2013). Furthermore, the collective Sacred Breathwork co-researchers' experience of intentional community and authentically grounded facilitation reinforces the expansion of consciousness and deeper understanding of the self. Correspondingly, the literature review revealed that ancient knowledge of spiritual and indigenous perspectives used by healers through the applications of ritual and ceremony promote transformation (Eliade, 1964; Judith, 2004; Levine, 2010; Nelson, 1993; Rappaport, 1999; Seligman, 2009; Smith, 1995).

**Academic, secular, and sacred reflections.** Given that the literature reviewed was comprised of academic, secular, and sacred writings, this exploration of the Sacred Breathwork experience provides a rich and unique addition to the field of psychology. As mentioned in Chapter II, psychological research on the use of ancient and indigenous tradition for medical or therapeutic benefit has tended to exclude the use of spirituality to relieve deeper levels of suffering. Instead, orthodox science tends to place a higher value on narrow examinations of biological and academic specialty and ultimately requires spiritual approaches to be validated or

governed by western conventional standards. This in turn perpetuates the fragmentation of efforts to understand consciousness and sponsors conflict with endorsing spiritual healing and any advantageous related anomalous phenomena. As a result, spiritual healing work manages to lag behind conventional psychology when it comes to dissemination, training, and adequate implementation. For instance, eight years after an investigation into spiritually-focused educational training of clinical psychologists, researchers found some implementation had taken place but no systematic increase of spiritually-focused educational training had occurred despite the fact that 96% of Americans state they believe in God and 88% state they value religion in some way (Schafer, Handal, Brawer, & Ubinger, 2011). Furthermore, these researchers, Rachel Schafer, Paul Handal, Peter Brawer, and Megan Ubinger (2011), said that

[m]ore specifically, 24% of Psy.D. programs compared to 8% of Ph.D. programs covered the topic of religion/spirituality systematically. This noteworthy difference may be attributed to the training philosophies of both programs, with Psy.D. programs having more of a focus on applied skills which may extend to skills related to addressing multicultural issues. (p. 237)

These statistics emphasize the current position of academic programs and research covering the multicultural areas of spirituality and religion. It was not until the year 2000 that spirituality and religion were recognized by the American Psychological Association (APA) as an element of the organization's standards for graduate education (Schafer et al., 2011). Additionally, if institutions, scholars, and clinicians genuinely intend to develop and implement culturally applicable treatment, "a broader understanding of therapeutic processes and practices is needed. This will involve an increased awareness and questioning of Euro-American ideological and cultural commitments" (Calabrese, 2008, p. 335). This draws attention to the prospect of contextual blindness of leadership and biases of dominant cultural value systems. Similarly, all co-researchers conveyed a general sense – supported by personal experience – that academia and

conventional psychotherapy are inadequate when it comes to addressing spiritual matters.

Areas of western indoctrinated health disciplines, such as psychology, medicine, and community services, contend with various aspects of the human condition. When attempting to resolve psychological and emotional conflict, one area of discipline should not be considered superior to any other. Regarding these areas, researcher Kaur Tarundeep (2013) said, “Examination of the list of interfacing disciplines reveals a variety of boundaries which must be respected if optimum cooperation is to be achieved” (p. 945). Clearly, efforts have been made in the field of psychology to incorporate spirituality but more energy, humility, deference, and appreciation are needed to achieve a true holistic partnership between the sacred and secular, the academic and the spiritual.

**The extension of consciousness beyond the corporeal.** Additionally, the literature review strongly suggested that consciousness extends beyond the physical structure of the brain. This is a contradictory concept to the conventional paradigm of science (Grof, 1993; Grof & Grof, 2010; Hameroff & Penrose, 1996; Hameroff & Penrose, 1996a; Metzner, 2009; Nelson, 1993; Sayama, 1986; van Lommel, 2013). Additionally, the literature review found that the collective and dynamic psychological experience of the spiritual is suggested by wisdom traditions to be more than a state of consciousness; rather, it is an independent reality and realm of being (Combs & Krippner, 2003). The co-researchers’ detailed accounts of engaging Sacred Breathwork and their resulting anomalous experiences validate this theory. The literature also supports the importance of ceremonial and ritual acts (Hardy, 1987; Levine, 2010; Rappaport, 1999; Robinson, 2002; Seligman, 2009; Smith, 2007; Smith, personal communication, July 13, 2013; Smith, personal communication, December 6, 2014) for inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness, which is also supported by the experiences of the co-researchers.

Additional findings that reinforce and build upon the literature review are presented in the following section. The subsequent portion will review combinations of the 10 core themes presented in Chapter IV most relevant to the literature review. The format will not follow the numerical order of themes, but rather the flow of topic relevance.

**Theme #1 – A lack of familiarity with Sacred Breathwork.** All co-researchers indicated they were on some level unfamiliar with Sacred Breathwork prior to their involvement in the study (Theme #1). The literature review was meant to strike a healthy balance between examining the sacred and the secular, while the co-researcher interviews aimed to qualitatively uncover the totality of the Sacred Breathwork experience. Similarly, the literature review revealed a theme that psychology's understanding of consciousness, NOSC, spirituality, and indigenous traditions is still developing and has much more ground to cover. Likewise, the co-researchers reported transcendent experiences and basic but limited understanding of the traditions. Despite this, they revealed an appreciation for the traditions that influenced their experiences.

This examination of the use of an ancient technique in modern times revealed that it is more than a holotropic conduit between the shamanic and psychology; it is a rite of passage, a sacred ceremony that can assist in more than healing. It can be used to assist in expanding consciousness and the reclaiming of ancestral and spiritual rights to the mystical and numinous. It also promotes interconnection, reciprocity in relationships, and the opportunity to develop a tribal community. However, most of the research participants had little to no understanding of what Sacred Breathwork was when they began engaging in it. As mentioned in the embodied breather section of the literature review, Levine (2010) maintains that indigenous people have long understood trauma and the process of healing through ritual ceremonies. This accentuates

the modern disconnect with the sacred ways of our tribal ancestors. Despite co-researcher descriptions revealing the limitations of in-depth knowledge about the traditions and rituals that influenced Sacred Breathwork, they expressed an interest in and appreciation of cross-cultural indigenous spirituality over conventional religion.

Also, while participants were familiar with the paradigm of alternate states of consciousness prior to engaging in Sacred Breathwork, after several encounters with the ceremony, they began to shift their consciousness to incorporate Grof's COEX system and non-ordinary states perspectives, along with a more exhaustive cosmology of spiritual notions of consciousness, including those of indigenous peoples. Also, the co-researchers began to make connections between the dynamic forces behind their emotional reactions to other members in the community, validating the existence of what Grof calls the COEX system.

In addition, the data suggests the subjective uniqueness of the co-researchers' concepts of spirituality and the interaction with their breathwork experiences. The co-researchers each defined spirituality in personal ways, which lends credibility to the importance of presenting a variety of spiritual concepts that are applicable to Sacred Breathwork. In both the literature review and in the co-researcher interviews, there was a desire to refrain from generalizing spirituality and aspects relating to it – such as consciousness and the Self. However, the co-researchers agree with the literature, that intentionally connecting to the sacred is a transcendent, transformational, and expansive experience. Metzner (2009) states, “whether we are on an external journey, or experiencing a particular state of consciousness, we're moving through spaces and places, inner and outer, guided by our intentions and questions” (p. 11). Furthermore, William James (1902) wrote,

The world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for



our life also; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in . . . the total expression of human experience . . . invincibly urges me beyond the narrow “scientific” bounds. Assuredly, the real world is of a different temperament—more intricately built than physical science allows. (p. 376)

Capturing the essence of the spiritual aspects and definition of consciousness in simplified terms proved problematic due to the innumerable ineffable qualities of the incorporeal and despite the revelation of positive benefits. Similar to the Holotropic Breathwork study conducted in 1997 by Gilles Brouillette (1997), all eight of this study’s participants described experiences on physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual levels that contributed to their transformative experience. Moreover, Brouillette (1997) reported changes in attitude: “After having gone through the breathwork process, many stated being more able to trust the wisdom of the healing process inherent to everyone” (pp. 245-246). All eight participants of this Sacred Breathwork study also reported a trust in the process despite triggered emotions, feelings, thoughts, and initial resistance. Additionally, Nelson (1993) said,

[b]y learning to focus our attention through spiritual practice, the buddhi (wisdom), or part of the mind connected to the spirit self, grows and connects us with the spirit or real self in the unconscious, the atman. This is the unique part of the person that lives in the unconscious and that is interconnected to all other life. (p. 25)

This inner connection incites opportunities unique to individuals in a way that promotes transformation, granting personal ownership of healing and self-growth. The co-researchers validated this finding in their personal accounts.

Each participant reported experiencing psychological breakthroughs (Theme #2) through the Sacred Breathwork workshop that rivaled what had been achieved in conventional therapy. Each emphasized the importance of the sense of safety, community, and facilitator commitment (Theme #3) to the achievement of better emotional regulation (Theme #5). As embodied breathers, co-researchers were able to experience emotional and psychological breakthroughs

through trusting the sacred, the community, and facilitator commitment. In Chapter II, Smith's term "the ritual master of the sacred" was discussed (2007), which involves managing the dangerous energies of the sacred. The findings suggest that the dangers of the sacred can be a result of human manifestation – such as energies, thoughts, and actions resulting from COEX systems, self-generated limitations, or projections from breathers. The literature review proposed that the COEX system affects the emotional and psychological lives of people, influencing perceptions of the world and those around us. "They are the dynamic forces behind our emotional and psychosomatic symptoms" (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 25). The co-researchers all appeared to believe in the presence of the COEX system through their lived encounters, and each individual related this knowledge as a map with which they could better understand their own unconscious behaviors.

The primary benefit the co-researchers reported was a heightened sense of psychological well-being as a result of intentionally applying the ceremonial aspects of breathwork and engaging in the community. It is especially the individual breather's duty, as well as that of the facilitator, to be active in this consciousness expanding and sacred process. It is a collective, yet simultaneously self-directed, experience. The process must be facilitated by what some of the co-researchers identified as nurturing and intentional individuals. Levine (2010) wrote, "the organism's innate capacity to restore itself to health and balance—is encouraged by a bystander, an empathetic witness who helps to prevent trauma by embodying kindness and acceptance" (p. xi). The co-researchers reported the intentional, compassionate, spiritually-driven facilitator and community members were factors that contributed to the success of their breathwork experiences.

The participant reports suggested that this type of deep psychological work developed the ability to better regulate emotion and enhance self-confidence. Co-researcher accounts indicated that after experiencing several breathwork sessions, a better understanding of emotional reactions emerges that goes beyond what mere intellectualizing provides. It appears that the seemingly anomalous experiences no longer limit them as they had previously. Also, co-researchers reported now knowing how to intentionally surrender to the process of self-healing through the evocation of the sacred.

**Theme #10 – The community fostered vulnerability and honest self-growth.** Co-researchers also described a desire to continue participating in breathwork as a result of experiencing tangible benefits, such as that of belonging to a community of caring and conscious individuals. This engagement seemingly produced positive results, per co-researcher reports, affecting the multidimensional self of emotional, spiritual, and psychological domains. Additionally, co-researchers mentioned having the experience of feeling a connection to the divine, a feeling of purpose, and confidence regarding making important life decisions. Furthermore, the co-researchers continued to return to engage breathwork because of a persistent desire to develop their sense of psychological well-being, self-awareness, and relationships with others. Despite differences in how the non-ordinary state of consciousness is achieved, similar transformations are reported following the experience of a NOSC, which suggests therapeutic value to having an NOSC encounter (Holmes et al., 1996; van Lommel, 2013). However, the intentional engagement and preparation for a NOSC is most ideal. Furthermore, akin to the co-researchers' communal intentions, anthropological revelations in the literature review proposed that ancient societies engaged in the practice of communal rituals for the benefit of the whole society and for purposes of meaning making (Bell, 1997; Robinson, 2002).

**Theme #8 – Struggles with the creative portion of the breathwork process.** Although the co-researchers described the creative process involved in Sacred Breathwork as arduous, they seemed to feel these difficulties could be a manifestation of unconscious struggles becoming conscious, an issue most participants became aware of after completion of the creative process. It became apparent to the co-researchers early on that their artwork was a portal to the unconscious, not just a tedious process to transition back from their breathwork journey. According to Grof and Grof (1990),

Significant correlations between their psychological problems and clinical diagnosis and specific aspects of their paintings [may be found], such as choice of colors, preference for sharp or round shapes, use of concentric circles, dividing the mandala into sections, and respecting or not respecting boundaries of the circle. (p. 45)

In Sacred Breathwork, much as in Stanislav Grof's Holotropic Breathwork, the mandala, or creative art piece, is not used to diagnose or to interpret. As Grof found, the pieces created were reported to be helpful. They become agents that manifest the breathwork experience in the physical, evoking remembrance and leading to further discovery of the unconscious. Just as the literature review proposed, the goal of the creative portion is to integrate the ineffable and mystical qualities in order to manifest the experience as an expression of, and communication with, the Self. The next two sections will briefly consider two additional issues found relevant in both the literature review and research findings.

**Indigenous perspectives on healing.** In reviewing the literature, it appeared there is a lack of current material on indigenous perspectives on healing. And, although there is information available on the psychospiritual, the extant literature focuses more on the secular rather than the sacred. Intriguingly, only one co-researcher spoke specifically about cultural misappropriation issues, although co-researchers expressed a desire for authentic application of

indigenous traditions ceremonially. The co-researchers also expressed reverence for engaging in rituals influenced by the wisdom of ancient cultures.

**Language as a barrier.** Another issue brought out through the literature review was that the language of psychology – and possibly the academic culture as a whole – is not sensitive enough to articulate the human experience of spirituality. For example, the phrase “the Self” is commonly used instead of such words as *soul* or *spirit*. For reasons of scholarship, *multidimensional self* and *Self* were used in this study to represent the words *soul* and *spirit*. This then necessitates an explanation of what these words mean in the context of this research – ranging from the career self to the psychological, physical, or artistic self. It is a reductionist approach to understand something sacred in a secular way that can change and confuse meaning. Difficulty already exists when attempting to describe the ineffable qualities of sacred healing, but this is compounded when individuals are forced to choose a preferred language for the sake of presenting as an academic in a particular context. Similarly, what both the literature and some co-researchers agreed on is the use of language in ceremony, in the preparation for the experience, the description of it, and in ritual to bind and enact change following ceremony. Words of power introduced during healing must be carefully selected and used with intention of heart and mind. Covering this concept further is deemed beyond the scope of this research; however, it is potentially a subject for future research.

### **Implications and Applications**

The therapeutic employment of non-ordinary states of consciousness, more specifically Sacred Breathwork, should be regarded as valuable to psychological research. This study presents a variety of potential implications and applications, such as the progress of educational programming, and the expansion of the professional, clinical, and social spheres. The following

section will examine these implications and applications.

**Implications.** There are a variety of implications to this research. First and foremost is that it may be of assistance in the development of graduate clinical training programs in the area of multiculturalism, in educating psychotherapists on the complexity of indigenous spirituality, and by fostering a deeper appreciation of healing through non-ordinary states of consciousness. This research could also assist in providing basic knowledge to organizations such as the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) regarding the recognition of therapeutic applications of non-ordinary states of consciousness, particularly Sacred Breathwork.

Spirituality is a critical dimension of the self and a wellspring to achieving a more expanded consciousness that deserves the attention of spiritually adept clinicians. Conventional psychotherapists would benefit from acquainting themselves with this study in the event a client introduces spirituality and non-ordinary states of consciousness in session. Becoming familiar with this material can increase the ability to hold a general discussion with a client and help determine if the individual would derive greater benefit with someone more adept in these areas. The argument stands that the experience of spirituality and the sacred is highly subjective. Therefore, modern ways of applying indigenous traditional healing cannot be understood from a purely academic perspective. This study could be used as an introduction to the subject, to help a professional gain basic familiarity. Practices such as engaging non-ordinary states of consciousness must be lived and experienced regularly in order to develop mastery. Additionally, a clinician interested in employing spiritually-based ritual practices would benefit from active reciprocal involvement in a genuine community that practices such traditions. A relationship such as this offers opportunities for the clinician to experience a deeper and more profound

connection to the teachings, to develop skill and self, and to cultivate a desire to honor and give back to the culture of origin. Such undertakings defend against issues related to cultural misappropriation and the potential harm caused by the uninformed to those seeking spiritual treatment approaches.

**Applications.** This study supports the further exploration of non-ordinary states of consciousness. It also advocates approaching group therapy on a level not yet widely practiced, through the creation of community while investing in – and implementing – the sacred. Such a setting needs to be based on deep psychological and spiritual foundations of discovery and combine, through an ethical construct, the knowledge of ceremony and psychology. Crow's Nest offers this type of community. However, available psychological services at Crow's Nest are kept separate from the indigenous-influenced ceremony due to autocratic political misconceptions informing and dictating regulations governing the practice of psychology.

Psychotherapists must consider not only prevailing views on treatment but also how the client conceptualizes treatment – especially if the client in question possesses a holistic and spiritual worldview. All eight study participants reported having experience with some form of conventional psychotherapy and described their Sacred Breathwork experience as more successful, immediate acting, and transformative. Clinicians must familiarize themselves with the variety of tools and applications available and consider collaborating with, or referring out, to appropriately qualified individuals when clients are spiritually inclined. If a client has any spirituality-based belief system, clinicians must recognize the importance of sacred components when providing treatment in order to best treat the human experience of psychological instability, trauma, and relational issues.

The psychotherapist also must be aware of spiritual significance and the implications that

result when this aspect of the human experience is not included in treatment. All participants spoke about how powerful and meaningful the collective experience is in Sacred Breathwork. The ability to be vulnerable and develop relational aspects of the self under the guidance of a qualified facilitator proved to be profound for each. Complicated and meaningful relationships appeared to form between the group members and the facilitator, a rapport that extended beyond that experienced in the confines of conventional psychotherapy and thus allowed the participants to undergo deep self-examination while experiencing the sacred.

An issue for conventional therapists to consider when determining whether or not to include spirituality in psychotherapy is how the therapist can create rituals for clients that can assist with spiritual aspects, while cultivating profound healing relationships with others – all others, including the therapist. The therapist must also reevaluate his or her comfort and level of experience concerning practice with the psychospiritual, and the possible need to disclose personal beliefs to the client in order to be effective in this realm. Another issue for consideration is how to handle conflict regarding spiritual bias and ignorance.

Incorporating ritual and ceremony into a therapeutic practice such as Sacred Breathwork requires purity of intention, commitment, and honor to the sacred. A clinician must understand these issues and also the need to approach the sacred from a non-capitalist or egoist perspective. Merging indigenous and modern tradition is a complicated process, which is one of the many reasons this study was conducted.

The results of this study can be used to bridge the sacred and the secular. There are barriers to implementing indigenous medicine within western psychology, such as cultural conflict, cultural misappropriation, misunderstanding, and the fears that can surround unorthodox beliefs. This study examined some of these barriers and how they were bridged through Sacred



Breathwork by the co-researchers.

This dissertation uncovered a community engaged in self-growth and active investment into others' well-being. Unearthing the existence of such a community and the characteristics of it could be applied to society in general when considering community development and the support needed to help such structures thrive. Furthermore, this study could help those unfamiliar with this type of community, or way of healing, gain insight and understanding while also cultivating respect regarding this phenomenon and further promoting human connectedness.

Another variable that arose as result of the study is the notion of belief versus experience. Sacred Breathwork provides the opportunity for the individual to experience belief. Therefore, it is no longer just a belief because it has now become a lived experience, a collective experience that for all participants, regardless of length of association, produces tangible results. The co-researchers had a unique but shared experience. This method of exploration appears to expand one's cosmology and allows room for duality and difference. "Any journey in subjective mind-space, whether induced by certain plants, or by rhythmic drumming, or by any other catalyst, certainly involves an expansion of awareness—as do journeys of exploration in outer geographical and cosmic space" (Metzner, 2009, p. 75). Moreover, the co-researchers each alluded to achieving a sense that there is no separation between spirit and nonspirit because their experiences proved to be true as witnessed through their integration processes. They gained insight and renegotiated, reclaimed, remembered, and even communed, with the Divine. According to Metzner (2009), "In the course of a psychological or spiritual growth practice there may be transient moments of awakening or enlightened insight. These are then to be integrated into one's evolving understanding of the nature of reality as well as the daily life of the householder" (p. 79). The experience is more than a holotropic avenue, or what psychology

might call a hallucination or active imagination. The co-researchers reported a direct sacred experience, which moved them beyond the belief. Therefore, the desire of academia to reduce and translate the language of spirituality in fact only proves to reduce, and often inaccurately translate, the sacred experience.

### **Limitations of the Research**

This study presents the complexity of a multidimensional experience that incorporates both secular and sacred paradigms. The heuristic model was a great resource for the investigation of this phenomenon because it allowed for a rich inquiry despite the limitation of a relatively small population sample. Qualitative research can be a limitation in and of itself because it relies upon individual experiential reports, researcher familiarity, and discernment of what data is most significant to transfer into themes. Subjectivity in the data analysis can be both a pro and a con; the con is that personal biases can insert themselves. Responses also cannot be easily quantified or generalized to a broader audience.

The open-ended questions posed to the co-researchers were designed to assist in the gathering of a vast amount of data, as well as to avoid loaded questions and thus biased responses. At times, the co-researchers needed clarification on what was being asked; this could have been a result of the language used in the questions or the openness of the questions themselves. This touches upon the notion of the limitations of language and how it is viewed in the western/scientific world of research. Ecologist and philosopher David Abram (1996) says, “The more prevalent view of language, at least since the scientific revolution, and still assumed in some manner by most linguists today, considers any language to be a set arbitrary but conventionally agreed upon words, or ‘signs,’ linked by a purely formal system of syntactic and grammatical rules” (p. 77). Abram goes on to suggest that this perspective automatically

separates the world and the felt experience from the human. Abram derides Eurocentric philosophy for its preoccupation and inability to relinquish the notion of positioning human uniqueness above that of all other species. All species, including plant life and other biological entities, possess a form of communication. What the current state of human language has done is use small units of meaning, which can be generalized and reproduced, to attempt to represent something much larger. According to Abram (1996), “Things disclose themselves to our immediate perception as vectors, as styles of unfolding—not as finished chunks of matter given once and for all, but as dynamic ways of engaging the senses and modulating the body” (p. 81). This description of language validates the bodily and ineffable experiences of the co-researchers. In the literature review, some examples of why earlier civilizations developed and used written language were briefly explored. This also adds to the complexity of adequately depicting the experience in research terms of the sacred and non-ordinary states of consciousness of Sacred Breathwork.

Co-researchers were often sidetracked from the original question, and at times required prodding to provide more detail. This might have been due to a desire to keep a response straightforward, the realization that an answer did not need elaboration, or the understanding that certain experiences are simply ineffable. In addition, the homogeneity of the sample size was somewhat limiting as most participants live in Midwestern North America and only two live outside of the United States.

Additionally, the discussion of consciousness in the literature review presented poor definitions that lack adequate description to encompass the totality of what consciousness is. Consciousness is much more than a sense of self-awareness and a set of responses to environmental stimuli. It involves everything: environment, experience, thought, sensation,

perception, mood, emotion, and the realm of dreams. It is also connected to collective realities through which it is possible to connect with the experiences of all sentient beings simultaneously. Consciousness can be affected by the observer, which makes consciousness difficult to reduce, generalize, or quantify. The encompassing literature review suggests the brain cannot completely account for the total experience of consciousness. It proposes that consciousness cannot be reduced through biological and structural manifestation. However, incorporating biological theories of consciousness with metaphysical, cosmological, and indigenous knowledge, consciousness can be better explicated. Also, the divine, transcendent qualities of the universal and collective consciousness experienced by the participants appear to play a role in their independent development and expression of consciousness. Additionally, consciousness oscillates beyond just brainwave frequencies; it is an experience that oscillates between the realities of the dream, the collective, and the individual. Last of all, the participant's relationship to the experience is was found to be unfolding, reciprocal and recursive.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this study highlight the need for further research in the areas of spirituality, non-ordinary states of consciousness, indigenous tradition, and effective application of cultural diversity relating to the indigenous. Because this research explores non-ordinary states of consciousness, it would be beneficial to further explore sacred investigations into other avenues that can induce these states, such as the use of entheogens (divine plant medicines). A subtheme uncovered in the research, yet not highlighted because it extends beyond the scope of this dissertation, is the presence of, interest in, and use of plant medicines, such as psilocybin and ayahuasca, and the collaboration of these with Sacred Breathwork. At this time, Sacred Breathwork architect Smith is currently exploring the possibility of integrating ayahuasca and

Jungian psychology, and Sacred Breathwork through the cultivation of relationships with Peruvian Ayahuasqueros in South America. Considering both the advantages and limitations of Sacred Breathwork, an entheogenic Sacred Breathwork study would be an expansion of the examination into the phenomenon of sacred holistic healing.

Interesting to note for future research are the uncovered personality characteristics. In this research they are primarily mentioned to enhance the co-researcher depictions and core themes. These traits are:

- an interest in alternative medicine and holistic approaches to healing,
- inclination toward non-dogmatic spirituality,
- traumatic life experiences or a series of significant relational ruptures igniting the quest for self-growth,
- desire to belong to a non-dogmatic spiritual community,
- resiliency despite adversity,
- propensity to work in a capacity to better humanity,
- inability to accept status quo,
- proclivity toward using ritual and ceremony for self-discovery and growth,
- openness to life's mysteries,
- a belief in exploring life's purpose and direction, and
- belief in fostering interconnectedness.

Each of these personality traits naturally emerged as the co-researchers shared their stories and experiences. These commonalties became apparent and presented unconscious characteristics that perhaps contributed to and propelled forward the Sacred Breathwork experience. Conceivably, these shared characteristics may help further explain the Sacred

Breathwork phenomenon.

Other factors to revisit as a result of the literature review are cultural misappropriation and diversity. Cultural, eco, and spiritual genocide exist today; these are not things of the past. Academia and clinicians interested in the psychospiritual must understand this and counter the tendency to promote only evidence-based approaches by reducing, repackaging, and replacing the sacred. Rather, they should cultivate meaningful and reciprocal relationships with indigenous tradition-keepers when considering the incorporation of the sacred.

Another area to consider regarding merging indigenous traditions and modern psychotherapy is whether a clinician can or should invest in building an interconnected tribe, a community of trust with an authentic tradition-keeper. Indigenous tradition-keepers were entrusted with sacred knowledge of healing to preserve and carefully pass on. Spirituality is very much embedded in the fabric of indigenous cultures and environments. Tragically, due to western influence – or invasion depending upon one’s perspective - great damage has been done to these cultures. Both those seeking knowledge and those attempting to preserve it have been harmed. They deserve the tireless efforts of anyone interested in indigenous psychospiritual work. These individuals must value reconciliation and the survival of indigenous people, and have respect for indigenous spiritual and cultural sovereignty.

Blatant racism, oppression, and denial of rights to land continue to be experienced by indigenous people all over the world. There are wars for monetary gain being waged on these communities by corporations and governments. The earth and its surrounding environment are a large part of indigenous spirituality; maintaining the planet’s health is considered a sacred responsibility. The forces of medicine behind the mechanisms of the sacred—including culture, the natural environment, the celestial and spirit realm, and the animal kingdom – must be

preserved.

However noble a goal it is to merge psychology with the indigenous and shamanism, this must remain secondary to respecting the primary role of the tradition-keeper, indigenous shaman, or shamanic practitioner. Like the role of a licensed psychotherapist or psychologist, it cannot be fulfilled without a lived practice and experience. There is intimate knowledge that cannot be obtained within a conventional academic setting. A clinician must understand how to adequately shift between paradigms when merging the two. Learning both the language and application of the academic and the healer moves one into a new category of profession or calling. It is vital not to misidentify which symptoms to treat—spiritual, psychological, or physical—and to choose the method most appropriate to the identified symptom and the individual client. Also, the work of indigenous healers or shamans has a unique relationship with the community from which it is derived.

This is where intuition, intention, and cultural context come into play, as well as the clinician's own work of personal development. The practitioner, whether clinician or shaman, must establish a trusted system that goes beyond simply providing treatment. In Sacred Breathwork, the community reveals itself as part of the system. Arthur Kleinman (1980) said, "health care systems are particularly affected by the level of technological and social development, including the status of therapeutic institutions, biomedical technologies, treatment interventions, and professional personnel" (p. 49). He was referring to the importance of the external and internal factors that influence treatment and its structure. For Sacred Breathwork, the technology consists of the music, the sacred, and the traditions utilized. The therapeutic institution for Sacred Breathwork is the Crow's Nest Center, the space deemed sacred for conducting the ceremony. The status of the facilitator as perceived by the community sets the

social development. The biomedical addresses the breathers' reported experiences of self-imposed physicality and other biological encounters experienced through engaging breathwork. The treatment interventions are not part of the experience but come after, and are based on what the breathers personally develop through processing and integrating the breathwork experience. The professional personnel relate to the facilitator's personal growth, knowledge, mastery, and commitment to both the sacred and to the community. The clinical reality of the sacred versus the secular is also an important factor contributing to the structure of influence.

Obviously, there needs to be more respect and support for existing, working indigenous paradigms, but also room for conscious, collaborative creation of new ones that address the external dysfunction that exists. This collaboration is definitely lacking in the realms of research and academia. Lastly, the longstanding issue of restricting and discrediting indigenous spiritual practices and rights prevents proper legal representation, protection, and accessibility.

Another underlying theme that arose in both the research findings and some co-researcher reports is the cultivation of a harmonious relationship with nature. This theme arises naturally given the intentional and frequent use of indigenous ritual and consciousness expansion ceremony. However, ecopsychology deserves its own investigation and is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### **Personal Meaning of the Study**

The exploration undertaken in this study is difficult to capture and write down on paper, but here is my attempt: My openness, receptivity, and desire to uncover the experience of others awakened a deeper knowing of spirituality within me that extends beyond tacit knowledge. I encountered difficulty, at times, when trying to simplify concepts in order to satisfy academic inquiry. However, I surrendered to what has flowed through the conduits of this process. What



mattered most to me was being authentic and accurately conveying the spiritual qualities, cultural considerations, and co-researcher experiences. Although using non-ordinary states of consciousness to heal is not a new idea, as noted throughout this dissertation, the field of psychology lags behind in producing sufficient research on the spiritual and incorporeal components of the self.

My Sacred Breathwork journey began in 2011, but my spiritual journey commenced 10 years earlier. If I look at it through an existential and transpersonal lens, it commenced pre-birth. Each step of the way, I have devoured and honored indigenous, non-dogmatic, and mystical teachings. I originally aimed to use the wisdom as medicine for myself; along the way, I found the path I was on was also a path to help others, and so I decided to write my dissertation on this intimate subject. In many ways, the most challenging part of this process was coming to terms with having to acquiesce to standards and a cultural value system that restrict the natural evolution, free exploration, and expression of the sacred and indigenous frame of mind. It is a reminder that I am of minority mindset, culture, and personality in academia. Experiencing the limitations of standards and protocol enforced by academic investment in conservative representation, which at times was contradictory and imprecise yet authoritarian in employment, felt oppressive and discouraging. Nevertheless, the journey of birthing this dissertation was not to gain exoneration and approval from colleagues but rather to gain further understanding of this phenomenon and share this knowledge with others interested in the topic.

Through this process I have further learned how to own my emotions, take responsibility, and advocate for myself despite moments of inequity and marginalization. This research is personally significant and required radical academic application, self-examination, and sensitivity to the entire process of unconscious and conscious mechanisms at work on behalf of

all parties involved. I have carefully reflected upon the pros and cons of including this aspect of my personal experience. I consider it relevant to the study's discussion of cultural considerations.

To further elaborate, I grew up in an oppressed culture, my ancestry is Caucasian, Spanish-Mexican and Indian (both Native American and Mexica–Mexican Indian). I relate least to my Caucasian roots and was raised more with the Hispanic, Xicano side. Throughout my life I have had countless experiences of being oppressed, labeled, and silenced. I am more aligned with the sacred, spiritual indigenous, and cosmocentric views rather than the secular, academic, and Eurocentric. Significant interests of mine lie within the realms of social justice and multicultural competence. This is a reason why I have included here a scholarly examination of the social, academic, political, and power structures that both govern and influence psychology and psychological research. According to researcher Joseph Calabrese (2008),

[t]he societies of the world do not agree on fundamental issues of personhood, sexuality, health, consciousness alteration, religion, or childrearing. Instead, human societies have developed unique and heterogeneous ways of understanding and adapting to local environments, maintaining relationships among consociates, and sustaining mental health. (p. 336)

Therefore, reviewing potential threats to the acceptance and advancement of adequately employing indigenous spiritual healing traditions is imperative. Furthermore, "Claims that Freud or whoever else 'invented' psychotherapeutic intervention are similar to claims that Columbus 'discovered America': they are insulting to members of other cultural traditions who have also 'discovered' the phenomenon in question for themselves" (Calabrese, 2008, p. 334). This declaration draws attention to the wide-ranging developments of psychology pre-dating, and currently existing alongside, the conventional western model.

Last of all, commitment to social activism requires intentional action, such as speaking up about experiences, interactions, and concerns that are overlooked and not viewed as

compromising equality. Regardless of the experienced negatives during this dissertation process, the rewards mentioned and research findings far outweigh the undesirable. Most importantly this academic initiation is over.

This study was born of the hearts and souls of my co-researchers and myself and both of our desire to share with academia, and even the psychological autocratic arena, the potential of spirit and the divine of healing. I am so grateful for their vulnerability and willingness to make this research happen. Healing and growing through employing the modification of consciousness is a practice that requires discipline, respect, and admiration for the mystical and cultural minority.

To conclude, this study helped me further evaluate my relationship to the academic, the spiritual, the political, the divine, tradition, culture, society, my spirit, and my heart. It has been many things, including an opportunity for growth. Sacred Breathwork is a type of healing that is about the inclusion of various levels – the spiritual, physical, psychological, and communal.

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## Appendix A

## Flyer &amp; Letter to Co-Researchers

**Sacred Breathwork  
Research Study****Seeking Participants—Criteria:**

- 21-years or older
- Have experienced **at least five Sacred Breathwork sessions in the last two years, no less than one-year active.**
  - Would be **willing to participate in a 60 - 90 minute Skype** interview.
- Must have an identified psychotherapist or spiritual advisor familiar with Sacred Breathwork.
- Must have your most recent or resonate sacred creative artwork present during the interview (having more than one might prove beneficial).

If you are interested please send an **email to**  
**Angela May Beers, PsyS., L.L.P**

[NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com](mailto:NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com)

The Institutional Review Board at the Michigan School of Professional Psychology has approved this study.

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant please contact, Dr. Kevin Keenan

[irbchair@mispp.edu](mailto:irbchair@mispp.edu) or Angela May Beers, PsyS., L.L.P

[NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com](mailto:NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com).

## Appendix B

**Informed Consent****Michigan School of Professional Psychology**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR USE WITH SKYPE**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby agree to voluntary participation in the research project on *Sacred Breathwork* conducted by *Angela May Beers*. I understand that the purpose of the study is to *uncover the experience of Sacred Breathwork*. The procedure will entail using Skype, a free software program that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet. This interview has a pre-interview process with 6 demographic questions, with the actual interview consisting of 10 open-ended questions, which should take 60–90 minutes to complete. I am comfortable using computer technology, including Skype and the Internet, to participate in this interview.

I understand that my participation in the study will take approximately an hour and a half.

I understand that there are minimal physical, social, and economic risks associated with the study. It is possible that I may experience discomfort in answering some of the researcher's questions. In this situation, I am free to discuss my concerns with the researcher. Should I determine that I have personal concerns that might benefit from counseling I understand that the researcher will not be available for counseling sessions but will, at my request, provide a referral to a counseling service, which I may choose to pursue at my own expense. I am aware that it is in my best interest to have an identified licensed psychotherapist outside of this interviewer, and/or spiritual advisor familiar with Sacred Breathwork.

In terms of benefits, I understand that participating in the study will help foster a better understanding of Sacred Breathwork and that I may gain further insight into my own breathwork experience. Indirect benefits may include uncovering psychological factors that contribute to enhancing the psycho-spiritual and spiritual communities I belong to. When my participation is complete, I may request information regarding the general findings of the research by contacting *Angela May Beers* at [NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com](mailto:NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com).

I understand that the researcher will make an audio recording of the interview. To further ensure the security of the interview, the researcher will use a separate audio recording device and will not utilize the recording features included within Skype. Later, the interview will be transcribed into a word processing document with no reference to my identity, and that the recording will be destroyed after the completion of the project. Thus, any data or answers to questions will remain confidential with regard to my identity. Any information derived from the

research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law. State law requires appropriate notification of designated others in the event that I reveal that someone, including myself, is in danger of serious harm, including but not limited to abuse, neglect, or threats of harm to myself or others.

Skype conversations are encrypted for maximum security. However, I understand that there are security risks and consequences to conducting an interview over the Internet, including, but not limited to, the possibility that despite reasonable efforts on the part of the researcher, the transmission of my personal information could be disrupted or distorted by technical failures, and/or the transmission of my personal information could be interrupted, accessed, or stored by unauthorized persons.

I understand the following security recommendations to protect my personal information and confidentiality: creating a new Skype account that is solely used for the purpose of this research; deleting the Skype account after the interview(s); creating a new password that is used only for the Skype account; participating in the interview alone at a computer in a secure room; participating in the interview at a computer with a wired connection (as opposed to a wireless connection); and ensuring that the computer is free of viruses prior to conducting the interview. I understand that the researcher will follow the above security recommendations when conducting my interview and that I am responsible for whatever security is implemented on my end of the Skype connection.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without jeopardizing my relationship with *Angela May Beers* or the Michigan School of Professional Psychology.

I understand that if I have any questions related to my participation in this study I may contact *Angela May Beers* at [NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com](mailto:NonOrdinaryStatesHealing@gmail.com). I may also contact the Institutional Review Board Chair at the Michigan School of Professional Psychology, (248) 476-1122, or [irbchair@mispp.edu](mailto:irbchair@mispp.edu).

My signature below means that I have read and understand the information provided above and that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

**Interview Questions****Sacred Breathwork Qualitative Interview****Demographic information:**

1. What gender do you identify as?
2. What age group do you chronologically belong in (21–28, 29–36, 37–44, 45+)?
3. Where do you reside (country, province, city, state, etc.)?
4. Have you participated in conventional and non-conventional psychotherapy, what forms and for how long?
5. How long have you been actively engaged in Sacred Breathwork (at least 1-year)?
6. How do you identify spiritually (subscribe and practice a particular religion, etc.)?

**Sacred Breathwork Interview Guiding Questions:**

1. What were your reasons and intentions for seeking out and participating in Sacred Breathwork?
2. What has your Sacred Breathwork experience been like for your overall wellbeing (In regards to your multidimensional Self. What effects has SB had if any on your insight, creativity, spirituality, psychological, and cognitive functioning)?
3. What do you consider as the most important ingredient for Sacred Breathwork? Why?
4. In what ways has Sacred Breathwork challenged your perception of being (obstacles encountered)? In what ways did Sacred Breathwork assist in this process?
5. In what way has Sacred Breathwork been most rewarding to you?
6. What and how have external and internal influences shaped your Sacred Breathwork process thus far?
7. What has been your experience of the music in Sacred Breathwork?
8. How has the creative processing portion of Sacred Breathwork assisted you (you may want to examine your breathwork creative pieces)?
9. How do you conceptualize Sacred Breathwork in comparison to conventional therapies (western medicine and disease-treatment medical model approach. Also, if applicable, how do you conceptualize SB to alternative and other indigenous practices experienced)?
10. What has been your experience of the community associated with Sacred Breathwork?



## Appendix D

**Table 1***Demographic Data of Co-Researchers*

#	Identifier/Name	Gender Identification	Age	Geographic Origin	Length of Experience w/SB	Spiritual Identification/ Upbringing
1	Cernunnos	Male	45+	Midwest NA	5 Yrs+	Pagan
2	Amadeus	Male	37-44	Midwest NA	1 Yr+	Spiritual Seeker Raised Seventh Day Adventist Christian
3	Artemis	Female	45+	Belgium	3 Yrs+	Nonreligious w/belief in great spirit and shamanism
4	Persephone	Female	37-44	Midwest NA	1 Yr+	Eclectic Spiritual Seeker  Believer in Higher Altruistic Life force  Raised Catholic
5	Hekate	Female	45+	South Africa	5 Yrs+	Large Cosmology  Holographic  Shamanic
6	Maat	Chooses not to identify by Gender	45+	Midwest NA	2 Yrs+	Nondogmatic  Belief in Higher Power  Openness to Truth
7	Ky	Female	37-44	Midwest NA	2 Yrs+	Quaker, Shamanic
8	Pan	Male	29-36	Midwest NA	3 Yrs+	Nondogmatic  Belief in Higher Power  Raised Protestant/Baptist