Dancing Barefoot:

An exploration of women's experience
of
the spiritual accompaniment/direction relationship

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Abstract

The aim of this research project was to explore the training, experience and knowledge which are necessary to offer spiritual companionship. I wished to research this particularly in relation to women, since women historically have been invisible in many religious faiths, their voices unheard, and their stories unwritten, and because of my own experience of struggle within the institutional church. The research methodology was a bricolage of heuristic enquiry, organic enquiry, and person-centred enquiry. Thirteen women were interviewed face to face using semi-structured interviews, including seekers, participants from training courses, and trainers. The interviews were transcribed and participants were invited to amend or clarify any points they were concerned about. The data was analysed into themes which emerged from the data. The participants had the opportunity to read the draft of the data presentation and ask for changes. The main themes are presented alongside my own process, reflections, poetry and art work relating to that and to the processing of the data, and also interwoven with quotes from the diaries of Etty Hillesum. The themes identified are the process of finding a spiritual companion, the need not to be directed, the quality of the spiritual director's presence, issues of power, trust and risk, issues around holding or failing to hold boundaries, the boundary with friendship, and the nature of the experience needed by the spiritual companion. The needs of women in this relationship are explored, and the contribution of the person-centred approach is considered. The conclusions are that this is a complex relationship which requires commitment on the part of the spiritual companion to their own spiritual growth, alongside a person-centred approach to being alongside the seeker, and also a sophisticated awareness of the issue of appropriate boundaries, with particular reference to the needs of women.

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Chapter 1 In the beginning…

I am not a linear thinker. This study did not unfold in the way it will end up being written. Experiences, thoughts, readings, conversations, emerge as threads, fragments, fragrances, colours, light, shadow, breeze, waves….. They happen concurrently, interweaving my daily life. These many aspects are held, reflected on, forgotten, discarded, treasured, and at the point of being fixed on the page like a snapshot, present a moment, many moments, but not all moments, a selection of moments that I hope convey richness, texture, depth, to engage the reader and perhaps stimulate further exploration. I do not regard this text as definitive but as fluid, captured at this point in my life and the lives of those who have generously assisted me.

And your life, as you read this.

This text has not been written in a traditional way. In this first chapter I introduce myself, and explain how I came to research this topic, I explore how the various strands of the person-centred approach, gender, feminist theology, my spiritual becoming and my understanding of spirituality all weave together to bring me to this point. I look at terminology and in particular the metaphors used in spiritual accompaniment/direction. Drawing on the metaphor of the dance, I explain how I came to present this thesis in this way, and then give some information about person-centred theory.

In chapter two, I explain how I came to choose the research methods, looking at person-centred research, organic inquiry, heuristic research, and the concept of bricolage. I explain how this informed my approach to interviewing, and how I recruited my participants. I also explain how the focus of the project changed as a result of the data, from a comparison of

trainings, to allowing the voices of the seekers to raise issues which need to be considered in training, and in practice, particularly boundary issues.

In chapter three I present the data, which I interweave with my own experience as a seeker, and also with extracts from the diaries of Etty Hillesum, relating to the themes. This chapter is arranged thematically, but there is overlap between the themes, some of which are revisited from differing perspectives. At the end of the chapter I return to my initial questions about women and spiritual accompaniment, and about the contribution of the person-centred approach.

Finally in chapter four I present my conclusions, reflecting on the data, and the themes that emerged, as well as drawing together my own process, and Etty's.

Setting the context

I am a spiritual seeker, a person-centred counsellor, trainer, supervisor and manager. I have been Centre Director of the Norwich Centre for Personal, Professional and Spiritual Development since 1999; I am also the Managing Director of the commercial company Norwich Centre Projects Ltd. Alongside this I have worked on counselling courses as a trainer since 1998, and, since 2004, as a tutor on the Post-Graduate Diploma in Counselling at the University of East Anglia, the course on which I trained in the mid 1990s. I redeveloped and have responsibility for the module on spirituality and counselling on the course, and more recently I have taken on the role of Course Director.

In 2006 the Norwich Centre ran its first Diploma in Spiritual Accompaniment, and, as a trainer, this course, and my own experience, raised questions for me about the nature of the relationship between the spiritual companion and

seeker, and further questions about the nature of the training required to be able to offer this. I was not sure on what basis the content of training courses was chosen, as I could find no published research based on the experience of seekers/directees. I was also interested to see whether the person-centred approach had anything to contribute. A greater concern though, was the issue of gender, because my own experience of alienation in the institutional church was causing me to read and reflect on feminist theology, and I had found in that validation of my experiencing which I had not found through the person-centred approach. I have had some experience of working as a spiritual companion in the one-with-one context but most of my experience is in groups. I am interested in it as a topic for research, and in developing my own spiritual understanding, as preparation for further work in this role. I have also been concerned to find my identity as a trainer in this area, and to begin to understand what I may have to contribute.

In the summer of 2004 I was visiting a friend who was reading a book called *'The Spirituality Revolution'* by David Tacey (Tacey, 2004). I had not at that point read many books on religion, beyond a few Lent books, since I generally found they were difficult to digest and presented me with a view of faith and belief that conflicted with my own values. However this book looked interesting and was recommended. The timing was right, too. I had been a participant earlier in the year on a course called the Quality of Presence, and then there had been a conference at the University of East Anglia (UEA) called 'The Spiritual Dimension in Therapy and Experiential Exploration' which was exquisitely timed for me. The course had helped me by enabling me to express my beliefs in an atmosphere which was accepting and affirming. I had felt for many years that if anyone knew what I really believed and experienced, they would be horrified, especially those in the Church of England, to which I have belonged (through choice) since childhood, although not always a regular attendee. Perhaps it was not a coincidence that two members of that group were Anglican priests. It was in that group that I first

tentatively expressed my anger and pain at the doctrine and dogma that felt to me so alienating. However, even though I felt received in that group, I still struggled every week at church, with the language, the teaching, the idea of original sin, the words of readings which excluded women, the idea of a transcendent God up high directing lives and rewarding those who lived a Christian life (whatever that was/is) by welcoming them into heaven when they died.

Fast forward to today, and I feel validated, confident, and able to present my experience and facilitate exploration by others. What happened in the meantime?

I attribute my confidence today mainly to my reading and membership of networks such as Woman and the Church (WATCH)[1], Inclusive Church[2], women word spirit[3] and the Living Spirituality Network[4]. In following a trail of reading from David Tacey, I have discovered other voices that I could engage with and which validated my own experience. What surprised me was that the voices with which I most resonated were those of feminist theologians and that many of my difficulties were as a result of my gender. I have been accompanied by these authors, by various people I have met, and by members of groups and courses I have attended or facilitated.

I can't remember now what it was in Tacey's (2004) book which alerted me to women's issues, but, from his bibliography, I was drawn to a book by Ursula King, *'Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise'* (King, 1989). Perhaps it was the title! This book inspired me, and in a section that explores the nature of women's experience of God, gives examples of God as Mother,

[1] http://www.womenandthechurch.org
[2] www.inclusivechurch2.net
[3] www.womenwordspirit.org
[4] www.livingspirituality.org.uk

God as immanent, a loving God who affirms women in their physicality and sexuality and concludes:

> …..perhaps feminist theologians may best be characterised as 'affective existentialist thinkers', to use one of Karl Rahner's terms. They reflect from the depth of their existence as concretely lived through their experiences and feelings, as do all women, and men for that matter, who are attuned to inner realities and the dynamic of the spirit. (King, 1989, p 200)

I do not consider myself to be a theologian, but I can recognise myself in King's description, and I believe this thesis demonstrates that.

King continues by identifying other themes which have been and remain so important in feminist theology, the battle for inclusive gender free language, and themes of 'liberation, community, and celebration'. We only have to remember the recent (2008) Lambeth Conference to know how far we have come, but also how far we have to go with the threat of schism over homosexuality and over women Bishops.

When feminists were famously burning their bras in the sixties and seventies, I struggled with their apparent anger with men. The 'a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle' approach did not seem to me to value humanity as I felt it should be valued. I was familiar with *'Spare Rib'*, the feminist magazine of the time, which circulated around friends at university, but as a young woman, I found what I experienced as the strident and aggressive approach of the Women's Liberation Movement off putting. This period has been called second wave feminism and broadly covers the years from the sixties to the late seventies[5]. Third wave feminism, which co-exists with

[5] First wave feminism covers the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the issue of women's suffrage, although some might argue that women's rights were an issue prior to this.

second wave feminism, emerged in the early 1990s as a response to some of the perceived shortcomings of second wave feminism, primarily the emphasis on white western upper middle class women's experiences, and as a reaction to an essentialist approach (see Linda Woodhead *'Feminism and the Sociology of Religion: From Gender Blindness to Gendered Difference*' (Woodhead, 2001) for an explanation of this in relation to religion).

My interest in this is primarily in the context of religion and spirituality, and although I have read some of the 'classics' of second wave feminist theology such as '*Womenspirit Rising'* (Christ and Plaskow, 1992) originally published in 1979, and '*Dispossessed Daughters of Eve'* (Dowell and Hurcombe, 1981), my inspiration and affirmation have come from more recent writing, including Nicola Slee (2003a, 2004b), Tina Beattie (1995, 2002a, b, 2003), Grace Jantzen (1998, 2000), Mary Grey (2003), Cynthia Bourgeault (2008), Carter Heyward (1995), and Beverly Lanzetta (2005, 2007) to name but a few.

Gender studies are a wider, more inclusive, and more recent approach which embraces men's studies as well as women's studies. For a history of the development of gender studies from women's and feminist studies see Rita M Gross *'Where have we been? Where do we need to go?: Women's Studies and Gender in Religion and Feminist Theology'* (Gross, 2005). As Ursula King says 'the study of religion can no longer be concerned with men alone but must always be equally concerned with women'. (King, 2005, p 7)

Just as my education did not include gender-critical thinking, neither did my training as a person-centred therapist. I came to it through my spiritual frustration and longing. In the context of the subject of this thesis, the relationship I am interested in is not one where one person is in distress, but it is one where one person is seeking to be accompanied by the other, and my particular interest is in the nature of the relationship offered and the contribution of the person-centred approach. As a result of my own

experience, and the difficulties I have experienced in exploring my own spirituality, I believe it is necessary to consider gender. As Charlene Spretnak says:

> The underlying rationale for Patriarchal societies is patriarchal religion. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism all combine male godheads with proscriptions against woman as temptress, as unclean, as evil. We were all made to understand that Eve's act of heeding the word of the serpent caused the expulsion of the human race from the Garden of Eden. We were made to understand that, as a result of her act, it was decreed by God that woman must submit to the dominance of man. We were all raised in cultures that reflect this decree; Men enjoy the secular and spiritual positions of power; women cook and clean for them and supply them with heirs. (Spretnak, 1982, p 394)

More than a quarter of a century later, what has changed? In her keynote address, 'A Half Changed Church' given to the Annual General Meeting of WATCH (Women and the Church) Lucy Winkett reflects:

> It is a feature of all world faiths that part of the apparatus of religion pertains specifically to women and their treatment and behaviour. As an agent of social control, Christianity in the West has been very effective in confining and controlling women's energy and sexuality. Notable and famous exceptions stand out from the crowd, but the fact remains that millions of voiceless women have lived and died being taught by male Christian leaders that they were responsible for all the sin in the world. It's all about Eve. She was the one who was taken in by the serpent and she tempted her man away from his higher calling. (Winkett, 2007, p 5)

Seemingly not much has changed. However, Winkett does see progress in that, of course, women are now able to be ordained in the Church of England and, since her address, the way has been seemingly cleared for women to become Bishops. However, she counsels against believing this has solved all the issues:

> We are embedded in the structures but there are huge dangers associated with this. There are points where women's participation in an unchanged institution becomes more talismanic than prophetic; a reinforcing presence rather than a catalyst for Godly change. This happens when we do not claim the freedom we have as women to be ourselves and to be priests. In a hierarchical and patriarchal institution, women are just as capable as men of infantilising congregations for example, or not encouraging other women, or not recognising the profound differences between women and rejoicing in that variety. (Winkett, 2007, p 4)

Lucy Winkett should know, she is Canon Precentor of St Paul's Cathedral, and famously was reduced to tears on television as cameras followed her as the first woman priest to serve in the cathedral:

> The cathedral became the centre of controversy when it appointed its first woman minor canon, the Rev Lucy Winkett, earlier this year. The appointment split the clergy at St Paul's, and has still not been accepted by some, including Canon John Halliburton. (BBC, 1997)

The controversy over women bishops in the Church of England continues, and will no doubt have moved on by the time this thesis is presented. For up to date information visit WATCH (Women and the Church) www.womenandthechurch.org

There is however a backlash against critical gender developments. King (2005, p 6-7) explains how the 'radical challenges shake the foundations of how modern western knowledge and learning are organised and controlled by the university system, by the power of the academy and all that this entails'. Criticised as 'unacademic', the questions raised by studying gender are threatening to secular and religious authorities. This means that the increasingly gendered studies of religion are on the margins rather than mainstream at this time. The seriousness of the consequences of excavating the gender patterns of religion, and therefore consequently of the impact on spiritual life are summed up by King:

> The effects of race and class difference may be easier to see and analyse in religions than the dynamics of gender. The underlying, often hidden, gender patterns represent deep structures of religious life which need to be historically excavated and analytically carved out by closely researching foundational texts and the history of powerful institutions with long established lines of authority. This is a challenging task which cannot be accomplished without tremendous effort, but it can also have shattering implications for religious life and consciousness. (King, 2005, p 9)

A challenging task and not least of the challenges is to arrive at definitions, in particular a definition of spirituality. In the post-modern determination to escape essentialism, no one definition can stand, all is process, relative and open to being unravelled. Despite this, the search for meaning which underlies spiritual exploration means definitions, however provisional, need to be stated. Here are a few to start from:

Brian Thorne has defined spirituality in this way:

> Spirituality is the yearning within the human being for meaning, for that which is greater than the encapsulated individual, for interconnection with all that is. (Thorne, 2001, p 438)

David Tacey explores contemporary spirituality in his book *'The Spirituality Revolution'*, and he says that spirituality is a term used to describe our relationship with the sacredness of life, nature and the universe. He defines spirituality as being concerned with connectedness and relatedness to other realities and existences, including other people, society, the world, the stars, the universe and the holy. (Tacey, 2004, p 38)

Oriah Mountain Dreamer defines it in this way:

> Our *spirituality* is our direct experience of that which is paradoxically both the essence of what we are, the stuff of which everything is made, and that which is larger than us. We can call it God, the Sacred Mystery, the Great Mother, the divine life force, fertile emptiness, clear light awareness, love, beauty, truth. The possibilities are endless. Some experience it through the practices of a religious tradition. For many life's holiness touches them unexpectedly when they attend a birth or sit at the bedside of someone who is leaving this world. Sometimes a direct experience of the sacred comes when we simply bring our attention to an ordinary moment. Fully present, we experience a presence within and around us, an all-inclusive vastness that is beyond words or thoughts. These moments of being awake to the divine within and around us offer us a sense of purpose and meaning, an appreciation for the wholeness of life even as what we experience in these moments may be impossible to articulate or explain. (Mountain Dreamer, 2005, p 5)

In her research into spirituality in the Liberties, an inner-city area of Dublin, Flanagan (1999, pp 3-37) outlines various understandings of the term spirituality, putting it into a historical context, and then exploring the different emphases the various current terms carry, '*religious experience, experience of God, spiritual experience, Christian religious experience* and *experience of grace*.' (Ibid p 5)

> Experience of God is one dimension of spiritual experience and it is sometimes placed at the heart of spirituality, the focus here is not on a transitory awareness of mystery (religious experience) or on the pervasive sense of living a variety of ultimate values (spiritual experience) but on the changing contours of the specific desire to encounter God personally. (Ibid, p 7)

She goes on to explain that Christian spiritual experience is about 'how the ultimate Christian truths, pointed to in the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Church and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, shape the everyday experiences of believers'. (Ibid, p 8)

These understandings seem to me to be helpful in raising awareness of the various approaches and understandings that seekers may have, the importance of exploring those understandings, and not making assumptions about what seekers mean. A search through texts will provide various versions of these definitions, and my hope is that they can rest lightly here, just as a loose container for reference and reflection.

To return to gender:

Gross (2005, p 18) believes that much has been achieved in the past thirty years, and that this can be demonstrated by the fact that the generic

masculine is no longer used, even by popular newspapers, but it is of course used in many churches; it is only recently that an *Inclusive Bible* (Priests for Equality, 2007) has been published although I have never known it used in a service because it is not 'licensed'.

However, Gross sees a major problem, which is that despite all that has been achieved, often we are 'preaching to the choir'. (Gross, 2005, p 18)

> The paradigm shift from androcentric to gender-neutral and gender inclusive models of humanity is still incomplete, in that women have taken it more to heart than men. (Ibid, p 19)

Gross argues for the need to regard women's studies as a sub-discipline within gender studies, and illustrates her point with her experience that a title which uses the word women or feminist will not attract men, whereas a talk on social justice which uses women as an illustration will. She feels that women are on the whole well aware of gender issues. I am not sure I agree with her. Perhaps this is true in academia, but outside, despite progress, I feel many women believe that all that needs to be achieved has been, and legislation exists after all in the UK, so let's not stir up trouble. However I agree with Gross when she says:

> Focussing on women corrects part of the problem, but it does not correct the failure to integrate knowledge about women into knowledge about humanity, which is what a complete paradigm shift in our models of humanity would require……I believe that we will be more successful at achieving major goals of women's studies and feminist theology in the long run if we conceptualise our work as part of the project of gender studies. (Gross, 2005, p 20)

My hope in this study is to highlight some of the knowledge about women that needs to be integrated into knowledge about humanity, and to attempt that integration in the context of this research.

The issue of gender is a contentious one for the person-centred approach. A recent issue of the journal of the World Association for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (WAPCEPC) was dedicated to *'Gender and PCE[6] Therapies'* (Volume 7 Number 2 Summer 2008) and a gender symposium was held at the PCE 2008 conference at the UEA in July 2008, which was entitled *'Persons or men and women: How relevant is gender awareness to PCE therapy and counselling?'*. The seminar room was full to overflowing for a vibrant discussion with the panel which included many of the contributors to the special issue of the journal.

The lack of discussion of sexual difference and gender, according to Keys and Prüller-Jagenteufel, is a result of:

> [T]he fundamental disagreement amongst practitioners and theorists about the relevance of anything extraneous to the agenda of two persons meeting in a relationship where one person is in distress and the other is focussed on genuinely accompanying, understanding and fully accepting this person and on trusting and following their lead. (Keys and Prüller-Jagenteufel, 2008, p 80)

However it may also be because, as Ursula King says:

> Gender-critical thinking is neither 'natural' in the current social context nor has it been historically available before the modern era. It has to be intentionally developed through education and involves the radical

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> transformation of consciousness, knowledge, scholarship and social practices. (King, 2005, p 2)

Graham (2009, pp 65-78) reviews the development of gender theory and asks 'What is Gender?'. In considering the meaning of 'gender', she says that theories of gender have 'three clear dimensions', identity, relations and representations. She explores the critical gender theories starting from an early definition by Stoller in 1968 of sex as male and female and gender as masculine and feminine, through to the present day. In doing this she considers the contribution of science, anthropology and psychoanalysis. She then draws out implications for theology.

Positivist approaches stress difference, and the emphasis on difference rather than on similarities distorts the results of research, since the findings are 'social products, generated by human processes of enquiry' (Ibid, pp 68-69). Anthropology is a field in which the question of gender has been extensively debated, since 'critical studies of gender relations are seen as indispensible to wider questions of a culture's social, symbolic and economic structures and practices' (Ibid p 69), but here too, there has been an emphasis on dualism although the explanations 'affirm the importance of human agency, or practice, in the process of generating gender differences'. This creates an understanding which rests on the suppression of similarities, rather than an emphasis on difference. Graham then explores the contribution of psychoanalysis, which the gender theorists have seen as 'able to take account of the strongly internalised nature of gender identity while offering a critical pattern of causation' (Ibid, p 72).

Wolter-Gustafson writes in the context of the person-centred approach:

> Rogers (1978) challenged the hierarchy of gendered binarism as he affirmed the uniqueness of each male, female, and transgendered

> person without regard for their sexual orientation (Ehrbar, 2004). He was also the only psychologist who posited a single track for human development (Wolter-Gustafson, 1999). (Wolter-Gustafson, 2008, p 100)

Wolter-Gustafson is 'encouraged to note some new connections between the person-centered world and critical theorists' (Ibid, p 104) and believes:

> The project of creating a post-dualistic embodied and body-aware epistemology is a large task which post-modern feminists share with some client-centered theorists. This creative project requires increased interdisciplinary collaboration and relationality rather than separation into traditionally isolated disciplines. (Ibid, p 104)

As Graham says:

> While gender is a complex and constructed phenomenon, it is not merely an incidental aspect of our experience. The decisive impact of gender as a form of social relations is suggestive of a model of human nature as profoundly relational, requiring the agency of culture to bring our personhood fully into being. (Graham, 2009, p 75)

It seems to me that the person-centred approach has much to offer here, providing, as Wolter-Gustafson says, as person-centred practitioners, we are:

> …willing to take account of, and become sensitised to, potential distortions in our empathic understanding, congruence and unconditional positive regard resulting from the influence of Western culture, and it means reclaiming the body and reaffirming the trustworthiness of the organism acting as a whole. It means new theory building. It means being willing to consider that, just as

> empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard together form a context in which constructive conditions are created, dualistic thinking and the weight of our gendered conditions of worth form a context in which destructive conditions are created. Ultimately I believe a deeper empathic understanding of our gendered *context* will help us move through, not merely past, our gender issues. (Wolter-Gustafson, 2008, p 107)

My research into women's spiritual lives is in part a feminist project; and it is also a person-centred project which is inclusive of a gendered perspective. Like Carol Wolter-Gustafson (1984, p 19) I think that women's studies is a necessary but not sufficient lens through which to approach my research, and that the person-centred approach benefits when the lens of gender is made visible. Like Alison Webster I think:

> We need to steer a way through this by recognising how we are each formed and shaped by structural power, and being really tuned into that. But also we cannot be fatalistic about these forces. They do not determine who we are and who we become, though they do have a powerful influence. It is part of our role, I believe, to bring a critical and analytical eye to unjust structures and to engage in robust actions to dismantle and mitigate their effects. (Webster, 2008)

I believe my data will be relevant to all involved or interested in spiritual direction/accompaniment. A feminist critique of the current situation feels to me like a judgement, and one which engenders hostility to the point where defences are raised and research, however compelling the results, cannot be heard. At the same time, it is feminism that has revealed to me the sources of my difficulties with religion and with the institutional church, and so clearly it must inform my frame of reference, and should be visible, when it appears.

In the interests of transparency, and congruence, which are also key to the person-centred approach, I acknowledge the influence of feminist theology on my perceptions, and since I intend to be fully present in this research, feminism will be there too, alongside the person-centred approach and my Christian faith, and the fact that I am a heterosexual middle class, single, white woman amongst other things. As Tina Beattie says:

> The quest for understanding what it means to be a gendered human being surely also encompasses the quest for religious identities, communities and practices of faith that affect scholars of religions no less than those they are studying, and this entails a degree of transparency with regard to the scholar's own religious positioning if she is to respect the criteria and ethics of feminist scholarship. (Beattie, 2005, p 65)

So, to be transparent, as called for by Beattie, I will not only explain my position as I start this research, but also include, where relevant, my own spiritual/religious process as I progress through the researching and writing of this thesis.

My own experience has been that those aspects of me that traditionally would be associated with 'masculine' such as leadership, clarity, intellectual ability, have been over-developed at the expense of those traditionally associated with the 'feminine', such as nurturing, caring, creativity, the body and the physical. Yet I experience myself strongly in those ways, and particularly in relation to my spirituality. It has been the reintegration of those aspects of me that has freed me. I have learned to value them and express them openly rather than split them off into a hidden and private place. It has been my reading of feminist theology that has enabled me to do this and not the person-centred approach, although it was the person-centred approach which provided the environment for me to discover this about myself. In my reading

I understood how profoundly alienated I felt within the Christian church and how for me that was entirely related to my gender.

Connection for me is enabled through dance, movement of my whole body, song, art, textiles, poetry, relationship and the natural world. I have written poetry for as long as I can remember, and the earliest poem I have, which was perhaps written as a hymn, was written, age eight or nine, on the flyleaf of my first bible, and is about Christmas, Christ's birth, and the visit of the shepherds, apparently in response to the illustration of that event which is on the following page. That seems significant in the light of the evolution of my research method and my own explorations of spiritual issues.

In my pilot study I researched the relationship of three women with the institutional church and found that connection and disconnection were themes that were repeated in the accounts given by all of them. This led me to consider the nature of the relationship which can enable creative engagement with spiritual issues and in particular the spiritual direction/companion relationship.

Slee (2004b) researched women's faith development and interviewed thirty women. She found that relational faith consciousness was an important factor needing to be considered in relation to women's faith development (Ibid, p 166). Slee sees her research findings as suggesting 'broad principles which can shape the pastoral care and Christian education of women and girls'. This extends to spiritual direction and I believe it also needs to extend beyond Christian education to spiritual development for all women. I wish to be as inclusive as possible, whilst at the same time acknowledging that I am limited to my immediate geographical area (the UK).

Another of the major themes which emerged from Slee's interviews was alienation. This took various forms, but the one which resonated with my

experience, and also with the results of my initial study, was 'Disconnection, fragmentation, alienation and breakdown' (Slee, 2004b, p 92). Slee's study is of particular interest in relation to this study, as her analysis of women's faith development highlights a need for spiritual direction with women to include an awareness of the particular needs and experiences of women.

Jack Finnegan (2004) writes:

> [M]y hypothesis is that gender issues both influence and are influenced by the interplay of socio-cultural and religious processes, practices, and concepts and are encountered within contemporary spiritual direction relationships. (Ibid, p 38)

He believes that gender issues should be raised in the context of the spiritual direction relationship, and stresses the importance of an awareness of these issues for ensuring that the practice of spiritual direction survives and develops in a meaningful way in contemporary society:

> Knowingly and unknowingly, cultural hierarchies, the forces of defensive splitting, and heterosexist bias continue to assert powerful influence on practitioners and trainers alike. Spiritual theology in general and spiritual practice in particular must acknowledge the inextricability of sexual and economic subordination in the lives of many. This is usually a product of gender stereotyping and consequent gender injustice. (Ibid, p 40)

The lack of awareness is a problem and, in my own experience, insistence on bringing this into awareness often results in considerable resistance, often, curiously, from those who themselves have experienced disempowerment. I think that is due to hostility to the F(eminist) word, and hope that by placing gender rather than feminism on the agenda, defences will lower. I was

interested to see in the course of my research whether my concerns about gender were reflected in the experience of those I interviewed. I am aware that I would not have conceptualised them in this way until I was able to find my voice and trust and follow my own inner promptings. As a spiritual companion I would want to enable others to do that for themselves.

> For the first time in human history a growing number of women from different religious and secular backgrounds are articulating their own spiritual experiences, reflections, and quests not simply as individuals, but as a group of virtually global size. This radically new process will have a profound impact on the future of religion and spirituality, and on that of the human species as a whole. Not only Western women, or women from a Jewish or Christian background, are actively engaged in the reinterpretation of their religious and cultural heritage, but women from vey different religious and secular contexts around the whole globe are fully involved in the transformation of their tradition.
> (King, 2009, p 140)

My concern for inclusivity in terms of being able to accompany those with a religious tradition and outside, is a result of having listened to many who have either left or never had experience of formal religion and for whom many of the concepts are alien. Jeff (2007, p xii) notes in his introduction to the revised edition of his book, that since in recent years more lay people (rather than clergy) have become spiritual directors, they are likely to see more of those who do not belong to any faith tradition. Much of the literature on spiritual direction, including Jeff's *'Spiritual Direction for Every Christian'*, is based on the Christian tradition (see for example Fischer, 1989, Guenther, 1992, Leech, 2001, Ruffing, 2000), although it is possible to find books which move beyond that, such as *'Tending the Holy'* edited by Norvene Vest (Vest, 2003b) which includes the Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi traditions as well as the

Jewish tradition. So far I have not found any writing that relates to those with no faith tradition. As King says:

> …it is important to realise that creative dialogue about spirituality is not and cannot remain restricted to people of religious adherence. It must embrace the secular world to make a difference to all the peoples of this planet. (King, 2009, pp 76-77)

Spiritual Direction or Spiritual Accompaniment?

Language and choice of words in this arena are significant. Direction or accompaniment? Directee or seeker? There are implications for power relations, for the role of the director as expert, which do not fit with a person-centred approach. Are they the same activities?

What is spiritual direction? Kathleen Fischer, writing from a feminist perspective defines it very simply:

> The goal of spiritual guidance is openness and responsiveness to God's presence in our lives. Spiritual direction is a conversation in which a person gives expression to her experience of faith and discerns its movement. (Fischer, 1989, p 5)

Working as a spiritual director with those who have a faith in God, this definition might be suitable; however it would not include those of no faith, or those who might take issue with the word 'God'. For example Vest (2003a) prefers to use the word Godde which she feels seen in a text opens up 'the possibility that the Infinite Being that we have named Godde is not limited by maleness'. (Vest, 2003a, p 186)

More inclusive of those of all faiths and none is Beverly Lanzetta's (2008) definition:

> **Interfaith Spiritual Guidance:** The ancient art of soul guidance—often called "spiritual direction" in the Christian tradition—is considered an essential dimension of a person's spiritual life. It is the process whereby a person is assisted in developing his or her relationship with God, Ultimate Reality, or the Holy, however named or defined. The primary focus of spiritual direction is on religious experience, not ideas, and how this experience touches the most profound level of the person. It is concerned with the inner life—that dimension of existence that deals with the heart, and the deep feeling states that arise from the closeness of the person to his or her divine source.

From a traditional spiritual direction perspective the word 'guidance' would be appropriate, however from a person-centred perspective it would be problematic, as, in the person-centred approach, the seeker would be the authority on themselves, and would use their spiritual companion as a resource, but would not expect to be directed. That also implies that there is no goal imposed on the seeker, rather that they define their own goal or aims, if they feel the need to, but equally they may approach the exploration with an openness to what may unfold, and have no predetermined ideas about what might happen or where it may take them. Establishing the hopes or desires of the seeker from the relationship would be one of the first areas for exploration. Fischer does address the issue of 'direction' in terms of taking responsibility for another and telling them what to do, and states that is not what she intends (Fischer, 1989, p 3). However, training in the person-centred approach highlights ways in which, however unintentionally, we may influence and direct, and the ability to identify potentially directive responses, or even directing by selective responses, is one which takes a high level of self-awareness to develop. Many trainee counsellors have been surprised at

the degree of control they exert over others, and the ways in which this happens, and I contend that it is no different for the spiritual companion. It often takes a detailed analysis of transcribed sessions and feedback from experienced practitioners on the session and the analysis, for trainees to become aware of the dynamics operating in the relationship (which includes of course the client or in this case the seeker). I believe that the person-centred spiritual companion will work in a different way to the more traditional spiritual director, but that the person-centred approach can inform spiritual directors and companions alike. Like Edwards (2001, pp ix-x) I use the various names interchangeably, and I agree with him that the important thing is the intent of what we are offering. I also believe that the word companion is most suitable to describe the nature of a person-centred relationship which aims to provide spiritual accompaniment, and that the person-centred approach does have something distinctive to offer, which may emerge from my research.

A definition from Spiritual Directors International, based in the United States, reads:

> Spiritual direction is the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey. Spiritual direction helps people tell their sacred stories everyday. Spiritual direction exists in a context that emphasizes growing closer to God (or the holy or a higher power). Spiritual direction invites a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy, counselling, or financial planning. (Spiritual Directors International, 2009b)

Further definitions of spiritual direction are also available on their website including definitions for Jewish, Buddhist, Taoist, Islamic, Eastern Philosophy (Yoga) and Christian spiritual direction.

A note here about the metaphor of the journey in relation to spirituality. This is a common metaphor, and 'quest' is also frequently used, as well as 'pilgrimage'. Care needs to be used when using metaphors, as Slee explains (2004b, p 98-100), since the sense of a search, of something lost or missing, of seeking, and of looking for a path all fit within this imagery, and are used by women as well as men, and yet can also be associated with the hero going on an adventure to prove courage and bravery, which is not generally the meaning attributed by women. Other metaphors associated with spiritual direction include the companion as teacher or midwife, but these imply the role of expert and do not in my view fit with the person-centred approach which is careful to regard the person as the expert on themselves.

My own preference, which may be influenced by my dislike of travel, my love of home and also of dance, is for Sharon Daloz Parks' (2003, p 61) *'To Venture and to Abide: the Tidal Rhythm of our Becoming'*, and Maria Harris' (1991) *'Dance of the Spirit'* and especially for Vest's 'place long treasured'. (Vest, 2003a, p 194)

Parks' choice of the word 'becoming' is deliberate. A more common term is 'development' used in relation to faith by Fowler (see for example Fowler, 1987, 1991) and also Slee (see Slee, 2004b). However as Parks says:

> All of us who have moved into this terrain have increasingly realised that while notions of "development" have captured important dimensions of the dynamic evolution of the soul/psyche, the developmental paradigm has been dominated by an imagination of differentiation, a story about moving away and beyond.
>
> The mythic journey has power, in part, because it is deeply resonant with established cultural images of human becoming. The mythic journey of the pilgrim from ignorance to enlightenment and from lowly

> beginnings to noble accomplishment is marked by fierce testings, great losses, and adventures of all kinds as dramatised in both the classic and contemporary imagination from Beowulf and Dante to Star Wars and Lord of the Rings. (Parks, 2003, pp 61-62)

However the current definition of success in terms of busyness, travel, being on the move, achieving material success by continual improvement, is matched by a corresponding longing for home.

> This longing for homeland is one of the two great pulls in the tidal ebb and flow that powers the development of meaning and faith. "Faithing" seems to ask us again and again to go forth, to risk letting go, to reach beyond the familiar, and to practice the way of the pilgrim. But there is another powerful sensibility that pulls as deeply and truthfully at the core of the human soul – the call to dwell, to stay, to abide, to return home. (Ibid, p 62)

As Vest says:

> Might not a woman be more likely to find freedom in an image that suggests a place safe enough to conceive and then give birth to a child? What would be the effect of thinking of our basic spiritual practice as involving the rhythms of nesting, gardening, creating a place of beauty and welcome for the Holy One? Rather than being in temporary quarters, on the move, let us imagine being in a place long treasured……(Vest, 2003a, p 194)

This may be the reason for the increasing interest in contemplative prayer and meditation. Teachers such as Cynthia Bourgeault, principal teacher for the Contemplative Society, and Lawrence Freeman of the World Community

for Christian Meditation fill lecture halls with ease, and a recent doctoral thesis (McLennan Tajiri, 2009) explores this in relation to spiritual direction.

Parks (2003, p 67) sees the sequential stages of developmental theories as too linear, and while they fit with the metaphor of the journey, they present only a part of experience by focusing on 'moving beyond while masking how we stay and keep'. She goes on to relate Fowler's theory of stages of faith to include home.

Maria Harris proposes that women's spirituality is a '*Dance of the Spirit'*:

> I propose that women's spirituality is a rhythmic series of movements, which, unlike a ladder or staircase, do not go up or down. Instead the steps of our lives are much better imagined as steps in a dance, where there is movement backward and forward, turn and return, bending and bowing, circling and spiralling, and no need to finish or move on to the next step, except in our own good time, and God's. At whatever step we find ourselves, we are where we are meant to be. Leaning into and living into any one of the steps is the only way to understand it, and moving onto the next one happens according to our soul's own rhythm – in ways similar to the bodily rhythms natural to us as women. (Harris, 1991, p xii)

The steps described by Harris are Awakening, DisCovering (sic), Creating, Dwelling, Nourishing, Traditioning and Transforming. The emphasis is on contemplation and her book *'Dance of the Spirit: the Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality'* (Harris, 1991) can be used as a workbook.

> Flame dancing Spirit, come
> Sweep us off our feet and
> Dance us through our days.

Surprise us with your rhythms;
Dare us to try new steps, explore
New patterns and new partnerships;
Release us from old routines
To swing in abandoned joy and
Fearful adventure. And
In the intervals,
Rest us
In your still centre. Amen (St Hilda Community, 1996, p 34)

I offer these alternatives partly to disrupt assumptions and open up possibilities for different readings of the concept of spiritual direction/accompaniment – since it will be important to understand something of the nature of the activity to be researched, without it being prescribed exactly what it is.

I have structured my analysis to reflect this sense of a dance and so the reader is taken though different steps in choosing a spiritual companion (for the dance), developing the relationship, exploring different aspects of that relationship, the boundaries of the relationship, moving with the music, using different steps, but returning to the chorus, revisiting different aspects of the themes from a different perspective. It spirals in, goes deeper and moves out again to look at more general aspects. It does not follow a linear argument, and the theme of boundaries is present both specifically and also as a part of other themes. In presenting it in this way I hope to convey the complexity of this relationship and of the issues raised in the interviews.

In person-centred theory, the concepts of the formative tendency and the actualising tendency are important here.

The formative tendency is the ‘directional tendency towards increased order and interrelated complexity found in nature’ and ‘is reflected in the universality of the actualising tendency in humans’
(Tudor and Merry, 2006, p 57).

The actualising tendency is a developmental concept:

> [T]he inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the organism.
> (Rogers, 1959, p 196)

This is balanced by the forces of social mediation, which more recent writings stress more than Rogers did and warn of the need to take this into account.
(Mearns and Thorne, 2000, pp 182-183)

The importance of the formative tendency and the actualising tendency were described by Rogers:

> [I]n our work as person-centred therapists and facilitators, we have discovered the attitudinal qualities that are demonstrably effective in releasing constructive and growthful changes in the personality and behaviour of individuals. Persons in an environment infused with these attitudes develop more self-understanding, more self-confidence, more ability to change their behaviours. They learn more significantly, they have more freedom to be and become.
>
> The individual in this nurturing climate is free to choose *any* direction, but actually selects positive and constructive ways. The actualising tendency is operative in the human being.

> It is further confirming to find that this is not simply a tendency in living systems, but is part of a strong formative tendency in our universe, which is evident at all levels.
>
> Thus, when we provide a psychological climate that permits persons to *be* – whether they are clients, students, workers, or persons in a group – we are not involved in a chance event. We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all of organic life – a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable. And on an even larger scale, I believe we are tuning in to a potent creative tendency which has formed our universe, from the smallest snowflake to the largest galaxy, from the lowly amoeba to the most sensitive and gifted of persons. And perhaps we are touching the cutting edge of our ability to transcend ourselves, to create new and more spiritual directions in human evolution. (Rogers, 1980, pp 133-134)

Providing the psychological climate in person-centred therapy means offering a relationship characterised by a way of being in which the following conditions, are present:

1. That two persons are in contact.
2. That the first person, whom we shall term the client, is in a state on incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.
3. That the second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent in the relationship.
4. That the therapist is experiencing unconditional positive regard toward the client.
5. That the therapist is experiencing an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference.

> 6. That the client perceives, at least to a minimal degree, conditions 4 and 5, the unconditional positive regard of the therapist for him, and the empathic understanding of the therapist. (Rogers, 1959, p 213)

These conditions are both necessary and sufficient for constructive personality change to occur. They appear deceptively simple, but it is a lifetime's work to be able to offer them consistently and to incorporate them into a way of being in relationship in the world. It has been said to be a spiritual practice in itself, but I see it as an aspect of spiritual practice.

> Three of the six necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change which have become known as the 'core conditions': the therapist is congruent or integrated in the relationship; the therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client; and the therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client. (Tudor and Merry, 2006, p 22)

The relationship offered by the spiritual companion would, in terms of person-centred theory, be one in which the spiritual capacity of the person would develop or actualise, but there is a difference in the purpose of the relationship and also in the psychological state of the seeker (although they may be vulnerable), and it is not necessarily personality change that is the aim of this relationship, so this raised questions for me as to whether the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence are either necessary or sufficient in this context. Therefore the nature of this relationship, and the training, experience and knowledge required to offer it, with particular reference to women, are the subject of this study.

Chapter 2 Methodology

In the glare of neon times,
Let not our eyes be worn
By surfaces that shine
With hunger made attractive.

That our thoughts be true light,
Finding their way into words
Which have the weight of shadow
To hold the layers of truth.

That we never place our trust
In minds claimed by empty light,
Where one-sided certainties
Are driven by false desire.

When we look into the heart,
May our eyes have the kindness
And reverence of candlelight.

That the searching of our minds
Be equal to the oblique
Crevices and corners where
The mystery continues to dwell,
Glimmering in fugitive light.

…….

And when we come to search for God,
Let us first be robed in night,

Put on the mind of morning
To feel the rush of light
Spread slowly inside
The colour and stillness
Of a found world.

Extract from *'For Light'* John O'Donohue (2007, p 33-34)

The original aim of this research project was to explore the training, experience and knowledge which are necessary to offer spiritual companionship. I intended to compare two training courses, one offered by the Norwich Centre and the other the Ignatian Spirituality Course offered at the London Centre for Spirituality. I was particularly interested in hearing women's experience. I wished to research this in relation to women, since women historically have been invisible in many religious faiths, their voices unheard, and their stories unwritten. My own experience within the Anglican church of frustration and alienation has filled me with a desire to enable women in particular to be able to grow and explore, and be heard and accompanied. As the interviews progressed however, it became clear that the material related particularly to the nature of the relationship with the spiritual director or companion, and that this material was valuable and could potentially inform trainers and spiritual companions/directors, and would also be of interest to those seeking a spiritual companion. It also became clear that although some of the participants had experienced discrimination within the Anglican Church, and all were aware of the nature of the problems faced by women in the church, the material relating to the impact of these problems on the spiritual direction relationship was not the only key concern and this therefore became a lesser theme. In addition, it emerged that several of the participants were either in training, or had trained on other courses, and that meant there was more information about various trainings, mainly from the perspective of participants. A discussion with my supervisor resulted in a

change of emphasis away from the comparison of the two trainings, to exploring the themes that emerged from my interviews and then considering the implications for training.

Participants

Participants in the study were recruited in a number of different ways, depending on which group they belong to.

In order to understand better the needs of seekers and the ways in which courses aim to train those offering spiritual direction/companionship I originally proposed three parts to this research. I wanted to build on my previous research and interview:

1. Six female seekers who have spiritual directors/companions

   I was aiming to discover the participants' experience of the relationship with their spiritual director/companion. What do they feel they gain from it, what do they find helpful and what (if anything) unhelpful. Ideally some of the seekers would be working with directors/companions from the two courses.

   I proposed to recruit them by putting a request out through the Living Spirituality Network, with the proviso that participants would need to be within a reasonable travelling distance of Norwich, or in London.

2. A female (if possible) trainer from the London course and either use my own experience of the Norwich Centre course, or one of the other facilitators (both are men).

I was aiming to explore the curriculum design, content and methods of delivery, and assessment of each of the two courses. What do they/we believe is necessary in order for a trainee to become a spiritual companion?

I contacted the London course and sent an information sheet to them.
I arranged to meet with the course tutor in January 2009.

3. Female course participants about their experience of training, at least one from each course.

I was aiming to learn how the trainees experience their training, why did they choose it? How do they feel it is contributing to their development as spiritual companions? Are they working in this role and if so how do they feel they have benefited from the course?

I spoke about my research project during the first weekend of the Norwich Centre course. The initial reaction was mixed, with a certain amount of concern that this would not affect their experience of the course. However two course members, one who participated in the previous study and one person who had previous experience of being a research participant elsewhere, expressed their interest immediately, and two further participants indicated they were interested and would consider it. In the event I interviewed two women from the course, Sophie and Alice.

I envisaged that the trainees on the London course would be recruited through my information sheet, but in the event Jane, the tutor on the third year of the course put out my request, and one person, Teresa, came forward for interview.

Having thought further about what I was aiming to discover, I realised it would be helpful to include spiritual directors/companions in the study, and draw on

their experience and expertise. They might have views about training and also insights into the needs of seekers. I felt that the emphasis needed to shift slightly in order that the learning from the seekers and then the directors/companions could be compared with the courses and the trainees. I therefore discussed this with my supervisor in November 2008 and added the directors/companions to the list of participants. Later, however, as a result of reflecting on the interview material, I revised this further and moved away from the idea of comparisons, and from emphasis on specific aspects of individual training courses.

Research Process

As I have previously explained, this project is a person-centred project which is inclusive of a gendered perspective. The method used needed to be, in the words of Carol Wolter-Gustafson, 'a dialogical, person-centred research method' (1984, p 15). Like Wolter-Gustafson I needed a method that would

> …involve my whole being, including intellect, intuition, feelings and spirit. To honor and reclaim as strengths my emotions, sensitivity, and creativity [is] to claim my wholeness as a researcher. (Wolter-Gustafson, 1990, p 222)

In the event, this happened in a way that I had not anticipated, through creating textiles, and including poems and references to song lyrics. I will explain more about that later in this section.

I too believe that 'the quality of the research depends on the quality of the living relationship between those engaged in the research' (Ibid p 222), and therefore reflected at some length on the implications of this for my research. What would it mean to involve my whole being in this? What is my identity as

a researcher? This was an ongoing reflection through the study, recorded mainly in my journal, extracts from which are offered as part of the study. I decided to attempt this synthesis with my process having read Kim Etherington's *'Becoming a Reflexive Researcher'* (Etherington, 2004) and recognising that it would be perhaps strange and uncomfortable to leave myself out when I am trained in my therapy work to reflect on what is happening in the relationship with my clients.

Etherington gives examples of her reflections on the conversations she has with her participant, Sue, includes this in her transcript and gives it to Sue before they meet for a second time. She discusses the ways in which her contribution, both in the interview and in her reflections, enable them both to reflect more deeply, and Sue shares more than she might otherwise have done (Etherington, 2004 pp 54-70). However this depth is achieved partly due to their gender, closeness in age, and similar backgrounds, which would not be the case with all my participants. As a therapist, my reflections on my own process are not on the whole shared with my client, as therapy is about the client, and self-disclosure by the counsellor must be carefully considered. However, as a researcher the relationship has a different purpose – I hesitated then to use that word, it felt like I am saying this is a transactional relationship and that feels wrong or at least insufficient, to describe what I hope will be the case. In fact it was this difference, between the research interview as a transaction in the pursuit of objective knowledge, and the research interview as a co-constructed event, that I felt it was important to clarify before I proceeded with the interviews themselves.

I have a great ambivalence around visibility/invisibility. Etherington (2004, p 242) reflects that 'researchers who include themselves in their stories often struggle with anxieties about how this might be viewed by others'. I have been as much misunderstood by being invisible as visible, I have not always found the counselling world to be a kind one to those like me

who are in leadership positions, and yet I do believe it is important to try to be as much of myself as possible, even when my passion, and the challenging process I can find myself in, might cause me to end up in hot water again. I believe this may be a gender issue, as Natiello (1999, p 168) suggests, and certainly in owning my power I have indeed been abandoned by those whose acceptance I seek. However, Etherington (2004, pp 239-241), discussing being a woman researcher with Jane Speedy, suggests that while reflexivity is more accepted when women use it in their research, than when men do, this means that women get less recognition. I felt this was something to be aware of in developing my methodology.

It seemed to me that a semi-structured in-depth interview would be suitable for discovering the information I was seeking from both spiritual seekers and also from trainees. The question of the extent of the structure concerned me as I did not wish to restrict the content according to my own assumptions and prejudices, and yet there was a focus to the study. Rogers (1945) wrote about the contribution of the 'non-directive method' to social research, stressing its ability to counter bias in the researcher. Using examples of the researcher apparently ignoring responses by jumping to the next question, he illustrated the contribution this might make in terms of depth of reflection by the participants. It seemed to me therefore that I needed to strike a balance by outlining the areas I was interested in and suggesting some points for focus, but then facilitating exploration by my participants within these, and creating a relationship within which the participants could feel able to contribute their own areas for exploration as part of their understanding of the aims of the study. The information sheet and suggested areas for exploration therefore needed to be carefully worded and the purpose of my research needed to be understood.

Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams write about the importance of collaborative power in the person-centred approach to research.

> When the people involved in a research project are encouraged to discover more about themselves as they share their views with others, the research can only benefit. It becomes richer both in its informative or academic outcome and in its 'developmental' outcome. (Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams, 2002, p 300)

Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams define a person-centred approach to research as one which:

> …values the subjective experience of the participants and depends for its effectiveness upon the communication of Rogers' (1957, p 96) necessary and sufficient conditions. It involves a willingness on the part of the initiator(s) to share power with everybody else involved and to engage with them, the research question and findings as a whole and present person. The effectiveness and validity of a person-centred approach depends on the expression of the actualising tendency of the co-researchers. (Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams, 2002, p 291)

There are, as previously explained, six necessary and sufficient conditions, and although I agree that empathy, congruence and unconditional regard must be communicated and that psychological contact is necessary, it is not necessarily the case that the participant is, or needs to be, in a state of incongruence in relation to the research question. I do, however, think it is very important that I as the researcher am as congruent in the relationship as I can be.

Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams propose that person-centred research is: 'based in the subjective experience of all those involved' and that 'the "subjects" of research are also co-researchers and contribute equally to the discovery and construction of meaning'. (Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams, 2002, pp 294-295).

But they feel that 'there is little research that conforms fully to person-centred principles' (Ibid, p 291) and I suspect that my study will be another that doesn't fully conform in their terms, because the research question is mine, and has not been arrived at collaboratively, and the name on my doctoral thesis will be mine. In analysing the data and drawing conclusions, it was not possible to operate with my participants as a group. This inevitably gives me power over how I present the data, what I include and exclude, and means that the interpretations are mine. I have taken care that I do not appropriate or misrepresent the participants or the data, (see Borland, 1991 for an example of this) and offered them the opportunity to comment if they so wish. As Mearns and McLeod write, 'it is the participant who knows whether the selection the researcher makes of the mass of information obtained is one that is meaningful and powerful' (Mearns and McLeod, 1984, pp 386-387). My intention was that my participants would be volunteers who wished to contribute to the knowledge about this subject. By taking a phenomenological approach, however, I know that I risk being accused of simply presenting a small number of experiences which cannot be generalised.

Certainly I view myself as consulting or engaging with my participants in order to gain and hopefully co-create knowledge, and we will have shared that experience. However the issue of power is an interesting one, particularly from a gender perspective. Discussing the issue in relation to interviewing women, Reinharz and Chase (2003) note that the historic invisibility of women, particularly in research, can mean that even being approached to speak about their experiences can have a profound impact. This impact may depend on the status, education and class of the woman concerned in that uneducated poorer women who do not have a career may never have had a voice, whereas educated middle class career women may feel confident in voicing their experience. Some cultures traditionally do not allow women to

have a voice, and the busy career woman may struggle to schedule time for an interview.

Whilst I do not assert that all women are the same, I do agree with Reinharz and Chase (2003, p 73) that there are experiences which most Western women share, and that 'gender shapes institutions, ideologies, interactions and identities.' A number of other dimensions intersect with gender, i.e. race and class, meaning that although 'all women's experiences are gendered, no two women's experiences are identical'. They treat as 'women' those who self-define themselves as such, inclusive of age, ability, sexual orientation, cultures, nationality and race. I am particularly interested in women's experience in the spiritual direction/accompaniment relationship because of my own recognition of the part my gender has played in my experience of church, and religious teaching. As I wrote this, the Church of England published its report from the General Synod Legislative Drafting Group on Women in the Episcopate, together with draft legislation. The press release from WATCH said:

> The report acknowledges that some of its arrangements would restrict the rights of bishops who are women, and cites the Church of England's continuing exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the principle in English law that where there are conflicting rights, the "exercise of one right may sometimes need to be restricted in order to protect the exercise of another right". (GS1707 page 3, paragraph 16 (General Synod, 2008))
>
> WATCH is dismayed that the rights of bishops who are women should be proscribed and that there is not equality of opportunity for women at this level in the Church. (WATCH, 2008)

Personally I am more than dismayed; I find it both shocking and heartbreaking. It impacts on me, adversely, in terms of the message it gives me about my value and potential as a woman who has been a member of the Church of England for most of my life. It affirms me in my view that spiritual seekers, especially women, may have particular needs from a spiritual companion/director, although I am aware that not all women share my concerns.

The status of the researcher can have an impact, too. I am aware that in the local person-centred counselling world, and perhaps beyond, I am in a position of power and I have status. I have job titles and roles that convey that, and I am fairly well-known. I am an educated white middle class woman in my 50s with a career as a counsellor, supervisor, university lecturer and manager, and now I am venturing into research. It is perhaps in my favour that I am researching outside of the person-centred counselling world, into a related but on the whole different area. I was unknown to most of those who agreed to participate in my research. My role within the counselling community has less and perhaps little relevance to the world of spiritual accompaniment, where I am a novice. I hope that my person-centred way of being enabled me to convey that I really do seek to share the power, and that I do regard my participants as co-creators of the knowledge we share.

I also needed to take into account the nature of the subject area I was researching. In the process of considering the research methodology, I became interested in organic inquiry/research. This arose from research carried out by women trained in the transpersonal approach, who wanted to find a way of including feminine creativity in their work.

> As found in all spiritual traditions, implicit in transpersonal psychology are a sense of wonderment about the commonplace, an acceptance of life as precious, and a recognition of the miraculous strata of all

> experiences. Considered alchemically, life's ordinary ingredients may suddenly add up to personal and cultural transformation. Whether studying extraordinary and uncommon experiences such as unitive experiences and altered states of consciousness or more ordinary experiences such as grief and joy, work and play, and love and pain, transpersonalists seek to sacralise the ordinary.
> (Anderson, 1998, p xxiii)

In their chapter on organic research, Jennifer Clements, Dorothy Ettling, Dianne Jenett and Lisa Shields describe how they met out of a desire to 'find a personal and sacred voice in [their] individual research projects', (Clements et al., 1998). Informed by the transpersonal approach and feminist approaches, they felt that feminist methodologies did not 'carry the idea of the sacred' (Ibid, p 116), and furthermore that even feminist researchers set out to prove something, rather than letting the information emerge:

> Instead of providing the researcher with a set of processes or procedures, organic research offers ways the researcher might position herself or himself to harvest the information that becomes available both from her or his own psyche and from the stories of the co-researchers and the context of the research. (Ibid, p 123)

They use a metaphor to describe the process:

> To grow a healthy and productive tree, the gardener must first prepare the ground by loosening and preparing the soil. Then the seed can be planted. Underground, a complex root system develops. The tree sends up a shoot, and branches develop. Finally, the tree bears fruit, which contains tomorrow's seeds. We use this metaphor to describe the five characteristics of organic research.

Sacred: Preparing the soil
Personal: Planting the seed
Chthonic: The roots emerge
Relational: Growing the tree
Transformative: Harvesting the fruit (Ibid, pp 116-117)

It is closer to heuristic research than traditional methods (see below), but in organic inquiry the areas of research tend to be more about 'how life is lived' and, crucially for me in this project, about 'how women experience relationships'. The authors describe organic research as 'more feminine, grounded, and focused toward offering ways of interpreting and improving daily life or social reality' (Ibid, p 123). An aspect that distinguishes organic inquiry for me is the emphasis that is placed on the spiritual resources that may inform the researcher.

In practice this means that the actual method is likely to evolve, and may include dreams, intuition or experiences during meditation, the goal is 'personal transformation for the reader of the study, the co-researchers, and the researcher' and 'the fundamental technique….. is telling and listening to stories' (Ibid, p 123). All of which fits very well with my subject area and my own personal preference and way of working as a person-centred researcher. It seemed to me that this approach could complement and inform my own developing understanding of myself as a researcher and of ways of carrying out my chosen research with integrity. In the event the method did evolve, as I discovered the possibilities of working with textiles, of songs and poetry, and also of including some of the process of Etty Hillesum (Smelik, 1986), to further illuminate the data.

The notion of research as a source of transformation in addition to information appealed to me, however I did not want to feel that I must achieve

transformation, either my own, my participants' or readers'. I was not even sure what transformation might look like, either for me or for others. I did not want to define it, but if the experience of carrying out this research, participating in it, or reading it should result in transformation, whatever that may mean for any of us, that would be a bonus, and at the very least, I expected to be affected in some way, and hoped my participants would be too.

Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams (2002, p 299) find that person-centred research is 'inevitably growth-promoting'. I am, through this work, hoping to create new knowledge, and I hope that knowledge will inform others as well as me, but transformation seems to me to convey something more than that. These aspects are captured by Heron's (1996) co-operative (or human) inquiry, which can be transformative or informative – but this is based on working as a group, which is not my situation. I hope that the process of engaging in this research engendered and perhaps resulted in, change for those involved, in addition to informing those who train as spiritual companions, and those who design the training courses.

I see organic inquiry as an approach which complements and in many ways synthesises aspects of the person-centred approach and feminist approaches to research, as well as psycho-spiritual approaches.

> …whether Organic Inquiry is an appropriate method for you depends on the nature of your research project and upon your own characteristics as a researcher. This approach is best suited for topics that have a transpersonal or spiritual dimension, for exploring experiences identical or similar to those that you yourself have had, and for studying topics that have passionate meaning for you. …... Doing Organic Inquiry is demanding and challenging. The prize is

> not only an advance in the knowledge base of the disciplines of transpersonal studies and psychology, but a contribution to transformative change in yourself and in others directly and indirectly involved in the research project. (Braud, 2004, p 24)

Flanagan (2004, p 91) feels that heuristic inquiry 'may be considered as an extension of spiritual accompaniment into the public forum' and concludes that:

> It is appropriate to note the suitability of heuristic inquiry for exploring issues in contemporary spirituality. The unexplored nature of many phenomena in contemporary spirituality which are currently being researched mandates a discovery, investigative approach. This immediately suggests the necessity for a heuristic notion to underpin the inquiry and a heuristic structure to guide it. (Ibid, pp 94-95)

Heuristics focuses on understanding human experience:

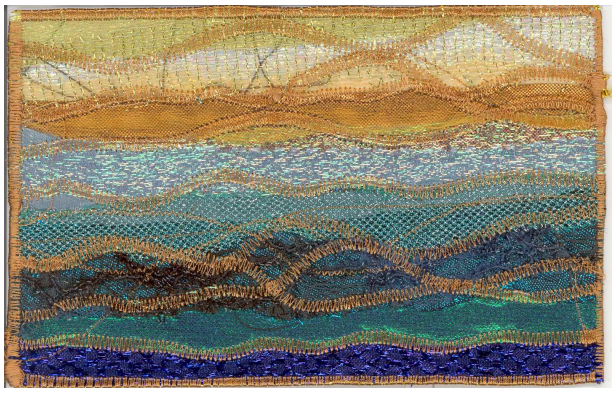
> Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific research through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences. The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one's senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgements. This requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered. (Moustakas, 1990, p 15)

West (2004) explores three approaches to research: grounded theory, human inquiry and heuristics. He also explores briefly the concept of bricolage. He likens the arguments around the different approaches, which he find 'sterile',

to the arguments around pure approaches to counselling and eclectic or integrated approaches. He says:

> I am still left with the question …..[of] how we can research spirituality in therapy in a way that does justice to our understandings of this complex and human phenomenon.
>
> Having presented several useful methodologies and the concept of the bricolage I remain fairly comfortable with Patton's (1990) pragmatism of an informed following of my gut instinct explored during a process of deep contemplation, prayer and meditation! (West, 2004, p 133)

West does not consider organic inquiry, nor does he advocate any one method as being ideally suited to the subject area he is researching, but his comment above seems to me interesting as I try to draw together the different strands that make up my own background to my research, of my training as a therapist, and my interest in women's spirituality. In common with West, and with Clements et al (1998), I intend to approach my research by preparing myself spiritually through my practice of contemplation, meditation and prayer.



1 'Be Still and Know Two' – by the author – used as a prayer card

Spiritual direction or accompaniment is about finding the deepest meanings

of human experiences, and therefore a heuristic approach seems to me to be a valid one, despite Clements et al's (1998, p 123) assertion that it is a masculine approach. As Etherington (2004, p 17) says, it depends on where one positions oneself. However heuristics have been criticised as imprisoning the data, and for having an inward focus (Ibid, p 126), and the approach is perhaps best used as part of a bricolage. Etherington suggests narrative methods and reflexivity can resolve the tensions here, by examining the data in terms of gender, culture, history, context and our construction of identity. I think a person-centred and organic approach, informed by heuristics, might be suitable for my own study. The person-centred approach has responded in recent years to a similar criticism of being inward looking and discounting social context, with the concept of social mediation. A number of books have now appeared (Mearns and Thorne, 2000, Mearns, 2002, Mearns and Thorne, 2007, Moodley et al., 2004, Proctor, 2002, Proctor and Napier, 2004, Proctor et al., 2006, Tudor and Worrall, 2006) which consider the impact of social context on the self.

Ellis and Berger (2003, p 162) describe reflexive dyadic interviews as acts of faith. Although the interviewer asks the questions, they may also share their own experience out of a desire to respond to the sharing of the participant, and the resulting interview will be more like a conversation between two equals. The researcher's emotional responses will be included in the writing up of the research, including reflecting on how they used their knowledge or responses to understand the participant's answers. This adds to the final account by contributing a sense of the context and the process of both people involved. I hope to be able to do this in my research as it seems to bring me closer to a person-centred approach, as well as a heuristic and organic approach, suited to the subject and the gender of my participants.

I also intend to use any other resources that may present themselves, such as my personal journal, poems, artwork, songs, notes, correspondence etc, in

order to present a comprehensive and in-depth view as possible. I will depart from heuristics by taking into account societal influences that may explain the data, and in particular I will consider the impact of gender.

I have allowed the study to become what it would, preparing myself for the process using meditation, contemplation and prayer. In this way I have tried to integrate the various aspects of this study: spirituality, person-centredness, and gender, in a suitable method to generate data which will tell the stories of the participants, and my story, in a way that does not misrepresent us, and presents the data for the reader to engage with in as interesting a way as I can.

An unexpected development was being drawn to explore my own experience of that which I call God, and also the emerging themes around boundaries, by working with textiles. This was something which was just beginning to catch my interest as I began the research, and developed alongside it as part of my own spiritual explorations. I used different methods to explore the theme of experience of God using tapestry, appliqué, painting fabrics, and later moved into using heat tools. Each textile emerged intuitively, as I reflected on the experience I was exploring. Colours, textures and methods emerged. Nothing was planned. As I worked with the threads or the fabrics, I felt my way into them, never knowing what might feel right for the next step. I stayed on the edge, and at times over the edge of awareness, of not knowing, of trusting my intuition. In this way the process mirrored my process with the emerging themes of the data. I was surprised how much working with the textiles helped me gain insight into various issues, and particularly with the piece about boundaries. Including the textiles as part of the presentation of the data seems very appropriate, given the subject. Taking the risk of including them and pushing the boundaries of methodology seems particularly appropriate, given the themes that emerged from the data.

Having completed the study, I discovered that this method has its place in qualitative research methodology:

> Visual art is often thought of as a potential source of data or as a creative form of representation. However, the usefulness of visual art extends into the realm of analysis and interpretation, key components of the research endeavor. In fact, one of the major strengths of using visual methods of analysis and interpretation is that they call attention to the interpretive phase of research…..In addition the visual representation of data,….opens up a space for multiple interpretations and perspectives. (Leavy, 2009, p 231)

This has encouraged me to think about further research using the arts as part of the research method, because I found that the 'Boundaries' textile was very helpful in opening up different perspectives. Another book, called *'Awakening the Creative Spirit: Bringing the Arts to Spiritual Direction'*, (Paintner and Beckman, 2010) was published as I completed this study. This explores the use of creativity in spiritual direction, and one of the founders given credit for the approach used is Natalie Rogers, daughter of Carl Rogers, founder of the person-centred approach. Natalie Rogers founded the Creative Connection ©, in which various creative arts are interwoven:

> Dr Natalie Rogers has developed a process called the Creative Connection ©, an interweaving of all the expressive arts to reclaim vital parts of yourself. Expression through one art form stimulates and nurtures other forms. Dancing enlivens your art and writing. Making sounds frees your movement and art. This creative expression brings self-expression and personal power, and leads to spiritual growth. (Rogers, 2000, back cover notes)

In the past I have done a couple of workshops about working in this way, but had not connected that at all to my process here. It seems as if, without realising it, I was working in a way that is recognised, both in my methodology and in my own process! It is certainly an area which I wish to study further.

The interviews were semi-structured in order to achieve the aims of the study. However, as Gubrium and Holstein (2003, p 3) explain:

> The interview conversation is viewed as having diverse purposes, with a communicative format constructed as much within the interview as it stems from pre-designated research interests.

I was prepared for following where my participant led, whilst being able to bring the focus back if we strayed too far away. This was to be a personal challenge, as I am trained to work within the frame of reference of my clients, and needed to be alert to losing my way in their world to the detriment of the purpose of the interview.

The interviews were transcribed in accordance with my training as a therapist, in other words, every word, pause and sound was transcribed. The transcripts were given to participants for their comments, additions or deletions. I was able to ask for clarification from them. The presentation of a transcript can be in the form of a script, such as in a play, but may perhaps be in the form of stanzas, as in Speedy (2008) and Etherington (2004). In my pilot study, one of the participants, herself a therapist, objected to my literal presentation in the transcript, because she felt it presented her as stumbling and unsure – which it did and in fact that was the reality of her way of being in the interview. I changed it at her request, and would not have presented it in the assignment in that way in any case, as it was not my purpose to convey her way of being. Some of the participants in this study had a similar reaction, and requested that their contributions were edited to remove

repetition etc, which I did. I needed to consider how I might present the stories, data, and conversations I have had.

Gubrium and Holstein note that:

> Standard representation has given way to representational invention, where the dividing line between fact and fiction is blurred to encourage richer understanding. *Reflexivity, poetics*, and *power* are the watchwords as the interview process is refracted through the lenses of language, knowledge, culture, and difference. (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p 3, original emphasis)

Ethical Issues

The research was conducted in line with the guidelines of the university and also of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy by which I am bound.

Participants were given information sheets (see Appendix 1) which informed them about the aim of the exercise. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point during or after the interview.

The courses were to be named, and therefore it was not possible to offer complete anonymity to the trainers, however it was possible to offer this to the course participants and to the seekers, and they have not been named in the thesis. I kept anonymity and confidentiality to the extent it was possible in each context, and limits to this were made explicit so that informed consent could be given by participants. The Director of the Ignatian Spirituality Course is happy for the course to be named, as are the team facilitating the Norwich Centre course. I adapted the confidentiality agreement to take account of the differing levels of confidentiality to be agreed.

Spiritual seekers are not generally psychologically vulnerable in the way that counselling clients are, indeed this is one of the differences in the nature of the relationship, and care was taken to ensure that they were not put at risk by the research, or left in a vulnerable state. As a professional counsellor I am qualified and have the experience to be able to assess the risks and any issues that may appear during any interview.

There were potential boundary issues with the course participants on the Norwich Centre Diploma in Spiritual Accompaniment and these were discussed and made clear, so that participants who were training on this course were clear in which role I was operating at any particular time, tutor or researcher. Although the interviews were formally arranged, there were also informal occasions that could have provided relevant material and the use of such material was agreed. There is no formal assessment on the course, it is self-assessed, and therefore my role will not be compromised in that respect.

The group at the Norwich Centre were informed about my research at the initial weekend. The nature of the course is that we are all trying to understand the application of the person-centred approach to this context, and to understand the nature of the relationship in this context, and the aim of the person-centred approach is that power is collaborative, and therefore I believed that my roles as facilitator and researcher would not conflict and would not impact adversely on the group. In the event I do not feel it did, although one group member was initially rather hostile, and then ignored it, but overall it seemed to make very little impact beyond the occasional question about progress and well wishing. One member of the group had participated in my pilot study and responded very positively to my invitation to participate in the next part of my research.

The transcripts of the interviews were given to the interviewees for their final comments/qualifications if they wished to make any. One person expressed concerns after reading the transcript, but was reassured when I explained that I intended to extract themes from the interviews, rather than write biographical details. This was because as a result of transcribing the interviews, my aims changed, as previously mentioned, and I was led by the data to reconsider my focus. The participants were asked if they would also respond to any subsequent questions that arose as the data was analysed. The recordings were kept securely and marked with a reference number which did not identify the interviewee. They were given the opportunity to read the analysis and give any further comments and to allow for any issues of misrepresentation to be discussed and resolved as far as possible. Some of them had amendments, which were incorporated without any problem. All except two read the data analysis and most commented on it. One declined to read it, the other did not respond to the offer of reading either the transcript or the data analysis.

In keeping with the Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy and in line with the practice of the Centre for Counselling Studies, the participants were advised of the names or roles of those who will have access to the data and the thesis in the course of its writing and submission for marking, in addition they were advised that this data may be used for conference papers, journal articles, and possibly publication in book form. They were advised that the final thesis will be available from the university library (See Appendices 1 & 2).

Recruitment of participants

I planned to interview first of all the trainer and trainee from the course in London, and arranged this through a personal contact. The trainer agreed to

ask her trainees if any would be interested in this research, and one person came forward and was interviewed on the same day.

I sent an initial email to the administrator of the Living Spirituality Network, to which I belong (See Appendix 3). The email gave information about my research and requested participants to contact me via email. This produced a steady flow of responses over a period of a few weeks. Most had seen my email directly, but it had also been forwarded on to others as being of interest to them. In all ten potential participants came forward, one male, and nine, all female, were sent further information, I then followed these offers up and arranged to meet all of them to interview. One person pulled out before the arranged interview, but by that point I had received another contact, who also agreed to be interviewed. These, together with two trainees from the Norwich Centre course, and the trainer and trainee from the London course, brought the number of interviews to thirteen.

The interviews

Four of the participants were known to me to varying degrees and in other contexts before the interviews, and I believe the level of that knowledge did inform our responses to each other, but in order to protect confidentiality I am not identifying which they were. Three of the participants were ordained women, one was a member of a religious order, and the majority described themselves as Christian, from various denominations. One person did not describe herself as Christian.

The interviews took place in various settings, including homes, offices and rooms used for spiritual direction. The train journey to London and back for the interviews based there provided a sense of adventure and exploration. Many of the interviews also included the generous hospitality of the

participants, which again added a dimension of sharing and gift that I felt enhanced the whole experience for me. Several therefore included conversations before and after the recording, in which we had time to orientate ourselves, and continue conversations unrelated to the interview topic.

The interviews varied in length from 37 minutes to two hours. The majority were around one hour to an hour and a half. I recorded them on a digital recorder, but took a cassette recorder with me in case of malfunction.
My greatest anxiety was losing the recording before I transferred it onto my laptop, but fortunately this never happened. Once on there I backed it up to the university computer, and onto a portable hard drive. The interviews were given an automatic number and date reference, in order to preserve anonymity.

Transcribing the interviews

This was another process I enjoyed, because in transcribing the interviews myself, I was able to reflect on the content, make notes of themes and it informed my own process and choice of a new spiritual director, of which more later.

I have been used to transcribing counselling sessions and in these it is important to capture every word. This can be distracting for participants, who may become aware of their style of response, hesitation and perceived lack of clarity, but it felt important to me that any changes would only be made by the participants themselves, so I did not edit them.

Once complete the transcripts were emailed to the participants for their comments. They were invited to choose their own pseudonyms, but only one did so. I have chosen the rest. Once I had received any comments back I

revised the transcripts in the light of this, or saved the amendments made by the participants themselves, and imported them into software for data analysis.

Data analysis

I have analysed the interviews by immersing myself in them, listening to them and reading them, but I have also used NVivo 8[7], a software package that I used in my pilot study, to identify themes (see Appendix 5). I was surprised that I was able to use a coding package in a way that felt entirely comfortable. It was like making notes, highlights in the text, and it had the advantage that one section can be easily highlighted for more than one theme. I could work and rework the data, test out ideas, and also produce information in ways that might create insights that would not be available to me using index cards or paper stuck around the room. It enabled me to manage the volume of information in an effective way, and it can now accommodate recordings and video. I used recordings sometimes for notes and things that occurred to me, and also many notebooks, and journals. I did not want to lose the thoughts and experiences that came to me in moments when I was not seated at my laptop, and tried to be disciplined about writing them up and using the software to help me, without it taking over! It also helped to organise my notes, at one point I realised I had ten notebooks in which various thoughts and references were beginning to get lost, and so I invested in a digital pen, and made my notes with that, so that they could be uploaded onto my laptop and into my research diary, keeping everything in one place. The digital pen was the only technology that let me down, after two months it had to be replaced as the unit would no longer charge up. Where I was able to download electronic resources, I was able to code them to the same themes

[7] 'If you need to handle rich information, where in-depth analysis on both small and large volumes of data are required, NVivo 8 is your solution. It removes many of the manual tasks associated with analysis, like classifying, sorting and arranging information, so you have more time to explore trends, test theories and arrive at answers to questions.' http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx [23/3/10]

in NVivo. This helped me to see where I had relevant material which I find is all too easily missed in electronic resources, unless printed out.

The majority of the material that I have used here has come from those participants who are in a spiritual direction relationship as seekers. I have used very little material from those who were not, because much of it did not relate to the themes identified by those seekers who have a spiritual director. That is not to diminish the contribution they made, as I was informed by and interested in all the material, but as the themes emerged from the interviews, it was clear that the directees must be the primary source, and that the themes emerging from the data they provided gave me ample material to present. Additionally some data could not be used in order to preserve confidentiality.

The Literature on Spiritual Direction

This section gives a brief summary of the literature on spiritual direction. I have chosen not to engage with the literature in depth at this point, but to interweave it with the data as part of my reflections and discussion on the meaning of the themes which have emerged, in order to present an integrated study.

There are an increasing number of books published which are aimed at spiritual directors (Ball, 1996, Finnegan, 2004, Fischer, 1989, Guenther, 1992, Jeff, 2007, Leech, 2001, Pickering, 2008, Ruffing, 2000, Simpson, 2008, Vest, 2003b), all providing useful advice and reflection on the work of the spiritual director, but I have been unable to find much research published in this area. An exception to this is McLennan Tajiri's (2009) doctoral thesis on contemplative presence in spiritual direction. This was of interest as her focus was on a particular aspect of the spiritual direction relationship, and her research was based on both the writings of four mystics and on interviews

with twelve spiritual directors. She has worked as a counsellor and has used insights drawn from her knowledge and experience of counselling. Although all her participants were required also to be in direction themselves, I wondered how much they drew on their own experience of being a directee in their responses. It is all too easy to imagine we are offering something, but how reliable is the perception of only one person in the relationship? Whilst the relationship in spiritual direction/companionship has a different focus, there may be something to be learnt from counselling research that shows:

> Therapists' ratings of the quality of the therapeutic relationship tend to show only moderate agreement with clients' ratings (e.g. Gurman, 1977, Tryon and Blackwell, 2007). (Cooper, 2008, p 2)

Ruffing (1995, 1997), in her research into kataphatic religious experience, interviewed male and female seekers, but her research differs from mine in important ways, firstly she decided the subject of the research, and secondly the participants did not self-select, the choice of participants was mediated through their spiritual directors. Additionally her questions were more structured than mine, which suited her aims. She notes that one of the consequences of the spiritual experiences of her interviewees was that some were training as spiritual directors. Her research is significant as it provides data from seekers themselves which, like mine, can improve pastoral practice, including spiritual direction.

I see a particular strength of my research to be the focus on the experience of directees/seekers, although a limitation may be my decision to interview only women. All the participants in my research had experience of being a directee/seeker, and importantly four were directees/seekers but not directors/companions, and one was a directee/seeker and a trainee but not a director.

Presenting the data

Although originally I had thought I would present narratives, in reflecting on the data it became clear that there were common themes, and that this would be a better way of presenting it. In exploring the themes I felt that the literature was better presented in an integrated way, and reflected on alongside the interview data. In addition, I realised that I could present the themes in relation to the process of Etty Hillesum, whose diaries and letters (Smelik, 1986) present the process of spiritual growth with a companion which challenges conventional boundaries and therefore could potentially highlight the issues. I also intertwined my own relationship with my spiritual companion who I sought and met with as I was undertaking my research. I have drawn on my own spiritual process, illustrated with my explorations in textiles and poetry, and with other poetry and references to song lyrics which inspire me. I hope in this way to present an integrated and reflexive study, which will be of interest beyond the academy.

So the threads that are presented here are not separated in reality, and although I have given them headings, in order to provide a kind of map, there are overlaps between them, places where I revisit part of a theme, but with a different viewpoint, as if the colour of the yarn is similar, but the texture is different. In some places you will find poems, which are there because they resonated with me as I reflected on the themes. I hope they give an added dimension of insight or understanding, as they did for me. In some cases that is obvious, but in others it was subtle, the words caught a flavour, a sensing, an insight, perhaps indirectly related, but present. The section headings are there as markers, and each section starts on a new page, in order to allow a pause for reflection, and greater clarity.

Chapter 3 Weaving the tapestry

> Let the whole earth be joyful in you, O God,
> greet you with gladness,
> and celebrate your presence with a song.
> For we know that you are creating us,
> you are alive in us and we belong to you.
> You are weaving us into a marvellous tapestry,
> a people of diverse threads and colours.
> We enter your gates, a motley procession,
> with heartfelt thanksgiving and joy.
> We dance with delight and bless one another,
> in the Spirit of your love, intimate and just.
> For you are gracious and courteous,
> compassionate in embrace,
> faithful through all generations (Cotter, 2006, p 33)

I started this research having read Nicola Slee's book on women's faith development (Slee, 2004b) which raised questions about the needs of women from spiritual companionship, amongst other things. What emerged from my interviews was a diverse range of expectations and hopes, and also some themes which at first surprised me. Boundary issues are a concern in the therapy world, but I was surprised how much of a concern they were in my interviews in relation to the spiritual companion relationship. One concern in particular emerged in five of the interviews, and that is the theme of friendship. These women had the experience of the boundary between spiritual companion and friend becoming blurred. This made me wonder what it is about the nature of this relationship which seemed to make this such a risk, what is friendship and what is spiritual companionship? I wondered what the boundaries are, and whether they really exist? For whose benefit do they

exist and how flexible are they? This in turn raised issues around professionalism and ethics. I became more aware of what my participants were saying about the relationships they valued as seekers, and as a consequence what training had to contribute in these areas. At the same time there was a question in my mind about the balance between professional boundaries and the essence of spirituality, and to what extent would spiritual maturity make those boundaries unnecessary?

I have woven into this the experience of an extraordinary woman, Etty Hillesum:

> On 9th March 1941, a 27 year old Dutch Jewish student living in enemy occupied Amsterdam made the first entry in a diary that was to become one of the most remarkable documents to emerge from the Nazi holocaust. Over the course of the next two and a half years, an insecure, chaotic and troubled young woman was transformed into someone who inspired those with whom she shared the suffering of the transit camp at Westerbork and with whom she eventually perished at Auschwitz. Through her diaries and letters, she continues to inspire those whose lives she has touched since: an extraordinarily alive and vivid young woman who shaped and lived a spirituality of hope in the darkest period of the twentieth century. (Woodhouse, 2009, back cover notes)

I have chosen to do this because I believe her relationship with one particular man and also with her diary writing is one that represents the kind of process a modern woman seeker may bring to her spiritual companion, because she shaped her own spirituality, and because it is possible to use her diary entries and letters to illustrate some of the themes that have emerged from this research. I believe she has much to offer the contemporary seeker and companion.

She is particularly interesting because her process began with therapy with the psycho-chirologist Julius Spier, and that relationship evolved into her becoming his secretary, and then a closer relationship, when at times they were lovers, and this of course transgressed boundaries. Despite this, he had a profound influence on her, as she struggled with him and his spirituality, and eventually found her own truth. Since the issue of boundaries is a key theme in my research, she is an interesting companion through the data.

Etty's shaping of her own spirituality is relevant to today's seekers. Heelas and Woodhead (2005, p 5) 'sharpen up the distinction between "religion" and "spirituality'' ' by distinguishing between "life-as religion" and "subjective-life spirituality" and further develop this with the recognition that subjective-life can be lived in various ways. They describe two poles: 'individuated subjectivism' and 'relational subjectivism', and they believe 'every person who tries to live by the authority of subjective-life rather than, or together with, external guidance or distraction can be located somewhere along this spectrum' (Ibid, pp 95-96). It seems to me that this reflects the increasing realisation that social context impacts on individual actions, as discussed earlier in relation to the person-centred approach. We operate within a society, and we act to maintain relationships that are important to us, and perhaps that is particularly true of women. The way that we do this varies. Etty seems to me to be an example of a person who could be placed at or near the relational subjectivism pole, as indeed could anyone seeking accompaniment in the spiritual exploration, since they are choosing to do this within a relationship.

> Hermits aside, though, it is surely the case that the cultivation of subjective-life best takes place in the context of personal encounters:

> ‘talking things through’ with a friend; visiting a therapist, counsellor or human resource specialist; (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, pp 96-97)

Or visiting a spiritual companion?

> …….And unlike individuated (let alone life-as) modes of subjective life, relational subjectivism is associated with a tendency to *go deeper:* one finds out more about oneself by discussing one’s anger with a close friend, or by dealing with jealousy with a lover, for example. (Ibid, p 97)

Or exploring one’s relationship with God or the Divine, or one’s spiritual beliefs with a spiritual companion? As Tacey says:

> Increasingly, parishioners and church-goers of many traditions are developing interest in spirituality. Many are saying that traditional forms of worship, based on devotional practices, extrinsic faiths and creeds, are no longer adequate to their spiritual needs. They do not want to be told to believe in a religious mystery by authorities outside or above them. They want a deeper and more abiding relationship with their faith. They want a personal and intimate connection with the mystery to which their religion points. Ironically some, in their frustration, have left the churches and the institutions of faith to pursue a deeper connection to faith outside the institution. (Tacey, 2004, p 204)

That personal connection can be explored within or outside the institutional church, or even a faith tradition, in a relationship with a spiritual companion.

Heelas and Woodhead see this distinction between the more superficial individuated subjectivism, and relational subjectivism, 'where the tendency is towards concentrating more directly on the intricacies of the inner life' (Ibid, p 97) as throwing light on the issues around gender and the involvement of significantly more women in 'the holistic milieu and subjective wellbeing culture' (Ibid, p 98) that was the subject of their research in Kendal. I find this interesting because it also seems that more women than men are now involved in spiritual direction, more women train, and more women are seeking it. There are no statistics to prove this, but this is my own and the experience of my participants, especially those who have engaged in training. This would be an interesting subject for further research.

The participants in my study are exploring in a context which is Christian. Even the participant who would not describe herself as Christian is working with a spiritual director who is a Christian, and using Christian resources in her explorations. Etty, of course, stays outside any institutional religion. All, and myself included, are doing this in relationship, and it is a relationship which allows a deepening of understanding. Etty certainly increasingly becomes engaged with others, and in particular the suffering of her fellow prisoners, choosing to go with them to her death, rather than escape. Writing on 20th September 1942 she says:

> Why not turn the love that cannot be bestowed on another, or on the other sex, into a force that benefits the whole community and that might still be love? And if we attempt that transformation, are we not standing on the solid ground of the real world, of reality? (Smelik, 1986, p 525)

As David Tacey writes:

> The new attention being given to spirituality is not just some fashionable interest in esoteric matters, nor is it an escape from the

> real or an intellectual enquiry into human nature. It is an emotional and urgent reaction to widespread alienation, disempowerment and disillusionment. It is an almost panic response to the apparent lack of relationality and connectedness in contemporary life. To call for spirituality is to call for healing and reconnection. It is to admit that we are divided and long to become whole. It is to acknowledge that our lives are fragmented, and that we hope for some mystery that will fit the broken parts together. (Tacey, 2004, p 215)

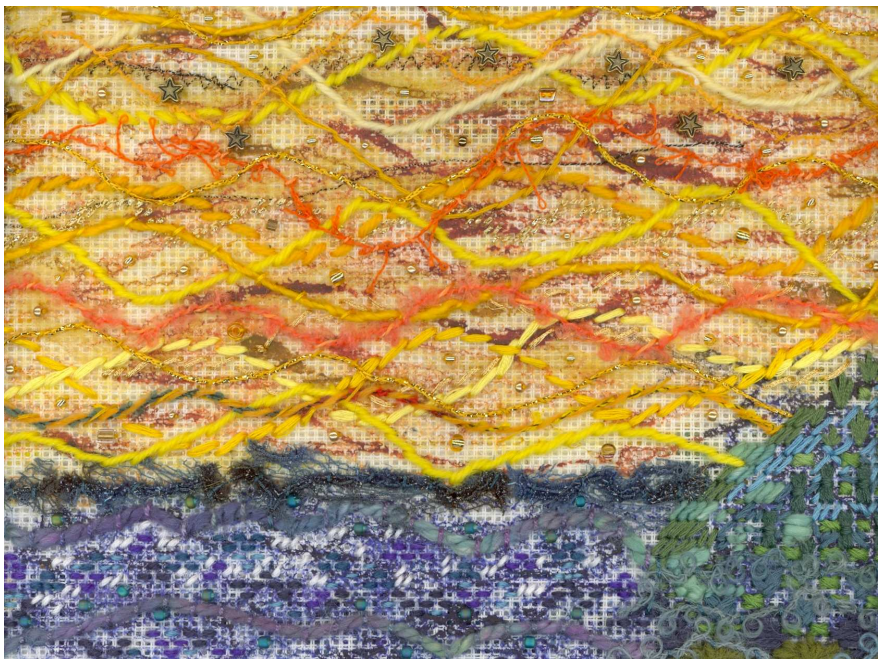
Etty is 'a woman for our time' because:

> Etty was not a 'religious' person – at least not in the institutional sense of that word. She belonged to neither synagogue nor church and shows no interest whatever in institutional religion. Her route to God was initially through psychotherapy and an exhaustive, relentless and disciplined grappling with the self, which led to the discovery of the hidden inner depths of the human soul. (Woodhouse, 2009, p xiii)

Alongside this is my own process. Transcribing the interviews raised issues for me – I started to feel hope that maybe there would be someone who could understand my experiences, someone who might accompany me. My previous experience with a spiritual director had started reasonably well, but then too much interpretation and Jung got in the way. An unannounced change of room left me feeling unimportant, less important than the group which was the cause of the change. My father died and I stopped going. Now transcribing the interviews I started to reflect on what I was looking for:

> Caussade likens 'the soul that has abandoned itself to God and has only eyes for Him and for its duty' to a tapestry being woven stitch by stitch from the wrong side. The person working on it sees only the stitch she is making, and only when the right side is turned outwards

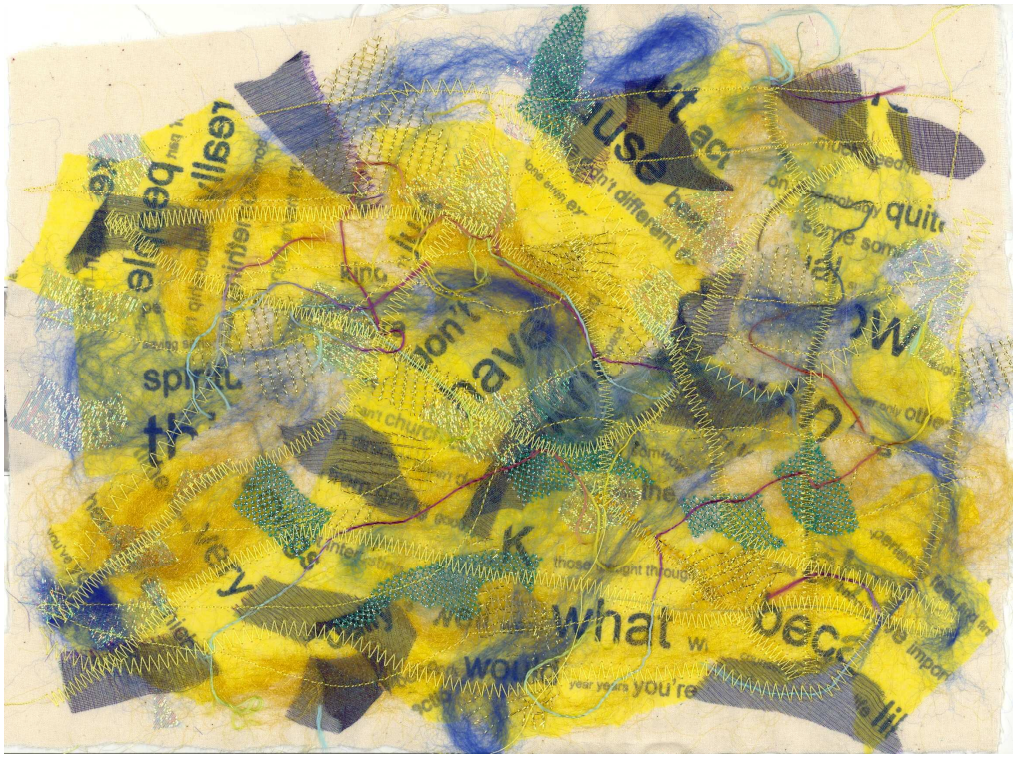
can the full design and beauty of the tapestry be seen. (Conaway, Undated, p 11)



2 'Be Still and Know' – Tapestry by the author

I think the image I like most at the moment is the weaving of a cloth, or the creation of my tapestry. It happens in bits, it is a process, and it is not linear. (Kitcatt, 2009e, 13/5/09)

It is as if I have chosen the canvas, and the women and I in our conversations have produced multicoloured threads, fabrics of all hues and textures, shiny beads of all sizes, glittering pieces of precious metals and as I have worked with these I began to see shared threads, shared colours, perhaps slight variations in colour or texture, but woven into each other and onto the canvas they produce a picture, a vision perhaps, of this relationship we call spiritual direction, spiritual companionship.



3 ‘Transformation?’ by the author

In the above piece I printed the tag cloud of the most frequently used words from the interviews onto yellow tissue paper, which I then tore and scattered with pieces of fabric and thread, stitched onto calico and deliberately left unfinished. I worked on the ‘right’ side, but it is an intuitive process, an idea of colour, a sense of how the experience feels, which unfolds stitch by stitch, I pause and wait to see what comes next, trusting the creative process, letting go of any idea of where it must go, and I don’t know, until it is finished, how it will look, and the place of completion emerges just as the pattern and colours combine and emerge into being. I do not know what I am creating, I am letting it emerge. I am working in relationship with the interview data, a stitch here, a stitch there, weaving a thread through, around, trusting my intuition, allowing the process to unfold. A process of transformation?

> God is the constant, in all the change and loss, God flows in and around and through it all and faith creates the opportunities for new

> insights, realisations, and through that I come to dance, move, dream, the gold and blue streamers of God's love and acceptance like streamers around my naked body (Kitcatt, 2009e, 22/5/09)

In all of this, listening to the women I interviewed, slightly envious of their relationships with their spiritual directors, I felt I wanted to share my experience of that which I call God. A picture by Sophie Hacker[8] called *'Walking with Angels'* resonated powerfully with my experience, something which rarely happens to me. She was using the same colours as I was experimenting with as relating to my experience, and the streams of blue and gold whirling around and through the figure was exactly my own experience. Could I find someone who would connect with this? In an email to the person in Norwich diocese who co-ordinates the spiritual directors, I asked for someone who could work with images, a woman, who could work with someone who was working on this subject for a doctoral thesis. I thought it was a tall order, but he produced someone as a possible person, and we arranged to meet.

> I feel it's odd – my experience, I never had a black and white faith, so the struggle was not letting go of that, my struggle was always how to reconcile my experience with what I was being told in church. The struggle was for the confidence to believe my experience was valid, to let people see what I really felt / feel or believe….. Thinking about meeting [my spiritual director] on Thursday, and that my experience of spiritual direction will be very different from my participants' experience. I would like to record my process in spiritual direction and use it in my thesis, if she agrees, as I feel as if it would have something to bring to the whole area. (Kitcatt, 2009d, 7/6/09)

[8] http://www.sophiehacker.com

Tomorrow I will meet [my spiritual director]. I have been feeling excited about that for weeks. I have put my poems (oh and by the way '*Forgiveness'* (Kitcatt, 2009c, p 6) has been published in the WWS journal), my tapestry, my fabric postcards, my sketchbooks, my spiritual journal, all in a bag to take to show her and talk to her. I feel a bit nervous, wondering if I will like her. Will she be able to meet me, engage with me, understand me? I don't want analysis or interpretation, I want her to understand where I am and what is important to me right now. (Kitcatt, 2009d, 10/6/09)

Amazing! I met [my spiritual director] today. Straight away I felt this is somone I can connect to. I loved her room, art – sculpture – fantastic. She had two glasses of water ready on a glass table which was a piece of glass on a tree stump that looked like it came out of the sea.

First she told me about herself……Not trained in spiritual direction, does deep listening.

I showed her my sketchbooks, my fabric postcards and my tapestry, my bowl and my poems – well '*Eucharist'* (Kitcatt, 2009b, p 371) and '*Forgiveness'* (Kitcatt, 2009c, p 6). She related to them, and also asked me questions about how I work, which is completely new to me. Strange to talk about it.

Seems to want me to break free, sees me as creative. Also feels my stillness.

Who am I?

What am I?

(Kitcatt, 2009d, 11/6/09)

Themes

I present the themes in sections, and have tried to do this in a way that preserves the complexity of some of the themes. The first section, 'Find my Light' explores the process of seeking a spiritual companion. This is followed by a section called 'the last thing I need is somebody to tell me', a quote from one of the interviews, which explores the participants' need not to be directed, and to be heard where they are, and a connection is made here with issues of power and trust in the relationship.

This leads into a section called 'The space between us', where the quality of presence and the nature of the space created and held by the spiritual companion is explored. Trust is mentioned again here.

'Risking relationship, trusting the boundaries' is a more detailed exploration of boundaries with reference to issues of trust, risk, power and inequality. The establishment of trust in the relationship is explored, in the context of the particular nature of the relationship.

The following section, 'the lines on the map moved from side to side' explores boundaries from a different perspective. The rigidity or permeability of boundaries is explored, with their potential to both prevent and create an abusive relationship. In particular the nature of friendship, and the blurring of the boundary with friendship which was experienced by some of the participants is explored.

'The Visitation' looks further into the nature of the relationship, the nature of friendship, mutuality, and the risk of dual relationships.

‘Are you experienced?’ looks at training, from the perspective of the participants’ experience of it, and also considers the experience they have looked for in their spiritual companion.

I then return to the questions I had at the start, in the sections ‘Being brought to voice – Do women have particular needs from the spiritual direction relationship?’ and ‘Too religious to be religious’ – the contribution of the person-centred approach, which concludes the presentation and discussion of the data.

'Find my light' – Seeking a spiritual director

> Breathe in my love. Stretch your edge,
> turn toward me, find my light.
> See? Your toes already tap the dance.
>
> (Extract from Invitation, Chinn and Gleeson, 1999, p 43)

I was interested to hear how my participants had come to find their spiritual companions. One aspect that was interesting was that several of the women I interviewed had come to the decision to find a spiritual director through an event at a church, or through the church:

> I suppose it began on a parish retreat that we did … and I've never had a spiritual director before, and it was just wonderful, it was like rain to parched earth, it was just lovely, it was very imaginative, and lots of guided imagination, imaginative things and exercises, and I just thought oh yes! I want more of this! I've done lots of that sort of stuff in the past, but I've been going to an ordinary C of E church, it's very good, the priests are wonderful, but it's not kind of, it doesn't feed that part of me which I really, really enjoyed so I went to the leader of it and I said I need to move on now, I think I needed to go on in my own journey, not just follow the church's sort of pace (we laugh) and so he gave me the name of this guy…I'm very lucky, and he's a psychotherapist as well, so I feel I've been given a nice good quality person. I didn't want a priest. That was very important because I think I'm considered rather as a heretic in my church! They've said that! (Anne)

Anne explained that she has what she calls an 'eclectic' approach, drawing on other sources of spiritual experience such as Buddhist meditation. I have

often felt the same, that I would be viewed as a heretic, and could really feel Anne's desire to feel accepted and able to grow at her own pace.

Joanne's experience was different. She said that growing up in Thatcher's Britain, she had no contact with religion, no idea what spirituality was, and church services were a mystery to her. However, following an experience she didn't understand, she embarked on a search for meaning that initially took her to church:

> I'd gone to church for something like six to eight months and hadn't liked it, and someone said, just someone came up to me at the end and actually said I don't like church either, and I said well, what do you do once you've kind of had a go at church and it doesn't work, what do you do? And at that point, I don't think I'd even heard the word spirituality at that point, not been brought up with religion, you know and I'd kind of stumbled into it, and hadn't even been purposefully looking, it was just something that happened, almost by accident, and I'd sort of given it a go, just found it incomprehensible, I felt a bit lost really, because you know, you start off something and you don't really understand what you're doing, you don't really understand why you're doing it, and you hit a dead end. And you know you can't go back to where you were before, because you've left there, but you don't know where you're meant to be going, and you don't know how you're meant to be getting there. So this guy just said, he basically took out a business card, and wrote a name and a phone number on the back, and said give this guy a call, so I just took this card off home, didn't do anything with it for a couple of months, and then one day just decided I had to phone up this man, so I phoned up this man and said I've been given your name because I don't go to church but I don't know what to do next, and he said well you need to come and talk to me, so I turned

> up and the first thing this man said to me was what sort of person are you looking for? what kind of person would you want to work with? So I'm like, OK well, um, somebody not at all judgemental, someone who won't mind that I don't go to church, and someone who won't feel challenged by me, and that was quite important to me because it wasn't just that I found church incomprehensible, I found the people incomprehensible and they'd had a similar reaction to me. It had not been at all a happy experience. It was a real culture clash. And one thing that kept being said to me was that people found me challenging, and I didn't really understand why because as far as I was concerned, I was being quite quiet! And I couldn't understand, you know, since it wasn't about bad behaviour, I couldn't understand what it was in me that people found challenging, so that was quite important that whoever it was that I was going to work with, do whatever it was that we were meant to be doing, was not going to get upset by who I was

It is sad to think that the church could not respond to Joanne, and in part it seems this was because she wanted to explore in a similar way to Anne, but at the same time, through the church, she became aware that there was an alternative, and it was one she has come to value greatly:

> in terms of the life, and what it means to be human, it's more than just intellectual and that kind of exploring is probably what I think you need most help with from a spiritual director, in a way, because to explore those things when to some extent it's counter cultural, both secularly and religiously, so it's kind of counter cultural and also … there's kind of practices and things that are embedded within religious traditions, that you can use, but you have to try lots of things out and you have to find things that work and you do need someone that you can reflect with on that and who can help you ask the right questions, and who can suggest things and so you need that but then when you're doing

> this exploring, you need to somehow make sense of it and sometimes I'm in such a jumble, and that's usually what my sessions with him are like, you know I don't arrive with a specific thing to talk about necessarily

Barbara was a member of her local church and was looking for a spiritual director when she met one through an event at the church.

> …my present director – I encountered him through doing a day course, … and he was the sort of host and introducer but he said, and I was at that time struggling with how to support my mother, and he said if anybody would like to have a fifteen minute chat with me during the day, do ask, and I thought I think I'd like to do that, and I did, and he gave me fifteen minutes of the best stuff I've ever been given, and centring really on the importance of forgiving ourselves, the result of that was, I was at that time with somebody else, a priest who was retiring and who just said I need to stop seeing people so you'll have to find somebody else and so I thought about it for a long time and wrote to this chap eventually and said would he consider seeing me and I got this quite shirty letter back saying well I can only see you once every six months and it may be that we should have an exploratory meeting, it was quite off putting, but I pursued it because I knew I needed somebody and I went.

Susan initially found hers through a week of guided prayer at her church, and the relationship enabled her to explore her emerging sense of vocation as a priest:

> Well I've received, been a directee for about ten years, and in that time I've had two spiritual directors, and the first one came from, my move into wanting to see a director, came through a week of guided prayer

> that was run in my parish….So it would be, in a busy day we'd meet every day for forty minutes with a director. I think it was the day by day-ness of it and that experience, that week actually started a lot of things going for me. It was part of my journey into ordination actually. If I look back it was a big, big week for me although at the time I didn't quite see what it was about it. It was something about the day by day-ness of it. And when that ended, she, the woman who I was seeing offered for those who wanted to, to carry on seeing her as a director and so I decided to do that, and I think that, it was something I was lacking, missing in the church, it was a sort of space to talk about prayer

Susan, Barbara and Anne all experienced something extra in the events they went to, something that made them feel that spiritual direction might have something to offer. Joanne was given to believe that it would, even though at the time she didn't know what it was. This extra was something that attending church could not provide, and in Anne and Joanne's case felt as if it would provide a place where they could be accepted, despite being a 'heretic' (Anne) or upsetting people (Joanne) with their version of faith and belief. These events provided a stepping stone to spiritual companionship and a connection to someone who could facilitate this for them. It seems to have made it accessible.

> I think in church, you don't get a chance to talk about things – if you go to a church where you're in a small group you may, if you get a really good small group, you may be able to, but often in small groups people have such strong views about things that they, they tell you what you should be thinking, or some churches do that, they expect you to believe like that, well it doesn't actually come across like that but, they don't actually say those words but it does come across that this is the view that we think you should have and the spiritual direction, or one of the really good things about the spiritual direction, companionship

> relationship is *it gives people a relationship in which they can talk openly and honestly about what they really think about the things they've heard,* and some people's spiritual growth, you know if you just go to church, there's not necessarily anybody who's particularly interested in it, whether you're growing, or changing or developing, or becoming all that you can be, fulfilling your potential (Carol, my italics)

These women are serious about their spiritual growth, and they are looking for a relationship where they are able to talk about their spiritual experiences and relationship with the sacred or divine, without feeling the need to defend themselves, without fear of judgement or retribution, and which provides the opportunity to grow, which some of them have not found by attending a church, or which they no longer find the church or Meeting able to provide:

> I suppose after about fifteen or twenty years in a Quaker Meeting, I'd had a bit of a low time, I didn't seem to be getting much out of it and I wanted to make sure that I, I wanted to do something more positive about leading a spiritual, a life, and every so often you need to do that. I did the Roots of Christian Mysticism course at the John Maine Centre for Christian Meditation, and … it came up there again, and then I did another day there which was led, I didn't realise until the end, but the guy running it was the director of spiritual, I'm not quite sure what they call it, but spiritual direction or something of that kind at the Westminster Cathedral, the Catholic Cathedral, so I had a bit of a chat with him, and he was very encouraging…
>
> …it took me a long time, you know, to feel well I could ask for a spiritual director, you know, because it was not something that had ever come up and I didn't know anyone that had, you know, or if I did they were terribly eminent or they were priests or something, you

> know, and it's not something that Quakers do and it's not something that ordinary people, it's not for ordinary people. (Sarah)

The increasing involvement of lay people is one of the interesting aspects of the developing interest in spiritual direction.

> It was in the early days long before women were being ordained, and I was a very active member of the local Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW), and we went to the annual conference …[and] there I met [her] for the first time, … I wrote this up into a local MOW magazine, and [she] got in touch with me… and she'd been recommended to me far earlier, about five years earlier as somebody who somebody else thought would be good as a spiritual director for me, and I just hadn't known how to approach, and so with this, with her writing to affirm what I'd written about her, I wrote back and said would you do this? and she said 'gladly' and so from I guess what must have been my early thirties on we went (Fiona)

Others, like Mary, found theirs through word of mouth:

> I acquired her, as I had acquired my previous spiritual director, who just became too elderly and decided she was going to sign off, via word of mouth, you know, so from another woman who was using her, and who liked her, and I really started going to her when I was exploring vocation to ordained ministry

Fiona also found her second spiritual director through word of mouth:

> in the end it was in my present job that my boss happened to mention how good his spiritual director was and in the end I plucked up

> courage to say would you mind awfully if I approached the same person? They just sound marvellous!

Writing about the search for a spiritual director, Mary Earle writes about the kind of companion we need:

> We need teachers who do not exalt themselves, teachers who are also companions and sister travellers. We need teachers who are also guides. We need teachers who don't care about approval or power, but rather desire that each person grow gently and surely into the person God desires him or her to be. We need teachers who are also lovers of souls, who are true ammas. (Earle, 2007, p 39)

I find it helpful that she explains her use of the word teacher, because for me there is a risk in that terminology of an association with judgement and evaluation, particularly in the current climate. She later uses the word mentor, and I think that is more appropriate, but the qualities she lists are those which I think are necessary, and certainly relate to the philosophy of the person-centred approach.

Earle gives suggestions for looking for a suitable companion by first exploring our own experience of those from whom we have learnt (Ibid pp 44-46), and I particularly like the fact that she sees this as a reflective process, and not one of ticking boxes. She describes this as 'Finding a Soul Friend and Teacher of Love', and 'Finding a Lover of Souls'. This description does convey to me the essence of what I am seeking in a spiritual companion, because for me the process is about learning to love better and growing in wisdom, in fact I feel that is the purpose of life. I believe that growing in ability to live the commandment to 'love your neighbour as yourself' and 'love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind' (Matthew verses 37 & 38, Priests for Equality, 2007) is the process in which the spiritual

seeker is engaged, whatever the frame of reference they are operating from. This is the process in which I am engaged in my relationship with my spiritual companion and with that which I know as God.

Among the many books on spiritual direction (Ball, 1996, Buckley, 2005, Dyckman and Carroll, 1981, Edwards, 2001, Guenther, 1992, Jeff, 2007, Leech, 2001, Pickering, 2008, Ruffing, 2000, Silver, 2003, Simpson, 2008, Vest, 2003b), the majority are aimed at those training or offering this ministry to others, within the Christian tradition, and although much can be discovered about the variety of styles and approaches, and how a director can establish what a seeker needs, there is little written from the perspective of the seeker. Rosage's (1994) *'Beginning Spiritual Direction: How to Choose a Spiritual Director, What to Expect from a Spiritual Director, How to Avoid Pitfalls'* is aimed at helping the seeker, although not written from that perspective. Rosage, a Roman Catholic priest, clearly writes with love and concern for the seeker, but from the perspective of the doctrine of the Church and the foundation of Scripture. Many would find this helpful, and those who are Christians, who are happy with structure, would find this an excellent guide, however the language he uses is that of hierarchy (Lord and Master) sin (Evil One, Devil, Saviour, Redeemer), and patriarchy (He, Father), and I struggle with that.

Spiritual Directors International (2009a) suggest interviewing at least two directors and reflecting on the reasons for seeking someone at this time. They advise asking questions to establish the experience and competency of the spiritual director and include:

1. What enrichment, spiritual formation, and theological education do you have in spiritual direction?

2. What is your personal experience tending your own prayer, meditation and contemplative life?
3. What is your experience as a spiritual director? How many years? In what environments? What are you most interested in spiritually?
4. How do you continue your education and supervision for your spiritual direction ministry?
5. What ethical guidelines do you abide by, such as those published by Spiritual Directors International? Have you ever been accused or convicted of misconduct?
6. What type of engagement agreement will we establish to clarify roles and responsibilities in our spiritual direction relationship, such as samples provided to members of Spiritual Directors International?

These are not questions I specifically asked, although my director did tell me the answers to the first three questions, in the flow of our conversation. However, my spiritual director is known in the diocese, she is a public figure and came through a recognised network. I did not ask either of the questions 5 or 6, and the issues around those are explored later. Spiritual Directors International is based in the United States and seems to be trying to tread the thin line between professionalising the activity and recognising that prayer and reflection will also inform the discernment process. In my research, the participants chose through meeting the person, through personal recommendation and word of mouth, or through a recognised organisation such as the London Centre for Spirituality[9] or SPIDIR[10].

Silver (2003, pp 93-103) has a chapter *'For Directees: What to Expect'* in which she advises seekers to be guided by God, to consult to see whether this is the right course of action, and not to be discouraged if it proves difficult to find someone who is available. On meeting, she advises a formal or

[9] http://www.spiritualitycentre.org/spiritualdirection/findingdirection.html accessed 14-9-09 provides a list of people to contact
[10] http://www.southwark.anglican.org/spidir/referral.htm accessed 14-12-09 again provides a contact list

informal covenant to establish frequency of meeting, fees, limits of confidentiality and contact. She advises that although the relationship can sometimes be challenging, it should always 'feel safe' (Ibid, p 100), and she lists resources that may be helpful to the seeker. This advice is more relevant to the situation in the United States, but merits consideration as it does relate to the discussion here.

My searching produced a thesis, by Judith Smith Wilkinson (1997), which has particular relevance to this study, in which she explores her *'Existential Experience of Spiritual Direction: Process, Relationships, and Dynamics'*. This is interesting, because in it she recounts her experience of firstly discovering that there is such an activity, and then she describes her experience of different spiritual directors. At the end of each chapter she poses questions for the reader, and suggests suitable reading. She concludes with a brief review of the literature on spiritual direction at the time. She hopes her account may be helpful for other seekers, and also give those who may be considering looking for a spiritual director a sense of what the process is like (Ibid, p 7). She conceptualises her faith development as a process of stages, using Fowler (1981) as her reference point, and this of course is a common approach, which seekers may find helpful.

The reasons the participants in this study gave for seeking a spiritual director included to find a space which was non judgemental, where the participants could explore and grow, and feel heard in a way that several of them felt they did not experience in their church.

It seems as if the most common way to find a spiritual director is by meeting them at an event, through their church, or by word of mouth. The participants in this study did not seem concerned about codes of practice, or training, which is interesting in view of the concerns expressed by a number of them in relation to boundary issues. It also seems that awareness of the existence of

spiritual direction as something which lay people can engage in is not high, and this is particularly true for those outside the institutional church, and probably for those on the margins of society. This activity is less formalised and less publicised in the UK than it is in the United States, but despite this there is information available to those who know how to look for it.

“the last thing I need is somebody to tell me” (Fiona)

> I know that when I try to share some feeling which is private, precious, and tentative, and when this communication is met by evaluation, by reassurance, by distortion of my meaning, my very strong reaction is, “Oh what’s the use!” At such a time, one knows what it is to be alone. (Rogers, 1980, p 14)

One of the striking things about the spiritual direction relationship is that for several of the research participants, directivity is definitely not what they want, or in the case of those who offer spiritual direction, what they offer. This is explored by writers such as Kenneth Leech (2001, p 91), Kathleen Fischer (1989, p 3), and Margaret Guenther (1992, p 59), among others, although some (Jeff, 2007, p 20) have a rather different understanding to mine of non-directivity, and an emphasis on a certain kind of knowledge, but despite this Jeff has a fundamental belief in having:

> a greater trust in the indwelling Holy Spirit within each person, and a belief that each person, in discussion with another, is likely to uncover what is their own right path. (Jeff, 2007, p 20)

For Silver (2003, p xiv) this non-directivity is one of the differences between counselling and spiritual direction, but the counselling she describes is not person-centred.

This suggests to me that spiritual companionship is a better term, as it seems to describe more accurately the nature of the relationship my participants are seeking.

Teresa, a trainee on the Ignatian training course, feels:

> I think that it is good for the director to be a bit ahead on the spiritual journey in order to understand the directee but during a session I must stay beside or even behind. In direction I don't feel I am the leader at all.

This interested me in the context of working with the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, as she was training to do, because they seem to me to be inherently directive, but it clearly was important, as her trainer emphasised:

> that's that vital thing, we're training people to be able to be with the person where they are, and that God is with them where they are, and there's no agenda from the director to get them anywhere particularly it's just you're journeying with them (Jane)

Joanne also didn't want to be told:

> I thought yes I don't want someone to tell me the answers; I just want someone to help me carry on with my own questions. And I sort of feel that if I ever arrived at answers, it would probably mean I'm deluding myself

Anne hoped that her spiritual director would not impose his ideas on her as her priest had. One of her main goals is to create a life with fewer tasks in, to take time to reflect:

> I'm sure being a Quaker he won't be directive like maybe a priest would say well you better read…like my priest when I had him here to lunch, I was telling him …I feel I need space, and he recommended me

> two books, and another thing was to read one of the Gospels all the way through without stopping.

Training can help to give directors or companions the confidence to stay alongside, rather than directing, but as Susan, an ordained priest who is also training as a spiritual director, reflected:

> I still have to within myself think don't put your preconceived… don't expect, don't ask her if she's been to church but just let her come with what she comes with, you know, and then we'll piece together what that means for her. But that's quite hard because I have all my ideas of what someone's faith should be about!

As a seeker, Fiona had struggled with her first spiritual director's inability to hear her where she was:

> that's what went wrong in the middle bit with [my previous spiritual director], ….if I said to [her] I've been wondering this week a lot about prayer, she would have been quite likely to say I'm sure that's fine what you need is a good holiday…and there did come a time when I really did itch to start to understand the mystical journey for myself and then that was no good

So Fiona did not feel her spiritual director really heard her where she was, but moved her away from that, and she found this frustrating. Sarah, a Quaker who is also training to be a spiritual director, feels a sense of the potential power of the relationship:

> I feel quite strongly that everyone's got to find their own paths, I think the hardest thing I find is people that say there is only one path, and I suppose I would be afraid for somebody who isn't clear where their spiritual home is, that they might be hindered from finding it. I'm sure they'd be pointed in the right sort of direction but *it's potentially quite a*

> *powerful relationship.* Maybe I am wary of the possibility of evangelism trampling over the person's ability to hear and value the leadings of the Holy Spirit within themselves. (My italics)

I italicised the comment about power, because I feel that it is often overlooked just how subtly power can be exercised, and Sarah is recognising here something important about this activity and the relationship. I explore more about power later. There are other, even more subtle, ways of directing the directee, such as interpretation, something I had found very hard when I experienced it with my first spiritual director. I had revisited the church where I was christened aged three, and had stood by the font, and it had a powerful effect.

> I mentioned I went back to St Mary's. She suggested I reflected on the flow of water from the font and talked about its significance in ways that come from her not me. Not asking me – doesn't ask the right questions. That's it. I need a person-centred trained person. Anyway I am going next at the end of March. Maybe that will be the final session. (Kitcatt, 2007b, 10/1/07)

In the event my father died at the end of March and I never went back. Perhaps my training makes me more sensitive to this, but in the interview with Teresa who is training on an Ignatian course, when I asked her about what she had learned on the course she replied:

> I think really it has made clear to me the basic skills and how to use them with more awareness of what I am doing.
>
> CK: What do you think the basic skills are?
>
> Teresa: Listening; reflecting back and summarising and really be close to what people say – even using their own words, rather than bringing yours; respecting what is said and not jumping in with interpretations.

> CK: so putting yourself in their frame of reference really, into their way of understanding. (yes) relating to them from that and trying to make a connection from that place really
>
> Teresa: yes and helping them to go deeper, in their own time; letting them develop their own story and not trying to go quicker than they can.

So clearly this is something that is considered important in her training course, and there is something important here about power in the relationship. I discussed aspects of this with Sophie when she was explaining what she would look for, and I realised:

> I think I was less clear two years ago about what I need, and what I want from a spiritual companion, and more clear now about what I want the person… but actually what I want is a connection, and for me they don't have to… be completely self aware, as long as I can say I wonder where that comes from, or think to myself, that's your agenda it's not mine (the author (CK) in the interview with Sophie)

Sophie was clear about her hopes:

> I imagined myself walking to the door and being met by the person who's going to accompany me. And what I would like to get a sense of would be a sense of time, meaning that there was…I don't quite know how to describe it … something about the person not being hurried or rushed or…the time is mine OK? I want to feel cared for
>
> CK: so what would that look like?
>
> Sophie: that would look like, I could have their attention even if the dog barked or the cat wanted something, or their household intruded, their

> attention would be with me…[it's about] the quality of their inner congruence and self-awareness.

Joanne also felt that quality of attention was important:

> I don't think I could work with someone who was perfect, because I'd know that that was a front, so you don't need the other person to be perfect, but you need them to try and be there for you, and you need them to be good at doing that. That kind of vacating themselves for an hour…

And Sophie continues:

> I think everything I'm describing makes up a quality of presence.
> A sense of acceptance of what may occur

And it is not just acceptance of what may occur it is also acceptance of the person, which is important for Joanne:

> the relationship I have is incredibly important and incredibly supportive, because these are the things I'm most vulnerable over, and most ill at ease with, with regard to other people, and yet here is a safe place where all those things are OK and where no matter what they are doesn't make me less of a person
>
> CK: yes so he's welcoming all of you, including
>
> Joanne: yes not just the nice acceptable bits, and not just the bits that are beneficial or positive or whatever and I think that that's quite important, I think self-acceptance can only follow someone else accepting you.

This of course is one of the core beliefs of the person-centred approach, one of the three ‘core conditions’ and for exactly that reason:

> I feel warm and fulfilled when I can let in the fact, or permit myself to feel, that someone cares for, accepts, admires, or prizes me. (Rogers, 1980, p 19)

In that sentence, Rogers equates acceptance with caring, in fact in the index to the book, the items about acceptance are indexed under caring. The quality of feeling cared for was important for Carol, who does not like to call herself a spiritual director, but prefers to say she talks to people about spiritual things:

> I think with most people it’s building the rapport where they feel they can trust you and another really important thing for me is not just that people are able to trust me and know that what I say is meant, but that I do care about them. Because for me it’s all about ministering God to them in a way, which is, if God is love, which he is, then just being a loving person with them, and I’m sure I’m not the only loving person in their lives, but someone who is consistently there for them. Not twenty four hours a day, but somebody who, they know when they come to see me they can just let it all out really.

Her own experience of having a spiritual director who appeared not to remember anything she had told her means she is alert to this.

> I don’t like things desperately formal, but I do like to think this person has been thinking about me and praying about me, rather than forgotten what we’d been talking about

There is a connection to trust in that she feels that if the person can't remember what she has spoken about, this does not create trust in the relationship, or may even destroy it for her. When she found a director who offered this caring of her, it was very moving:

> [I had] a sense of being, I don't know really, I think probably held, and I remember crying during it, and thinking what on earth am I crying for, I'm not upset about anything, but just the sense that he was understanding of the issues I was describing to him and that he really cared and although I didn't know him desperately well, I'd never felt that same sort of caring coming from the other person and I think it's a lot to do with personality.

In my interview with Sophie, who was at the time a trainee on the Norwich Centre course, I reflected on the qualities I hoped to find in a spiritual companion and my experience of meeting her:

> CK: it was a requirement that I could actually share with her some of my images and what they meant to me, and I wanted her to be able to hear me, receive me and sort of be alongside me. What I didn't expect was that she would actually be in that place herself
>
> Sophie: that she would understand instantly
>
> CK: yes and it would be her world too and it is, and I know it is, even though we didn't necessarily talk about that, but I just know it, and that was most extraordinary, I mean there would be a lot of things which won't, you see this is what is interesting, there would be probably levels on which we wouldn't meet, but we met on that level, she was able to connect and in a way that's what you would ideally want, I think, well I would ideally want, but it didn't even occur to me, I'd

written it off as that was that person, that’s a once in a lifetime experience, it’s never going to happen again (The author (CK) in the interview with Sophie)

The space between us – the quality of presence

> In the final analysis I believe that the most important thing in direction has relatively little to do with what is said, but a great deal to do with the quality of the relationship between director and directee
> (Jeff, 2007, p 90)

What is the quality of a relationship in which we can feel able to connect at a deep level? Emma, who is a spiritual companion and interested in contemplative prayer, believes

> …going back to what you said, how do you deal with direction in a contemplative sense, rather than with words? that's been a key aspect for me and a lot of what's going on in spiritual direction happens in the space between us and if that space is sanctified by the Spirit and the presence of God, then that's where the movement and the energy happens and takes place
>
> CK: would you describe that space as the relationship space between you or?
>
> Emma: …no I think it's something outside, I think it's something more than the relationship I mean the relationship is there but I think it's an extra dimension to the relationship which I would see as something special I suppose, because there's a holiness to it, isn't there?

This 'extra dimension' to the relationship is interesting, and seems to be an important factor in the relationship for several of the participants. For Emma it comes as a result of a space that is 'sanctified by the Spirit' (the Holy Spirit). Susan, who is a seeker, and also in training, feels:

> I want to be drawn deeper, because there's a way in which, it's not that one can't get to those places by oneself, but there's a way in which having another person holding that space for you and just pointing out, it helps you affirm where God is, and in a way, seeing in a way you can't see, seeing from a slightly different perspective. Because they've got your best interests and God will be in their heart as it were, you can trust it.

So for her there is something about the spiritual director having 'God in their heart' which makes it a trustworthy space in which she can be drawn deeper. As Etty Hillesum writes in September 1942:

> *Hineinhorchen* – I so wish I could find a Dutch equivalent for that German word. Truly, my life is one long hearkening unto myself and unto others, unto God. And if I say that I hearken, it is really God who hearkens inside me. The most essential and deepest in me hearkening unto the most essential and deepest in the other. God to God. (Smelik, 1986, p 519)

This is a particular quality of listening, inner listening. The translation from the German 'hineinhorchen' into 'hearken' does not completely capture what Etty means, and Etty herself cannot find a word in Dutch (the language of her diary), which captures her meaning. It is a word she uses a year earlier in her diary (Smelik, 1986, p 90-91), in a similar way, but without the reference to God. Her process in the time from the reference in August 1941 to the later reference in September 1942 is one which I hope to use to illustrate the kind developing relationship with God or the divine which seems to me to connect to the themes that emerge from my interviews, many decades later, in a different world. It seems to relate directly to the kind of listening and the kind of process to which Susan refers. A few days after the first reference to 'hineinhorchen', Etty writes:

> There is a deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then He must be dug out again. (Smelik, 1986, p 91)

As Woodhouse says of Etty:

> Suddenly, without hesitation or embarrassment, she unambiguously names the depth within her from which she senses her life comes. But this life gets blocked, buried, and she is cut off from it. So she defines her task, her mission – to 'dig out' this buried God within her. (Woodhouse, 2009, p 40)

I see the role of the spiritual companion as accompanying the seeker in this process, and I am interested in the diverse ways in which this can happen. For me, it is in the ability of my companion to engage with my images and to some degree with my words; it is in the quality of her presence. I was struck, when we were arranging a time to meet, that she was careful to make time after a stimulating morning meeting so that she could be present to me, and she explained that was what she was doing. This, I think, is exactly what Sophie meant.

Fiona uses the image of Narnia to describe the place she wants to experience, a mystical space, which her spiritual companion helps her to be in.

> Fiona: how does she create that space? Presumably by some sort of expectation in her that we are spiritual beings and that there's something to say and that if she just gives me enough space to unfold it will unfold

CK: so she gives you space to unfold, she doesn't take all the space up or

Fiona: no I'd be out of the door if she did I can tell you! (we laugh) no I mean I know when that's happening to me and so no. So that's one thing, there's an expectation that there is a rich spiritual life going on in me, and I think also she knows how to affirm that but also to challenge, and by challenge I don't think I mean 'do you really mean that' so much as…I think in some ways so few of us in the Church of England at the moment really talk about Narnia, if you like to use that as an image for a while, although I'm not sure, but anyway if we use it for a moment, that a lot of the tendency is to not give that much space, so here is somebody that I met for the first time in my life, who gives it a lot of space, and you can only do that if you're willing to push against other things and not have other things and so she's able to open up that space because she has taken this journey very seriously herself, and continues to do so in her own life

Sophie feels that unresolved psychological issues can get in the way of creating this space:

The spiritual bit is here (indicates a place on her body) and they have a lot of stuff here (indicates another place) that gets in the way, it feels like psychologically, there's a sort of psychological place, I don't know how to describe it, it's a bit like the turbulence of psychological troubles, can cloud the ability for me to feel connected at any depth

Etty, writing on 7th August 1941, agrees:

I am not yet sufficiently at one with life, I am not firmly rooted in it.

> That is no doubt because my physical and spiritual sides have not yet fused into a single organic whole. From time to time the meaning of everything suddenly escapes me. That is probably due to a lack of self-confidence, to a lack of faith in myself, to not believing that what one does is good and meaningful. (Smelik, 1986, p 75)

This seems to me to be what McLennan Tajiri (2009) researched in her doctoral dissertation *'Attentiveness to God: Contemplative Presence in Spiritual Direction'*. She interviewed twelve Christian spiritual directors, all of whom had at least ten years experience, and also used as data the writings of four Christian mystics. She draws on her experience and background as a transpersonal psychotherapist, and draws on the literature of psychotherapy, including Carl Rogers' well known quote, which I quote here in more detail:

> When I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my *presence* is releasing and helpful to the other. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways in which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviors turn out to be *right*, in some odd way: it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present. (Rogers, 1980, p 129)

McLennan Tajiri's research suggests that there are ways in which the spiritual director can make it more likely that they can be and convey this quality of presence. This is by the cultivation of contemplative awareness through a way of being in life, and spiritual direction is seen as 'another mode of

practicing the way of life they already live' (McLennan Tajiri, 2009, p 258). The participants used rituals, and cultivating intention, the use of silence before sessions, prayer, and reminders during the sessions, such as candles, an empty chair, pictures, passages from Scripture or poems (Ibid, p 247). She recognises that her research is limited to the Christian tradition. One limitation of her research that she does not recognise, however, is that she has not interviewed the seekers about their experience in the relationship, although she does acknowledge:

> I realized I was too focused on the spiritual director; that is I often neglected the fact that the director is attentive to God in and for the *directee*, not the director. (Ibid, p 225)

I think this is an important area which I hope my own research goes some way to address.

Risking relationship – trusting the boundaries

In my next meeting with my spiritual companion we talked about balance, what does it mean? Order and chaos, boxes, boundaries, where are the boundaries? What are they in a spiritual direction relationship? What differentiates this from friendship? What do they look like? A fence? A hedge? High? Low? Bricks? Can you see through them?

The idea of boundaries in counselling/psychotherapy is that they act as a container, create a feeling of safety, and trust, and for some in the psychoanalytic or psychodynamic approaches they create the framework within which transference will appear and can be worked with. That is not true of the person-centred approach however, in that although transference may occur, there is no particular focus on it. Time boundaries, place boundaries, the boundaries of the relationship, concern about dual relationships, confidentiality, etc, are set both by convention, by ethical frameworks, and probably in future by the statutory regulation of counselling and psychotherapy. Hancock Ragsdale (1996, pp xii-xiii) outlines the current debate, as true now as in 1996, between those who support regulation and those who do not. That debate currently being engaged in with intense vigour within counselling and psychotherapy in the UK, is not yet raging around the activity of spiritual direction in relation to statute, and in any case seems, perhaps rightly, to aim to prevent sexual exploitation, and to ignore other related issues, such as friendship. The profession is, however, increasingly being professionalised in the United States. Spiritual Directors International has drawn up Guidelines for Ethical Conduct (Spiritual Directors International, 2005-2009). Gerard May (2000) expresses his strong feelings about this:

> I do understand where the professional stuff is coming from. People and organizations are afraid of lawsuits and are burned by all the

> horrible stories of abuse, etc. They also think of it as a business, which they want to conduct responsibly. But they seem to have no models for spiritual direction other than that of the modern counseling professional. They can't help but think of spiritual direction as a "service" provided by some kind of "qualified expert". This is often complicated when the directee is expected to pay a "fee for service".
>
> But understanding does not constitute agreement nor, for me, even tolerance. I think this modern movement to professionalize the ministry of spiritual direction should be resisted in whatever form it takes. So I'd distance myself from any such commercializations of this precious, ancient, and sacred ministry.

The need for boundaries relates to issues of power, and the wish to protect the vulnerable, and those who may not have the resources to protect themselves. Women, children, minority groups, those with disabilities, those whose sexuality or appearance makes them seem 'other', the list is long, and I risk omitting and thereby appearing to marginalise, just by attempting a list.

And, perhaps, as a result of fluctuations in power, they move…the lyrics of Pink Floyd's *'Us and Them'* (Waters and Wright, 1973) run through my mind…

There are aspects of my being that mean I have power in this society, such as my education, health and the colour of my skin, but my gender, and perhaps increasingly my age, mean there are others who have more power than I do. Then, if I connect with my vulnerability, and reveal my history, my fears, my doubts, that in itself impacts on the dynamics of power. By the nature of the spiritual companion/director relationship, one person is looking for companionship and the other is offering it. Seekers do not expect to hear about the difficulties of the companion (although Ruffing (1989, pp 71-72) feels that can change), and for Joanne it was helpful to have a sense that her

spiritual director had experienced them, and she had asked him directly about this in the early stages of the relationship:

> He was clearly someone who has not had an easy path, and on the principle that what doesn't kill you improves you, I just felt that here was someone who would know why I don't find things easy, would know why my life's difficult, and know that you can get through all these things or that you can carry on living with these things, and so that's quite important for me, you know the idea that it would be someone who has had an easy ride through life, I just don't see what they have to offer at all really!

It seems as if that was helpful in creating a sense that she would be heard and accepted, but it seems to me that it also gives a sense of greater equality. Perhaps there is a fine line between that and (ab)using the relationship for the purpose of gaining sympathy and support on the part of the spiritual companion, in the way that Sarah experienced it:

> Very quickly we ended up with her talking as much as I was, so I would go to her place and have three quarters of an hour, an hour, and then she started telling me all her stuff, well not all of it, but quite a lot of it.…It kind of made me feel responsible to her, for her, to some extent, and that's fine in a friendship, but that's not what this is about, and for me it's quite important to have, the formal differences. It is quite important I think

So the relationship transgressed a boundary for Sarah, between friendship and the relationship she wanted and expected, and the nature of the transgression was the difference between being able to bring her needs to someone who held them for her and responded to her, and someone who imposed their own needs into this relationship. Sarah is saying that this

relationship is not a reciprocal relationship, but friendship is. However this does raise a question for me, because there are many aspects of this and other professional relationships which are very close to friendship, and what happens when we confine relationships within professional boundaries? How professional should the spiritual companion relationship be? Joanne is clear that her spiritual director's self-disclosure was only in response to her direct questions in the early stages, and that her sessions are always about her and that is what she wants:

> I think part of his good practice is that whilst he may tell me where he's going on holiday if I ask, he doesn't share his problems and I don't ask about them because it's not part of our relationship. (Joanne, 2010)

Sarah feels it is important to have the formal differences, but what exactly are they and are they the same for everyone? Should these differences be defined into a professional code of practice?

You might also say, but this is a relationship of trust, and should we all pay the price which is the result of those who have betrayed that trust? And what is trust? What (or who) are we to trust in?

Trust was explicitly mentioned in eight of the interviews, but was implicit in them all, as the concern with boundaries reveals.

Sophie spoke of the need to feel able to trust that her spiritual companion would accept whatever she brought, and saw that as an aspect of the quality of their presence.

Joanne spoke of feeling that it takes time to build up that trust, in order to feel that she would not be judged.

Carol spoke about the need to build rapport so that the seekers who came to see her felt they could trust her.

Teresa also felt this, and that it is a grace:

> I find it a gift really to be a director, to be able…. I think it's a grace to be able to offer somebody a place, a safe place where they can open their heart I think it's wonderful to develop trust and confidence, I think it's really a grace for the director, a grace if you can help really, yes I'm very grateful to be able to have this in my life

As mentioned earlier, Susan, who is in training, but also has a spiritual companion, felt that she could trust the space that was being held and allow herself to be drawn deeper because the companion will have her best interests at heart and God will be in their heart.

There is something here that is just beyond my grasp, and it relates to the idea of God being in the heart of the companion, Etty's God within the well, of the ability to offer the space for this exploration being a grace (from God), alongside the comments on the need to be able to trust in the acceptance of the companion (or God?). This seems to me to be something about the added dimension which is a quality of this relationship, or is something seekers hope for in it, and that companions hope to offer, which relates to presence, sacred space… and perhaps it is that this is a relationship in which that dimension is in awareness, or is the reason for it:

> I feel this issue of trust is fundamental, and that it is intertwined with issues of power and vulnerability, but also interesting in that in these interviews there was something about the nature of this one to one relationship, which sets it apart. Perhaps it is because it is a relationship which exists to enable the growth or development of

> another relationship, the relationship with the divine, God, the spiritual. Perhaps it is because both parties have, or seek that relationship. I don't know, but I am experiencing a faint but increasingly strong sense that it is here, somewhere, that there is something important to be known. Maybe it is something that is to be known or experienced about God, which is particular to sharing in this context. I am not sure. I feel it is something about intention, about grace, about gift, about seeking, about the human condition, about the social context, about our times. Perhaps in order to get closer to finding it, I need to explore further what exactly the relationship with God is, but there I touch on the ineffable, the impossible to express, I go beyond words, feelings, into the mystical realm, and how might I draw on that for a doctoral thesis? (Kitcatt, 2009d, 11/10/09)

There is an intimacy in this space, as Etty Hillesum wrote on 10th October 1942:

> What a strange story it really is, my story: the girl who could not kneel. Or its variation: the girl who learned to pray. That is my most intimate gesture, more intimate even than being with a man. After all, one can't pour the whole of one's love out over a single man, can one? (Smelik, 1986, p 547)

There is perhaps a sense in which this relationship is a less vulnerable making one than being a client in therapy, but for me a sense that actually it is a more vulnerable making one, because, at its deepest level, it is about the fundamental meaning of life (and death). By deepest level, I mean beyond a meaning that is about achievement, success and material possessions, beyond a meaning that is about our health and happiness, education, employment etc, it is about the foundation of our life, and it is both beyond our day to day living, and at the same time about how we live day by day.

Joanne in her interview felt that her counselling was there as a temporary process to deal with issues that were impeding her spiritual growth, and that her relationship with her spiritual director was more important, more fundamental and ongoing.

‘the lines on the map moved from side to side’ (Waters and Wright, 1973)

But what is a boundary? Perhaps it is a place where things change, change from being one thing, to being another. But then whilst the boundary between my cup and my desk can be seen, the boundary between friendship and spiritual companionship is less clear. Relationships are fluid, not static, they must change or they will stagnate, perhaps some change is necessary, and other changes threaten the integrity of the relationship? If the boundaries dissolve, what happens? Perhaps it depends on which boundaries, and how they dissolve or change?

4 'Boundaries and Beyond' by the author

This textile piece, *'Boundaries and Beyond'*, is an exploration of boundaries, using sheers, nets and fibres cut and laid against and over each other, and fixed to felt. They began with clear edges, and then I used a heat gun to distress the edges of the various fabrics in particular, of each piece, and then the whole, and I also used the heat gun on the back, this made the edges less clear, and in some places they fused, broke, or even disappeared, making holes right through. Some of the fibres were chosen because I knew they would not change in the heat. I could not decide which way up it went, but have settled for this, for now. There is significance in the grid of the nets, the textures, colours, spaces and shapes, and there are shapes that emerge as I contemplate. So here are many layers, different colours, different reactions to heat, a fusing and a bonding, and it looks different if you look at it in a different light…

Edwards (2001) explores the issue of boundaries, saying:

> The basic question concerning boundaries in the spiritual direction relationship I believe is this: What boundaries will support our mutual freedom for God in the direction session? Our answers will likely be a bit different with each directee. *We especially need to respect the boundaries that each directee sets in the relationship. We may see these changing somewhat over time, as trust between you and the directee grows.* (Edwards, 2001, p 124, my italics)

I find this interesting because of the mutuality this suggests, that the directee, or seeker, sets boundaries, and also because he suggests that the boundaries change as trust grows, it also suggests adaptability and flexibility on the part of the director, and confidence on the part of the directee/seeker. Here is another clue, because it seems to me that relationships in general can be undermined when one person assumes a level of trust that does not

exist in the other. Trust can lead to assumptions or taking things for granted. In the spiritual companion relationship, the relationships which became friendship seems to have followed an evolutionary path for one person, the companion, which was not desired by the seeker, and it may be difficult to address this, particularly when the companion seems vulnerable, as Barbara's was, or unaware, as Fiona's was. It may also be difficult to address if there is a sense that the seeker gains something from the change in relationship, for example if they actually desire the friendship. Then there may be an issue of needing to seek another companion, as indeed Barbara was considering.

Barbara spoke of 'permeable boundaries', that whilst boundaries were important to hold in her work as a spiritual director, they might also cause difficulties:

> I use this phrase permeable boundaries,
>
> CK: ah right, tell me about permeable boundaries
>
> Barbara: well, you have a boundary but it's got lots of holes in it!
>
> CK: You have discretion to move it
>
> Barbara: yes or to go through it, through a hole! but the boundary is still there!
>
> CK: I like that very much, so it's like there might be situations in which you would see the boundaries as actually causing more problems than they help?

Barbara: yes, but never-the-less …there is a place for the boundary at a time and a place and a circumstance and the need of somebody, a particular need at that time

CK: yes, so perhaps a need for things to be a bit more held and contained (yes) and then a growth out of that place into a more flowing perhaps way but having done that understanding the boundary and why it's there rather than having gone straight into boundarylessness

Barbara: absolutely, because I think that there is a place where if you don't then some, especially perhaps young…not especially young people, but certain people feel very, well it paralyses them by not having a boundary

This, I believe, is what Thorne means when he writes:

> …it is obviously right that clients should be protected from invasive therapists and from those who abuse their power by changing the parameters of the therapeutic relationship without warning and without regard for the client's needs and wishes or with scant respect for his or her vulnerability. Insistence on boundaries is rightly emphasised so that the client can feel safe from the unwelcome attentions of abusive therapists or of those whose self deception or self-inflation is so great that they exercise their personal power without awareness of their responsibility. On the other hand, the very notion of a boundary – especially a rigidly prescribed one – speaks of a 'so far but no further' mentality. It suggests an unwillingness to venture into unknown terrain, the unexplored 'no-man's land' where almost inevitably those who have suffered most need to venture if they are to face their pain and their terror. The therapist who is prepared to be a companion in such terrain must sometimes move across a boundary courageously or

> risk leaving a client stranded in a place of fear to which is added the desolation of abandonment. (Thorne, 2002, p 20)

One of the key things, Barbara feels, 'of spiritual accompaniment, [is] the discernment of what and when and how isn't it? It's a basic thing':

> …with my present director, we do walk alongside, I feel that… I think he is extraordinarily open with me, without any confidentiality being breached, about how he sees things and what people are encountering and how he feels about it, and indeed how he feels about me and it was even more emphasised you know, talking earlier about friendship, you know I feel in a way there is a friendship there, so much so that it's caused me to think is this the right way to be?

A process of discernment is clearly going on for her:

> I wonder whether I've actually got to raise it for both our sakes, but again it's another boundary, you know I actually haven't got much experience in this and I know from, because I see about five people, and they're all different and you know there's a different way of conversing, there's different way of communicating with each of them, and I don't see in any of them, at all in the position that I am describing with my spiritual director, I haven't actually got very far in coming to any decisions about it

At the same time, Barbara values warmth in the spiritual direction relationship:

> …there's a very human aspect to, as far as my experience is of spiritual direction, accompaniment, verging on the kind of friendship,

> warmth relationship all that to me is important. Which is another way of saying that some of the stuff I've read about spiritual direction sounds to me so clinical and unfeeling and I wouldn't want to be seen within 100 miles of it because I just don't think it actually treats people with the respect that they're due.

There is a difference, though, a boundary somewhere here, where the relationship becomes less about one person accompanying another, and more about the intrusion into this of the other person's needs:

> I remember having a conversation with somebody, a friend …and talking about something that I had talked about with mine and she said hmm I'm not sure about that, she said I think what I want from my spiritual director is somebody I can just go and sit flop down and just fflph! Put it all out there and I know that it will just sit there and just be looked at and you know that I can just let it all hang out was what she was saying and I think she was hearing from me that I was receiving as much as giving and whether that was actually right, so I am wondering a bit about it

What seems interesting in this situation is that Barbara is finding herself having to consider raising it, but her director seems unaware that there might be a problem.

As mentioned earlier, Sarah also found herself in a similar situation when she saw her first spiritual director, however:

> As a result of that [spiritual] direction relationship I took one or two important steps in my life, which were right to have done, but I wouldn't have done without that, so I'm very, very grateful to her, but we both acknowledged that we should stop having that form of relationship

In this case Sarah was able to discuss it, and move on, but she was clear about the impact it had on her.

So again, the spiritual director's self-disclosure and taking up of space in the relationship was not helpful, both for Barbara and for Sarah. Both ended up feeling a sense of responsibility for their director. Perhaps this is an example of stress affecting the spiritual director, and not being contained, but leaking into the relationship inappropriately. An interesting study (Taylor et al., 2000) found that women have predominantly a 'tend and befriend' response to stress, rather than the more well known (and more masculine) fight or flight. This might explain the concern felt by the female participants over the neediness of their directors, they did not want to feel responsible for them, because they were seeking support from them. However for one of them, Fiona, there was a feeling that she had benefitted greatly from the relationship before it drifted into friendship, and then a feeling that she should not question the friendship offered, even though it was very difficult for her to manage:

> [It was] really fantastic, absolutely wonderful, for many years, in that she really taught me, I suppose about quarterly meetings, all with some sort of food at the beginning or the end, and always some sort of chat at the beginning or the end, but in the middle of it a deep hearing of wherever I was, an affirming of me, and that went very well for quite a long time, it became more difficult when my life at last began to get its act together in terms of priesthood and a happy relationship life and I thought then we started in some ways to become more friends, and I found that very difficult, but in the end gave up the uneven struggle and just thought who am I to quibble with having [her] as a friend, and so we did become friends and we did friendly things, like I went to

> parties and things like that but I would say that spiritual direction then stopped, and more the influence of a very wise and loving friend started and when that became very friendly like going out to something I think it really didn't work, I just couldn't manage the shift

This relationship transgressed the boundary between spiritual direction and friendship, it did this by becoming a social relationship and because then their meetings were not confined to a specific time, place and purpose. With her current spiritual director she was very clear about what she didn't want, and is pleased that this relationship is:

> Much more boundaried, we use a room at a centre, and even though the offer was of going to her home, because her home's quite near mine, I told her very clearly why I really didn't want that to happen this time and that it was really helpful for me to be in a room like off a library, rather than a home. She was very accepting of that

So for Fiona there is something about the location which helps to hold the boundary between friendship and spiritual companion.

In this concern about the relationship straying into friendship, which these participants feel is not helpful, there is a feeling of wanting the relationship to be separate from everyday life, but yet of there being warmth, a sense of being cared for, connection.

Etty Hillesum's relationship with Julius Spier moved through many stages, from therapy, to lovers, friends, and spiritual companionship, and the boundaries seem to have been very blurred, she struggles with her feelings, but despite the unconventional process of their relationship, there is no doubt it benefits her (Woodhouse, 2009, p 17). I am not saying I believe this to be appropriate behaviour, but perhaps it is necessary to reflect further on the boundaries:

> As the modern reader gets caught up in this first part of Etty Hillesum's story – and particularly the detail of the relationship with Spier with its sweaty bouts of wrestling, its sexual intimacies easily taken, and the huge disparity of age and life situations between this therapist and his patient, he or she may feel ill at ease. Certainly what happened between them was neither conventional nor what we today would regard as acceptable. But for her it was not just immensely positive, but life saving. As her relationship with him grew and developed, it became far more than just simply 'therapy'. A rich multifaceted friendship flowered between them which embraced far more than just psychological understanding, crucial though that was. (Woodhouse, 2009, p 21)

What exactly is friendship? And where does the spiritual companion relationship become problematic?

> I am so grateful for having been allowed to come so close to you; that will be of crucial importance in my further development – I feel that more and more strongly. You are, in fact, the first person to whom I have ever related inwardly, whom I have tried to emulate. Perhaps it will be the first 'non-amateurish' friendship of my whole life. (Etty in Smelik, 1986, p 84)

Her description of this friendship as 'non-amateurish' is interesting. She seems to mean by this not that it is a professional relationship, but that it has given her something tangible to live by, which other relationships or friendships have not provided. I believe this is part of the essence of the relationship with a spiritual companion:

Thanksgiving for friends

> These, these are the ones who have walked with me
> where no others would come.
> These are the ones who have not refused to look upon me.
> These are the ones who have come near.
>
> These are the ones who have shown me your face.
> These are the ones who have touched me with your nearness,
> These are the ones who have incarnated your justice.
> These are the ones who have mediated your presence.
>
> I am trembling.
> I am thankful. (Slee, 2004a, p 108)

Ruffing (1989, pp 64-73) explores the historical development of the spiritual direction relationship and the more recent impact of the therapeutic relationship on the activity of spiritual direction, including the boundary issues of:

> …fifty minute hours, restriction of the relationship to the clinical setting, including time, place, frequency of meetings, one-sided self-disclosure by the directee of intimate details of his or her life to a director who maintains clinical distance, sometimes a stipend or fee, and a professional structure of supervision for the director. (Ibid, p 65)

Writing from the Christian perspective, she, like May (2000), sees the therapeutic model as detracting from the spiritual direction relationship, and puts forward as an alternative, a model of Christian friendship as proposed by Leech (1977) and Edwards (1980). Both these authors have subsequently produced revised editions (Edwards, 2001, Leech, 2001), and Leech is particularly concerned that in the time between the original book and the

revised edition, the ministry of spiritual direction has become increasingly professionalised (Leech, 2001, pp xvi-xvii), and that the boundaries with therapy have become hard to distinguish. He sees this as detracting from the relationship, and perhaps Etty would agree.

Carter Heyward and Beverly Wildung Harrison would agree. In their chapter entitled *'Boundaries: Protecting the Vulnerable or Perpetuating a Bad Idea'* (Heyward and Harrison, 1996) they build on the argument Heyward put forward in her book *'When Boundaries Betray Us'* (Heyward, 1993):

> So many women and children, boys as well girls, have been sexually abused. This violence is not abating. In this evil and terrifying social context, many people assume that "good boundaries" are essential to their own healing and to the well-being and safety of others. It is as if "good boundaries" have become synonymous with "right relation". But we have serious misgivings, politically, ethically, and theologically, about the worldview and spirituality embedded in this equation. (Heyward and Harrison, 1996, p 112)

They argue that by regarding the good boundaries as the solution to the problem, the danger is that the issue of abuse of power is then not dealt with effectively; in effect it becomes concealed, so in essence they are saying it is treating the symptoms of a sick society, and not the underlying cause. They are concerned that 'this is what the boundary discourse does amongst contemporary feminists: it helps us *feel* safe in a violent and abusive world' (Ibid p 113). They argue their point using four themes, based around the psychology derived from Freud, and, they feel, 'reproduce[s] capitalist patriarchy's social relations and spiritual ideals of separation, autonomy, and self-ownership' (Ibid p 114). I think it could also be argued that cognitive behavioural approaches also reproduce these ideals, and perhaps they are right in saying that therapy as a whole reinforces them. They do not mention the person-centred approach, which does take into account the need for

social mediation in more recent theoretical developments (Proctor, 2002, Proctor and Napier, 2004, Proctor et al., 2006), and as an example Mearns and Thorne explore the different boundaries in therapy in Japan, compared with the UK:

> So, for example, the person-centred school counsellor trained in Kyusyu Sangyo University in Fukuoka will seek to work not just with the individual student, but will also go to his home to talk with his mother and grandmother, before returning to the school to meet his homebase teacher and even his friends. In many other parts of the world school counsellors might be alarmed by the wide boundaries operating in this way of working and be concerned about confidentiality. But their tightly boundaried way of working is not better or worse – it is merely different, in a fashion that reflects their own culture. (Mearns and Thorne, 2007, p 23)

Mearns and Thorne do not evaluate the cultures which result in these differences, they feel that theory should evolve and accommodate the changing nature of society and the nature of the social context. But by accommodating it, are we colluding with an essentially damaging societal structure?

Peggy Natiello writes:

> Power over others, or authoritarian power, is still the primary political orientation in the world. This orientation is, I believe, inappropriate and ineffective in addressing the issues that challenge us at this point in human history. The radically different view of power subscribed to in the person-centred approach offers a map to the facilitation of egalitarianism, adaptability, and interconnectedness – qualities that seem essential in confronting the crises we face today. (Natiello, 2001, p 59)

This is in contrast to the second theme of Heyward and Harrison's argument (1996, p 115), that 'the psychological structure undergirding the current enthusiasm for boundaries among feminist therapists, clergy, and other helping professionals is the dynamic of "transference".' They see this as a block to mutuality, and the theory and practice of the person-centred approach would support this. Transference exists, but is not the focus of the therapeutic work. Heyward and Harrison argue that:

> To use the theory or actual experience of transference for any purpose other than to help people increase their awareness of how power works in their lives, and to help them do so with dignity and perspective, is an abusive use of professional, economic, emotional, and, at times, sexual power. (Ibid, p 116)

They also argue against the medical model of healing, something which the person-centred approach also argues against (see for example Freeth, 2007), but since therapy is not the subject of this thesis that is not a subject to explore here. Another focus is the role of the 'expert' and this does fit both with the idea of collaborative power in the person-centred approach, and the desire of the interviewees not to be told or directed.

A third theme in Heyward and Harrison's exploration of the damaging effect of boundaries is the issue of the nature of vulnerability. They argue that when vulnerability is seen as weakness, then it can be treated as pathological and in need of cure. In contrast, they see it as:

> *openness*…to deep engagement with the world, with others, and with oneself. Vulnerability is openness to feeling, to touching and being touched emotionally, and to personal transformation. Vulnerability is, we believe, sacred – a primary dimension of the spirit's own movement in history, the creative and liberating spirit of life that is purposeful and good. (Heyward and Harrison, 1996, p 120-121)

The vulnerable are often seen as needing protection, from themselves, from emotional pain, and Heyward and Harrison see this as risking failing to respond to situations which are complex and require a response:

> Vulnerable women need to become agents of our own lives. We do not need protection from the emotional openness that is the psycho-spiritual root of our agency: our capacity to live our lives fully. This capacity is cultivated only through emotional struggle. (Ibid, p 121)

However a different perspective is put forward by Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G Barton (1996) in their chapter in the same book, in which they explore *'Boundaries, Mutuality, and Professional Ethics'*. Whilst agreeing that mutuality and friendship are important in relationships, and that an examination of issues of power is necessary, they believe that there are other forms of relationship more appropriate to professional helpers, that professional boundaries need not be abusive, and that failure to maintain the professional boundaries is 'abusive and unethical' (Ibid, p 98). In arguing in support of professional ethics within the ministry of the church, they argue:

> …an appropriate professional ethic for counselling ministries centers on three convictions: (1) that "power over" and "mutuality" are not polar opposites, nor do they define the range of possible professional-client relations; (2) that boundaries are not simply limits to be seen in a negative light, but are enablers that create needed space to effectuate therapy; and (3) that "anticipation evokes manipulation": promises of goods to come following therapy mitigate against the healing process of therapy. (Ibid, p 100)

Given that the focus in this thesis is not on therapy, the third point may not be relevant, but their first two points are, I believe, relevant to the discussion. They argue that professional power has to be seen as a more complex issue than simply "power over" in that:

> …there are alternatives to “power over” other than simple mutuality, equal vulnerability, and friendship. In the counselling context, one person remains the helper and the other the help seeker. Yet this does not mean they are in a hierarchical relationship. There is a kind of mutuality in which one receives support from the other, yet each respects the role and personhood of the other. (Ibid, pp 101-102)

I think this applies in the spiritual companionship relationship too, and perhaps more so in that the seeker is seeking a companion rather than a therapist. Guenther sees the relationship as:

> …unashamedly hierarchical. Hierarchical not because the director is somehow ‘better’ or ‘holier’ than the directee, but because, in this covenanted relationship, the director has agreed to put himself aside so that his total attention can be focused on the person sitting in the other chair. What a gift to bring to another, the gift of disinterested, loving attention! (Guenther, 1992, p 3)

This seems to me to be an issue of language, and perhaps theology, rather than the language of patriarchy.

The second point concerns the value of boundaries in creating a space where therapy can take place, and again in the different context of spiritual companionship, this was also an important factor for the participants in this research. Some wanted to be seen at a different location so that the director/companion would not know the people spoken about, and would not be encountered in daily life. The examples where there was too much self-disclosure by the director/companion created a sense of responsibility in the seekers, and they felt their needs were not being met. Approaching this issue was seen by some as sensitive, and perhaps that was due to the power dynamic operating in the relationship.

The director/companion is putting themselves at the service of the seeker, in that they are making time and space available for the purpose of accompanying the seeker, and of helping the seeker to find their way to grow spiritually. The quality of the space is created between the two, but the director/companion has, I think, a responsibility to foster that in their way of being, their way of listening and responding and their presence. A degree of transparency and mutuality may evolve, but I think that would depend on the ability of both parties to be honest in the relationship, and for that to happen requires quite a high degree of self-awareness and trust.

May (1998) lists several different models of spiritual direction or companionship, which he divides into 'formal' and 'informal'. Under the formal title, which he describes as:

> …explicitly defined as spiritual direction, with a clear separation of roles between director and directee. Meetings are usually scheduled in advance on a regular basis, and a directee normally has only one formal director.

He lists the following types which I feel are relevant to the discussion here:

> *Professional ("Expert") Spiritual Direction* is in large part patterned after contemporary psychotherapeutic models. It is a highly structured relationship in which the director is seen as providing a professional service to the directee. The focus of meetings is firmly on the directee, and the director seeks to remain caring but unattached. Mutuality and relationships outside of direction are discouraged. The director is viewed as an expert: skilled, trained and experienced. Directors are usually supervised and may be certified. Fees for service are common. The "locus of discernment" (where discernment happens) varies according to the director's style; as in counseling, some directors make assertive discernments for their directees, while others

> are more non-directive, helping directees come to their own discernments.
>
> *Gifted ("Charismatic") Spiritual Direction* is also a formal relationship in that meetings are held regularly and the focus is primarily on the directee. The director, however, is seen more as gifted and called than skilled and trained. Many such directors claim no expertise, do not consider themselves professionals, and place their primary emphasis on remaining attentive to the Holy Spirit as the true Director. This kind of direction is not usually seen as a service but as God's gift to the director as well as the directee. Fees are therefore not normally charged. Mutuality and extra-direction relationships occur more readily than in professional direction. Here again the locus of discernment varies, but is more commonly placed in the directee. (May, 1998)

I believe it is important that these different approaches to spiritual direction continue to be available, as I, and perhaps most of those I interviewed, would wish to be in a relationship with a Gifted Spiritual Director in preference to a Professional one. Perhaps, though, there is a place for all, at least in the spiritual companionship world, because it may be that the approach a seeker feels comfortable with and growthful depends on where they are in their process.

I feel that both Heyward and Harrison, and Lebacqz and Barton have valid arguments, and that in a sense both are right. Given the current context, some attention must be paid to ethics and the issue of power and how it needs to be used. This attention is not an end in itself, but a way of operating justly within an unjust society, whilst acknowledging the need to work towards a society in which these abuses of power will not take place.

The visitation

In her study of friendship, Lillian Rubin (1985) comments on the relative invisibility of friendship as a relationship, in contrast with the importance given to family relationships. At formal events, such as weddings and funerals, and other times, family connections generally supersede friendships, and this is not often questioned, it is assumed. It can often be true that we rarely see family members, and perhaps do not know them as well as we know our friends, but in her research she notes that her interviewees claimed as friends those who when asked, barely remembered who their 'friend' was. Chittister agrees:

> The fact is that companionship is not enough to fill a life. What is needed in human relationships above all, if they are to give substance to our lives, is the quality of fusion, the character of meld. It is the challenge of connection. It is an insight of grave consequence in a world where we can live in crowds forever and never even notice that we are alone. It is easy to think that we have friends and know how to be a friend when all we have are contacts. It is so easy to think we have a relationship with someone when all we really have is more or less time for idle conversations with people we see often but keep at a distance always.
>
> Where there is no reverence, no trust, there may be attraction but there is no friendship. (Chittister, 2006, p 2)

So for Chittister, companion is not quite the right term, as it implies something less than true friendship, but for me, in the context of the spiritual companionship relationship, trust and reverence (or respect) are required, as is a time set aside to be together and focus on the spiritual growth of the seeker. She talks about fusion, meld and the challenge of connection in all meaningful relationships, but what might that mean in the context of the spiritual companionship relationship?

It is Advent. My next visit to my spiritual companion, and I explain I am wondering about the boundary with friendship. I am reading a book called *'Holiness and the Feminine Spirit: the art of Janet McKenzie'* (Perry, 2009) and I am particularly engaged with the painting *'The Visitation'* in which Mary, pregnant and unmarried, visits her cousin Elizabeth. In the painting they are shown with their eyes averted from each other, looking down, but their pregnant bellies touching, and in that touching, it seems to me, is connection, communion, consolation, support and above all a sense of companionship. These two women share a moment in time which they know will change the world, they contain within them lives which will change the course of history.

It feels profound, intimate, mutual and accepting. It is an image which affects us both. We sit with it in silence for a while.

I take her a gift of a selection of my poetry, meditations, photos and scans of my textiles. I also take the textile I have created, as she suggested, for my poem *'Eucharist'* (Kitcatt, 2009b):

5 'Eucharist' by the author

I describe the process of making it using layers of fabric which I created, and fused using a heat tool, iron and soldering iron. She asked me if the use of the heat tool had meaning. The use of heat had meaning. My poem *'Eucharist'* is about creation, connection, fusion, melding, transformation, relationship. We spend time in silence reflecting on it. She asked if I had moved to a different place having created it. Well, not exactly, I responded to my poem and the experience it was conveying in my words by creating the textile piece, and then in reflecting and engaging with the image in my morning meditation time I had written another Eucharistic poem:

This is the cup of light
Come share with me

This is the cup of love
Come share with me

Let light and love
  pour over my soul

Let me drown in light
  Let me soak in love

In the dark before the dawn
  Let me move into this day with courage

In the dark after the setting sun
  Let me rest without fear

In the mystery of love
  Let me rest in peace (Kitcatt, 2009a)

This process is one of a deeper indwelling or abiding with the meaning and experience of the Eucharist as I presently understand it. I chose those words now, having had time to reflect on it during the days since I met her. This is, I think, what Etty means when she writes on 12th December 1941:

> "Oh God, I thank You for having created me as I am. I thank you for the sense of fulfilment that I sometimes have; that fulfilment is after all nothing but being filled with You. I promise You to strive my whole life long for beauty and harmony and also humility and true love, whispers of which I hear inside me at my best moments." (Smelik, 1986, p 175)

I imagine my Eucharist textile projected swirling onto the white end wall of the barn, while a voice, my voice (?), reads the original poem. That, I feel, is how the textile and the poem could re-create the experience I feel I have captured.

I feel I am beyond one specific religion, although that is where my roots are. I have been encouraged and inspired in this by Beverly Lanzetta:

> Every loving exceeds name. There is no name adequate to our love or to our beloved. That is the nature of love: to be both concrete and ungraspable; singular and universal. To love passionately the Divine without name is not to reject god, love, or names, but to measure up to the immensity of what love is: its embracing of everything and its rejection of nothing. It is to become an open vessel of intimacy, in which we offer ourselves to each other without restraint. (Lanzetta, 2007, p 22)

That is the true meaning of the Eucharist for me, right now. Does 'without restraint' mean without boundaries?

My spiritual companion speaks of being the creator of context, rather than what she was trained as a priest to be, which is the conveyor of content. That is what I like, the context. What would happen, she says, if we were in the

barn rather than this room? The barn is finished and will have its first exhibition soon. Maybe we will meet in the barn next time? Context, on any scale, is important. I love her room, but what might happen in the barn? We would leave our shoes outside…..

Patti Smith is singing *'Dancing Barefoot'* (Smith, 2006, pp 128-129). These lyrics draw together the threads of the metaphor of the dance, of love and of creation. Patti Smith writes about them:

> I had the concept to write a lyric line that would have several levels – the love of one human being for another and the love of one's creator. So in a sense, the song addresses both physical and spiritual love……I wanted the verse to have a masculine appeal and the chorus to have a feminine one. (Smith, 2002)

I imagine us dancing barefoot in the barn, paint on our bare feet, making a pattern to show relationship, I don't say it though, for now. And maybe we will. She finds several books, and lends me one called *'The Friendship of Women: The Hidden Tradition of the Bible'*. (Chittister, 2006)

This fusing, melding, connecting, is a spiritual experience, whether it is manifested through physical contact, emotional connection, shared experience, and when it happens in the context of a relationship of trust, where there is no fear of abuse of power, that is when it is growthful, I believe.

I had discussed this with someone for whom I am an informal spiritual companion, and had emailed her a photo of the Boundaries textile:

> Thank you for your image of 'Boundaries', the blues look so soft and gentle, I can certainly find my way through. I would like to see it in the flesh and have you talk to me about it, I feel part of your boundary questioning somehow. The thing is, without the freedom of you

> softening your boundaries, bending them, expanding them, even dissolving them, how could I find the courage and freedom to let go of my inhibitions and let myself go in to this exploration? Will you ever know in my artwork today just how much you are there in my abandonment of fear? When I look again I see your acceptance of me there so much, I could not have dipped my fingers without that!
>
> Ah Caroline, unconditional love has no boundaries! (Jenny, 2009)

I believe there is a truth in this which applies to the relationship with a spiritual companion, because those who are exploring their spirituality can also need to venture into unexplored territory, and although that territory may not be identical to that which therapists encounter, (although it could be), the spiritual companion needs to be discerning in when the boundaries are held, and when they may be, in discussion with the seeker, allowed to change to accommodate the needs of the seeker.

Rubin (1985, pp 34-36) notes that friends tend to be transient, and often belong to particular times in our lives, and although we may continue to keep in touch, they often relate to us as we were, not as we now are. This is interesting and certainly is true in my own life, and I reflected on this as I wrote my Christmas cards whilst also writing this. I keep in touch with friends going back to school, and through various, but not all, jobs, including voluntary work, training courses and a couple from places I have lived. These contacts often only happen intermittently, or perhaps only at Christmas, but they do matter to me. Most do know what I am doing now, but I would not share my spiritual life with them, with the exception of a priest friend, who knew me and helped me in one of the darkest and most painful parts of my life. The reason I might share it with him is that I trust him to accept me, and he would be interested, but I know I am in such a different space now, and that my needs from a spiritual companion are very different. I have given up trying to fit myself into the shape I feel the church wants me to fit into, and,

like Etty, I have found a far deeper faith outside the church than when I attended – for now anyway. Yet spiritual companionship has a history within, and prior to the establishment of the Christian church, and particularly within monastic orders.

Lamontagne (2002, p 88) says that often searchers come to a spiritual director because although their friends are supportive, there is something lacking in those friendships, and some of the differences between a friend and a spiritual director are highlighted in a letter he quotes from 'J' to him:

> 'My friends are supportive, loving and caring and will accept me as I am. But I also find they are too sympathetic, sometimes lack objectivity, and of course, our relationship is two-way, meaning that I must always consider their needs in the conversation as well as my own'

Janice Raymond in her book *'A Passion for Friends'*, explores women's spiritual friendships, drawing on the text written by Aelred of Rievaulx, *'Spiritual Friendship'* (Aelred, 1977):

> Aelred's phrase 'companion of the soul' had a profound meaning for religious women. They delighted in the union of souls and expressed this in the language of mysticism, in their theology, and in their poetry. Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and Juana Inez de la Cruz are only a few of the prominent women in whose work can be found expressions of this companionship. (Raymond, 2001, p 90)

Particular friends were discouraged, or even prohibited in religious orders, but of course existed. Raymond, herself a former nun, notes (2001, p 108) that boundaries must emerge from within the community, must not be imposed and need to leave a certain freedom to avoid stifling that which they are intended to protect. In the spiritual direction relationship I believe this would equate to a negotiation of boundaries between the people involved, but the

companion would need to take care that they are aware of the dynamics of power in the relationship. There is also a risk of idealising women as innocent, thus playing into the virgin and the whore dualism, and deceiving ourselves that women are not capable of violence towards others. This aspect of women's ways of relating is explored by Angela West (1995) and is also relevant to the spiritual direction relationship.

Ruffing (1989) believes that mutuality in the spiritual direction relationship can emerge if the relationship is long enough. She believes that the growing maturity of the directee will enable mutuality to emerge. By mutuality she means 'a mutuality of attitude in which the other is accepted as a peer' (Ibid, pp 66-67). Perhaps in the relationships described by Fiona, Sarah and Barbara, this mutuality had not had time to emerge, but perhaps it is more the expectation of professionalism and perhaps the need for professional boundaries which creates the differences between these seekers and their companions. Perhaps also there is a need particularly for women to feel they will have their needs met, and not be required to be giving of themselves to the other, which is what they do in the rest of their lives. Certainly most of the women I interviewed were in roles which involved giving or caring for others, and they did not expect to be caring for their spiritual director or companion. In fact, as discussed earlier, true mutuality perhaps cannot be achieved, much as in the therapeutic relationship, since one person, the seeker, is coming to the other, the companion, and expects that they will be listened to, that they will be disclosing their subjective experience, and they will be facilitated in their spiritual growth in some way by this process. Drawing the parallel here with therapy, I quote Jordan:

> Within this context there can occur real caring that goes both ways. There is an important feeling of mutuality, with mutual respect, emotional availability, and openness to change on both sides. And the experience of the relationship, of mutuality often grows with the therapy. (Jordan, 1991, p 95)

The key here I think is that the context must be respected, otherwise there is the risk that the seeker's needs become subsumed into an unsought after relationship, as experienced by some of the participants.

The converse is also a possibility, where the seeker is actually looking for a friend. Teresa spoke about someone who came to her for spiritual direction, but she felt was not actually looking for that:

> I met someone who started direction with me but in fact I think she needed more a friend than a director. I offered her to meet her from time to time just to have a cup of tea and chat because she needed to talk. She wasn't ready to do the work of reflecting on her relationship with God. But unfortunately we haven't been able to make an appointment so I don't see her any more though I keep her in my prayers.

Overlapping circles and dual relationships

Perhaps for some of these reasons, Sarah feels that she would not want to confuse the boundaries of the relationship by offering spiritual companionship to members of her local Quaker Meeting, and can see that even by listening to someone in her Meeting, there may be a confusion of roles:

> I don't think I'd explicitly offer it within my own Meeting, because I think if somebody wanted it they probably wouldn't want somebody from within the same Meeting, either, but that said I do quite a lot of listening, still, and we have quite a lot of mutual listening as well, and that's one of the issues. It actually can be a bit odd with people in my Meeting, or friends, or people in other churches who know I'm doing this, would start talking about it, or it might be other Quakers from other parts of the country talking about it and then…you can…I guess

> suddenly I might realise ah are they talking to me as me or are they talking to me as someone who's doing spiritual direction?

Mary agreed with this, for similar reasons:

> one of the reasons why I chose to go not only outside my diocese, but also outside my [institutional] church, was because I really wanted to feel that this person I was going to speak to would never be forced to meet somebody I might have spoken about because necessarily, you know, when you're in ordained ministry, a lot of the problems that you have, involve other people you're having to work with and so I spent a lot of time talking to her about that and I wouldn't have even liked the idea that she might then have to go to something and meet them and I'm fairly sure she'll never meet any of the people that I talk about and that makes me feel more comfortable.

Joanne also felt that it was important that her spiritual companion lived outside her area and did not know her contacts, which she felt would help him to be able to be alongside her and hear what she was saying better:

> what I needed was someone who was totally outside of my everyday life who doesn't know the people I'm talking about or the things I'm engaged with and can just stand outside and can just hear what I'm saying and not be influenced by, you know, like if I was talking about something that involved someone that he knew, I don't think that you can listen in the same way. And it's not so that then that person would always take your point of view, I think it's just that they have a clearer picture of what you're saying and can pick up what you're not saying, from what you are, whereas if they're familiar, then they might be supplying the details from their own knowledge so I just think that really helps

It was also important that she did not see him outside of her meetings with him:

> I think also they almost need to be a disinterested person, to not, to not be involved in aspects of your life, other than that one thing, you know, he doesn't have any vested interest in what I do or don't do, in terms of, you know if I were involved in a church I wouldn't want it to be someone who was also in that church. No and because it's such an odd relationship and in a way it's quite like an intimate relationship I don't know that I would want to see him just in the street, no because you do end up talking about stuff that you know I feel is incredibly private and I just would not talk to other people about and I don't know how comfortable I would feel continually seeing him, I think it just works better. It's within an hour's travel and that's fine for me.

Companionship Connectedness and Caring

It was very clear, from all the interviews, how important this relationship is for these women and whilst it was important to hold the boundaries and not let the relationship be one of friendship or demands, at the same time several of the women felt a sense of connection to their spiritual director, and reflected on the nature of this:

> …it's not two non feeling people just sitting and talking for an hour and then you go off, you do kind of build a – well I suppose you would either grow to hate each other or you'd grow to like each other! and particularly, no I get the sense that he cares about me, and I care about him. I'm not involved in his life and vice versa but you know you can't help but become sort of a bit attached really just because from my perspective, here's someone who's offering this incredible gift of listening, you know and I suppose from his perspective he gets a

> window into my life, and sees what's going on in my life, the things that I'm struggling with, and I think you'd be inhuman not to, not being kind of sucked in, in the same way that you would do if you were someone else in someone's life, you can't help but kind of just start getting a bit emotionally involved, so and I think that's quite important too because I don't think I'd want someone who was just, you know where it could just be anyone. You know, anonymous. (Joanne)

For Joanne this means that there has to be a feeling of liking for each other:

> …it was kind of important that even if I made choices that would not be that person's choices, that would not influence how they responded to me, so I think it is important that you know that you can like each other. I don't think you can work with someone if you didn't. I don't think you could have those kinds of conversations and sit there and do the kind of warts and all thing

At the same time she values her director's ability to challenge her:

> it's always been quite subtle actually about how he says things to me when it's something that would be difficult for me to hear I mean that's quite often when a poem appears, but he does, he does because this is about my wellbeing, you know whilst not like – and actually it is something that I sort of knew that I needed but no matter how lost I would seem to other people, what I really did not want was a rescuer. I really did not want that and I knew that because I had experienced a rescuer, and I hated it but what I knew I needed was someone who could cheer me on from the sidelines whilst I rescued myself. And if I looked like I needed some hints about how to rescue myself, that they would pass the hints over, they wouldn't do it for me, but they'd help me see what I needed to be doing. And I think that that is quite a sort of subtle skill, because I wouldn't be told. I'm really, really bad at

> taking – you know I find advice very difficult, even when I need it but he's able to suggest things in a way that I can accept that will just kind of prompt my thinking or let me see something that I couldn't see.

For Sarah, these things were related to the modelling role of the spiritual director;

> I was at the Byzantine exhibition (icons and so on), and I went to a talk about it and talking to a friend who's an icon painter, and there's something in the Orthodox tradition about the icons modelling a relationship with God, and so the Virgin and the Child. There're all sorts of different aspects of that relationship and in a sense, but they're also modelling the relationship with the viewer, if you see what I mean. In some ways it's easier to relate to the saint or the figure in the icon, and in a way maybe the spiritual director is modelling a relationship, it's not a direct relationship with God, but it's not in the way of a direct relationship with God, but it could be helping. So there's listening and challenging and maybe suggesting

Sarah also valued the feeling of being affirmed, which helped her to feel confident about the relationship right at the start:

> [when] we came to the end of our first session and she said well usually we like to have a prayer time at the end, …I said that sounds really good and we talked a bit about the silence and so we decided we'd have a quiet time and then she said a prayer in the quiet time and that was fine. But one of the things she prayed was 'dear God, thank you for [my name] I thought that was so lovely! And because I was feeling a bit kind of not very worthy in this sort of general sense (that I ought to be doing more of this and less of that…) and wondering about what right I had to take up this person's time and not quite sure about

> all sorts of things. So it was just really affirming to be prayed about in this way. I was very grateful for that.

Her comment about her right to take up time is interesting in the light of her experience of her previous director talking too much about herself, and ending up with Sarah feeling responsible for her, it seems that when her new spiritual director prayed for her by name, this enabled her to feel that she would be received and could have this time for her needs to be met.

This sense of liking was also important for Mary:

> There's a whole load of reasons why I like it and enjoy going, I mean first of all we get on quite well, it took a while, and she's somebody who probably isn't easily accessible, she's quite kind of contained herself which I think is useful in spiritual direction. But we do seem to have sort of hit it off

She describes her feelings for her spiritual director:

> I feel enormously affectionate towards her even though I don't see her for months and months and I don't really know anything about her. But she's an important part of, she's been alongside me in this process, and she's an important part of it.

So this spiritual companion has clearly not found it necessary to tell Mary much about her personal life, and I asked her if she felt a sense of connectedness:

> Yes I do, I feel very fond of her. I mean she's physically not somebody who's at all tactile, and that's probably part of the training but I am you see, and I remember that after I'd seen her about twice, I just wanted to kiss her, you know, when I was leaving and she seems to quite like

> it, although she never would make the move, and I'm very fond of her and in a detached sort of way

I take this to mean that she feels very fond of her but not responsible for her. Whilst she felt her spiritual director was not as challenging as most, like Joanne, Mary also valued the support and the suggestions her spiritual director made:

> …she is very good and discerning and she's very supportive obviously and she's quite good at offering you one thing maybe to take away and you know, and I've found it very useful actually and a pleasure to do

Mary distinguished the nature of the professional relationship as being one where there is no sense of obligation or guilt:

> … the thing about her is she doesn't hassle me you see so I know that I can abandon her for months and months, and then just ring her and say can I see you and she will always respond immediately and find me a time, and I don't have to say oh I'm so sorry that I haven't you know, it's kind of like a guilt, not that I do guilt very much but it is a completely guilt free relationship in a way that if you had friends that you abandoned like that, you know, you'd spend a lot of time apologising, and I don't have to do anything like that with her, it's the professional element of the relationship which is also very freeing

So for Mary the difference between her relationship with her spiritual director and with a friend is to do with the responsibility towards a friend of being regularly in touch and maintaining the relationship, which she does not feel obliged to do with her director. There is something here about a lack of possessiveness, and a clearer sense of the limits of her obligation towards her spiritual companion.

As mentioned earlier, Carol also valued the sense of being cared about and held:

> …a sense of being, I don't know really, I think probably held, and I remember crying during it, and thinking what on earth am I crying for, I'm not upset about anything, but just the sense that he was understanding of the issues I was describing to him and that he really cared and although I didn't know him desperately well, I'd never felt that same sort of caring coming from the other person and I think it's a lot to do with personality.

Fiona described the importance with her first spiritual director of feeling loved, and although this relationship later became too much of a friendship, Fiona places a very high value on this aspect of it:

> But the good thing that I learnt from [her] was that all this business is about love, and what she gave me was actually an experience of love, and boy did I need it
>
> CK: you felt very accepted by her as you were
>
> Fiona: cherished, really, I think I'd use that word.
>
> CK: so the space, the relationship that was created there, was a very particular, very special one
>
> Fiona: yes very, yes, and that was very, very precious to me and very confidence giving and all that sort of thing

To return to Etty, in the context of these strands, on 25th November 1941:

> It is as if my relationship with S has suddenly changed. As if I had finally wrenched myself clear of him, when I had imagined I was perfectly free all along. I felt it deep inside me then: my life must be

> completely independent. A few weeks ago when there was talk of all Jews being sent to a concentration camp in Poland, he turned to me and said, “then we shall get married, so that we can stay together and at least do some good still.” And although I realised he meant for our work, his words filled me with happiness and warmth and a feeling of great closeness to him. But that feeling has gone now. I don’t know what it is, a sudden sense of complete emancipation from him, of continuing all by myself. No doubt a great deal of my energy is still invested in him. Last night on the cold bicycle ride, in a sudden flash of insight, I understood the depth of the intensity, the commitment I have made to this man and his work and his life. He has become an inseparable part of me. And with this new part of me I must go on, but alone. Outwardly nothing is changed, of course. I remain his secretary, continue to take an interest in his work, but inwardly I am much less bound. (Smelik, 1986, p 155)

Spier gave Etty the experience of love, and her love for him, her learning from him, his acceptance of her, standing firm in the face of her intensity and chaotic emotions, taught her to contain them herself. This is one of the key benefits of therapy, and happened for her despite the boundaries of their relationship being so blurred. But she realises, quite early on really, that she needs to continue alone, and the process of being released from him proceeds until he dies in 1942. The relevance of containment and learning emotional regulation in the therapeutic relationship is supported by neuroscience, (Gerhardt, 2004, pp 203-206), but their relationship also provides her with a spiritual companion, and on the night he dies she wrote:

> I had a thousand things to ask you and to learn from you; now I will have to do everything by myself. But I feel so strong I’m sure I’ll manage. What energies I possess have been set free inside me. You taught me to speak the name of God without embarrassment. You were the mediator between God and me, and now you, the mediator,

> have gone, and my path leads straight to God. It is right that it should be so. And I shall be the mediator for any other soul I can reach. (Smelik, 1986, p 516)

Etty has not only gained the strength to cope with life, she has also developed a relationship with God, with the help of Spier as her mediator, or spiritual companion, and is now in a place where she feels able to offer this to others. Their relationship was multi faceted, and although sexual boundaries were crossed, and boundaries that today would result in Spier being thrown out of any professional organisation, it is clear that for Etty the transformation and integration was profound as a result, and perhaps for her could not have happened any other way, but I wonder what might have happened in their relationship if he had not died, and if she had survived the concentration camp. We will never know, and because she wrote about this extraordinary process, we have an intimate record of her spiritual and psychological growth, through her relationships, and particularly her relationship with Spier.

Are you experienced?
(Hendrix, 1967)

The quality of the spiritual direction relationship has many aspects, as we have seen. It includes the experience and knowledge of the spiritual companion. This knowledge and experience is not just practical, but also emotional and spiritual. Establishing this in the context of the spiritual companion relationship requires a level of self-disclosure by the spiritual companion, but the degree of self-disclosure, and the content, is important, because there is a boundary to be held here, and the importance of that boundary, and the issue of the nature of that boundary is a key aspect of this exploration.

Joanne feels that it is important that her director had experienced life's struggles and was 'further down the road':

> …since I did have this intuition that I was going to be going down a rocky road, I think I wanted to know that it was someone who'd gone down that road, and was further along it than me, and my spiritual director told me enough about his own life and things that I knew that he'd had to do a lot of wrestling with things and that was important to me, I didn't want, you know, one of the things that I'd kind of felt about institutional church was [that] I had nothing in common with white middle class people who'd never had a problem in life, particularly not men, and so it's ironic that my spiritual director is a white man.

He self-disclosed sufficiently to reassure her, to enable her to feel confident in his ability to be with her, but clearly did not impose his needs on her, in contrast to the experience of some of the other participants. At the same time, she comments about his gender, about which more later.

So for Joanne, Fiona and Sophie it is important that their spiritual director has enough self-awareness, experience and training to be able to create the kind of relationship in which unresolved issues or agendas do not intrude, and that they take their own spiritual life seriously. They are looking for a depth of relationship, and a particular quality of relationship. This is supported by Pickering (2008, p 122), and also by McLennan Tajiri's (2009) research.

6 'Light Flows' by the author

My next visit to [my spiritual director]…

We saw so much, just looking at this piece (above), which for me is about the experience of living in God's light and love, which flows through me and around me. Where (Who? What?) does the light flow from? Where is it going? The piece has edges, which represent a window, but my sense of it is that this is a lens to the infinite, that there are no boundaries, no limits. She put it upside-down, she held it against a window and light came through and it looked amazing. She was reminded of a stained glass window by Matisse, and showed me a picture of it (Perscheron and Brouder, 2004, pp 218-219) – I could see why. She has lent me the book.

Be still and know – experiences of training

Five of the participants in the study, Susan, Sarah, Teresa, Alice and Sophie were in training at the time of the interviews, on four different training courses, including the Ignatian course and the Norwich Centre course. Carol and Barbara also spoke about their training, and Barbara was involved in training as was Jane.

In general the courses all teach basic listening skills in the same way as an initial training in counselling would:

> …there's a lot of overlap between the spiritual direction skills and the counselling skills, very much so. What else do they need? They need to be aware of their own spirituality, they need to be very in touch with themselves, they need a lot of self-awareness, and we help them with that all the time, we use a lot of reflective techniques, a lot of meditation, space to really reflect on how things are affecting them. We're helping them get in touch with themselves and there's not a set way of doing it, their way is important, and then it's kind of discovering

what works for them and also what seems to work with their directees, and certainly look at gender issues along the way. (Jane)

Jane is a trainer on the London Ignatian training course which is a three year training:

> …we're trying to build on that in the third year, to deepen their experience of it and open them up, really, to realising that these issues could come into spiritual direction very easily and it's to actually be able to face those issues within themselves, to be aware of what's difficult for them, what's not difficult for them, and to kind of realise that male and female are different. On the other hand there are lots of similarities, but it's really to sort of open them up to kind of both of those really and be aware that sometimes it's about being on the same wavelength as the other person, and not getting mixed up with issues that are really nothing to do with the spiritual direction or maybe more personal.
>
> **CK**: so understanding the boundaries with the relationship and where it might tip into counselling or perhaps other things that might be needed and perhaps being able to refer appropriately
>
> **Jane:** yes and with counselling you see, many of our students are counsellors as well as training in spiritual direction so they have the basic skills and then they actually have to spend some time reflecting on where their boundary is between spiritual direction and counselling because there is a huge overlap.

The various courses also offer resources for use with seekers:

> I think it introduced me to things I had no experience of at all, and it gave me an awful lot more knowledge, superficial knowledge I must admit, about people like the mystics and you know some of the great

> figures from the past who started different movements and all that sort of stuff, and we also learnt a bit about techniques that you can use with people, we were introduced to some resources, different collections of words and prayers and the practice of doing a guided meditation, we did one almost every week (Carol)

Generally all those who had engaged in training had found it inspiring and beneficial, with occasional difficulties:

> …in the first year the tutor was a bit… well meaning but a wee bit patronising and kind of, she didn't really stretch me I don't think, personality again probably, whereas I really clicked with the tutor in the second year but the first year not particularly. (Carol)

This was a disappointment but Carol was able to gain much from the second year of the training:

> I think the best thing about the course was … it increased my confidence and my ability to think yes I can do this.

Susan had found the experiential learning very helpful:

> the practical side of it is there right from the beginning, and we split the time, half practical directing one another, half input and sort of meditations and reflections ourselves, we have to go through it ourselves to experience what it feels like, but it's very helpful because you get to, you know, part of the session would be, you will direct, someone will come and bring something with them, for you to talk about and you direct them for twenty minutes and then you swap and someone else does it and everyone else in the small group will watch and reflect and give positive feedback and growing points and more positive feedback! It's a very nurturing environment to do that but it gives you, it's good because it gives you a 360 degree view and

> feedback of what's happening, because all those people feed back, the tutor feeds back, your directee feeds back and then you can feed back your experience of it so I think that's just a very, very helpful way of learning

Group exercises were also very good sources of learning:

> we were talking last week on our course about symbols and the importance of symbols for people and they put out on the floor these everyday items, and we were asked to pick one up and look at it and see what it was like and then see how that thing reflected in us, it seems like an odd thing to do, but it's quite helpful, it helps you see that even the smallest things of our life, the smallest details of life, can be given meaning and significance and almost like everybody's, you know, whatever someone brings into direction, however insignificant and unimportant it may seem when you're listening to it, if it's important for them, and if they want to bring it here, there, it is important, it's given dignity and worth, God gives it dignity and worth and respect and it was just very, very helpful. The detail of people's lives, you know, God loves all of it

She had gained far more than just basic skills:

> I found doing this course very, very helpful, because it's been, when you go into ministry it's such an overwhelming thing, it's all your time and all your life, and it's been for me absolutely an oasis, you know, the training and the experience of, you know, developing skills and gifts in direction, it's just fantastic. I come away every week and I always travel back with this one person, and we just, we can't stop talking about it! It's just a revelation, the whole experience of it is such a revelation, it's so amazing that God works in this way and can work in this way with us. It's fantastic!

Speaking about a different course, Jane explained:

> the third year is sort of 'right you've got all the theory now, you've experienced quite a lot, now start trusting this experience and let's see what you're going to be doing' so we have, quite, we have a mixture of work really, we obviously use the exercises of St Ignatius, and we've had the theory of that in the second year, very substantially so when we're moving into the third year it's now 'OK how are we going to use this theory? How do we use it with a directee?' so we do that with presentations and supervision and experience and practice, they still get into their twos and threes and sometimes they're actually directing in front of the whole group or half a group

There is no 'theory of spiritual direction'; at least I have not come across one, although one of the aims of the Norwich Centre course is to develop one. Much of what is written draws on psychological theory, such as Jungian and various stage theories, and to an extent on person-centred theory, which is well suited to enabling the development of accompaniment, in terms of being alongside, staying in the frame of reference of the seeker, and offering acceptance.

Having a formal faith does provide a language and concepts which can be helpful in enabling understanding, insight, and communication, but it can also create barriers, even between those who appear to share the same faith. I think some reflection on spiritual diversity is important in training, in order to broaden out understanding:

> The bigger thing for me is just the growing awareness of how spirituality is different for others…
>
> **CK:** the diversity of the group really, the different spiritualities

Alice: yes and what's meaningful to one might not be particularly important to another, and me as part of that

CK: yes and having the experience of people perhaps not really understanding in a way your spirituality which has happened to you I know (yes) and perhaps that's an experience you might not have had, had you been in a completely Christian group (Alice)

Barbara spoke of an exercise which had been particularly helpful in helping to broaden her understanding:

> …when I was doing the spiritual direction [training], one of the things we were invited to do was look at a spirituality with which we were not familiar, not from an academic or well mind point of view, but from an experience which was a very interesting exercise. We were given about three months, to decide which one we wanted to do and then examine it. And I chose, because of living in [X], and I didn't know anything about it and had all sorts of, well, if you like, worries, I chose Islam, and through that, through a good friend I managed to go and spend two sessions with an Imam, … who is a young, he's probably late thirties, he'd done a full six year course that they do, he was a local man, born and bred, and one of the most wonderful people I have met, …….I said to [him] do you know, how do you feel about your acceptance in God's eyes, and his whole face lit up and he said I know I am loved by God … which was an interesting thing about where therefore does our Christian idea of grace and being accepted unconditionally and all that, fit with what I've just heard?

Joanne is clear that she operates on the very fringes of Christianity, and although her spiritual director is a Christian, she struggles with many of the concepts:

> I don't like the word spirituality, I don't like the word religion, I don't like any of that kind of stuff and yet I do recognise that's what I'm doing, I just hate the labels for it. But you know when you kind of start doing that, but not within a kind of religious framework, as you say you're not in the same starting place, it's not like I was a blank sheet and arrived at the church with no ideas of my own, no values of my own, I did have, and I do have my own sense of ethics, and I do have, you know, not a well thought out sense of how things are, I wasn't that interested in science either, I'd heard of evolution but I'd never really thought about it, I've never thought about why is there something rather than nothing, where have we all come from, you know one of the things I find hardest about Christianity is that in my way of thinking, there's no need for a creator, things just are. So my way of relating to what I've decided God is, is not the same as someone brought up with a kind of God the Father and Jesus the Son, and you know I just don't have any of that and I don't have a kind of journey of faith as such.

This requires from the companion/director an ability to be open to whatever the seeker brings, without feeling threatened or feeling the need to correct or direct.

"We cannot have a God with a name" (Lanzetta, 2007, p 21)

An important area for me is the accompanying of those outside traditional faiths, those who would perhaps describe themselves as 'spiritual' but not religious. I believe this is a key area, because so many people in contemporary society describe themselves in this way, and are clearly seekers, and yet spiritual direction appears to assume faith, and mainly Christian faith. A visit to the website of Spiritual Directors International (2009c) is revealing. This is an organisation which has a very broad base, and yet there is nothing there for those outside a religious tradition.

Lomasson (2005, pp 167-168) talks about the spiritual homeless, and in the context of a Jungian understanding of psychology, believes these seekers need to grow up and root themselves in a tradition and a community before they can offer spiritual companionship to others, but she also identifies those who have 'wrestled so deeply with their own faith tradition, including with its shadow and their own wounding, that they have opened to the "deep universal" beyond tradition'. This is where I locate myself at present, although I do not feel I am 'homeless', far from it! I feel I have come home to myself, and in doing that feel more connected to that which I call God, and also to the whole universe. I also believe some come to this place without having had a faith tradition and Joanne is a good example of this when she says that although she participates in Christian activities on occasion, she rarely attends church, and would not call herself a Christian. As Beverly Lanzetta writes:

> It is not that this reality is not religious or against religion; it is just that the 'religious' is already contained within it; there is no need to demarcate its presence. The sacred does not need grand adornments to dress it up or formal gowns to make it palatable. It is already and always more than we can possibly bear and far more than we can imagine. Further, there are some of us who are hermits and wanderers, who feel more comfortable in silence, on the edge, without a religious home. We cannot have a God with a name. For every name would be somehow blasphemy; and even though we honour names – Jesus, Buddha, Mohammad, Moses, Krishna, Woyengi, Corn Woman, Goddess Durga, Great Spirit – we are called to claim none as our own. This is our faith. This is our calling from that mysterious oneness *concealed within life itself.* This is our secret. But it is an open secret that cannot be contained. (Lanzetta, 2007, p 21)

Barbara, like me, was very interested in David Tacey's book (Tacey, 2004) feeling that:

> …particularly that David Tacey book, …it's really important to be able to work with people who don't work from a particular faith structure and that you can do that. It's challenging, but you know it's important because actually they are on their own kind of exploration and they need, I mean they may not need somebody who's got a particular faith or your faith may not be particularly important to them, what's important is that they feel validated in where they are

I asked Carol if she felt it is possible to work with someone outside the faith traditions:

> yes, I think it is, because if people are interested in their spiritual development inevitably that will lead them to God in some shape or form, and what they're not, or this particular woman I'm thinking of, what she's not interested in is conventional churchyality as she calls it. And I have a lot of sympathy with that

Tacey (2004, p 76), describes himself as a spiritual educator and not a religious educator, and notes that in working with young people, 'As far as religion is concerned there is a tremendous lack of fit between youth spirituality and religion' and therefore he 'deliberately work[s] behind religious lines', in lecturing, as I do myself, to a very diverse group, which includes many who are outside traditional faith traditions. Like Jeff (2007, pp 83-90), I believe that these seekers have a need for companionship, and that it is important that there are spiritual companions who do not restrict themselves to working within a faith tradition. Above all else though, I feel it is important that anyone seeking to offer themselves as a spiritual companion to others lives from a spiritual place in themselves, which they have engaged with, reflected on and continue to develop, with the aid of their own spiritual

companion. As McLennan Tajiri (2009) found, in her research into contemplative presence:

> For spiritual directors, the most important application of this study lies in their own personal spiritual journey and the profound integrity and commitment to which contemplative presence calls each person. Spiritual directors-in-training can learn from the participants the value of a balanced lifestyle, a rich prayer life, and the support of supervisors, spiritual directors, and peer groups. Instead of seeing contemplative presence as something that one turns on and off for directees, directors can instead view spiritual direction as another mode of practising the way they already live. (Ibid, p 258)

McLennan Tajiri is a transpersonal therapist, but I believe that it is here that the person-centred approach has much to offer. It too is 'a way of being', when understood and lived as it was developed to be. It is not enough to apply the core conditions of empathy, acceptance and congruence as techniques in the therapy room; they need to be lived as a personal philosophy.

She mentions the importance of supervision in supporting the spiritual director/companion. This was something felt to be important by the participants in this study. Group supervision was provided for the trainees on the London course:

> …people take a turn to bring something and then it is discussed. The role of the supervisor is to help you deal with your problems because normally what you bring is how you feel and what happens in you when you are directing someone, disturbances or resistances in the directee or yourself. You are helped go deeper and find out why you get these feelings and how to change if needed. (Teresa)

It was clearly a very important part of the training, as it is in counsellor training. Teresa saw the group as a valuable resource:

> You can get one to one supervision. If you need a supervisor you can get it but sometimes a group might be more fruitful because people would bring a case which might be helpful to you in the future or you may recognise something that happens to you without you being aware. So I think a group is a good thing, and supportive as well.

The group format was also particularly important for Carol:

> I think to have that little group of women is one of my luxuries! and it feels much more, I feel much more accountable to them… than I do to any minister or anything else like that ….I do feel held and cared for and all that sort of stuff there as well, it's interesting how relationships change, in a way I think that little group has become more for me than, has become for me what my spiritual director was initially, it's an interesting thought.

Sarah, who had had the experience of a spiritual director disclosing and using the relationship for her own ends felt:

> One of the questions I have … is about how, … supervision or support for directors, you know and especially newer directors, to stop the sort of, to help people set the tone right and maintain the right kind of relationship, and make sure that it's reviewed from time to time, and that sort of stuff, because I think that's quite important, to be able to feel you can stop a relationship, without it being seen as a criticism of the director.

Joanne felt reassured that her spiritual director has supervision, as well as working on his continuing development and felt that she benefitted from it:

> I know that my spiritual director has supervision and I know he does things like retreats and stuff and I think those are important things as well, I think that the spiritual director does need support and ongoing training in what they're doing. But they also need to be looking after their own spiritual life in whatever way is appropriate for them, I do think I get the benefit of him doing that.

Emma, like me, had found it difficult to find a supervisor for her work, because like me she tends to know many people and that causes problems finding someone who will not feel compromised by the boundaries of other relationships:

> I now do have supervision which I'm much happier about, not often but it's enough to make me realise that yes I'm doing the right sort of things and I do belong and I have belonged for quite a long time to the Spiritual Direction Network so I guess that's been going on for five years or so, so that's quite important as well as a support mechanism.

I think it is important to be realistic about the limits of supervision too. It is only as good as the trust within the relationship. If the spiritual director is unaware or chooses not to explore an issue, the supervisor cannot help with it. It is clear though that supervision, peer group, supervised group or individual supervision, is an important source of support and insight and is to be recommended, not just in training, but perhaps on an ongoing basis. The frequency of supervision may be decided depending on factors such as availability and need, rather than, as in the counselling world, imposed by professional bodies as a requirement for practice.

Wandering backwards and forwards – the boundary between spiritual accompaniment and counselling

This leads me on to the question in several of the participants' minds about the boundary, if any, between spiritual direction and counselling. This distinction is likely to become more necessary with the proposed statutory regulation of counselling and psychotherapy, because if the regulating body believes that someone who is not registered is in fact working as a counsellor or psychotherapist, it will be able to act against them.

Joanne identified issues that were counselling issues as a result of her spiritual direction, but for her, the spiritual direction relationship is the primary one:

> I sort of see the counselling as almost like a subset of, you know it's because in my spiritual journey I hit obstacles, and the counselling is to help me deal with those obstacles,
>
> CK: it's complementing your spiritual direction
>
> Joanne: yes it's a part of it, it's not separate, these are not separate things and correspondingly things that I previously wouldn't talk to him about, I now will, because the spiritual direction thing is all of my life, it's not just about encounters with religious stuff, spiritual life is not just religion …..the counselling has allowed me to be willing to talk, has opened up what I'm willing to talk about but I see the spiritual direction as being the overarching thing, not the other way round. It's kind of a primary relationship in a way! I mean the counselling is every week, so obviously I see her more often than I see him, but I talk to him about where my counselling is going because he asks, and that's really nice because nobody else in my life asks!

I asked Carol where she felt the boundary was:

> I think it wanders backwards and forwards, and a lot depends on what the individual's going through at the time. Because if they're dealing with something that's going on in their life that they really need to talk through, which is not overtly spiritual you know, they need to talk it through. I have actually, I think there's only one person so far that I've suggested that they go and see somebody and get some proper counselling, and they've not done it but they keep coming back to see me, which is quite flattering in a way, but also in another way I think they would probably benefit from you know having, even if it's only a short term relationship with a proper counsellor to help them work through a particular issue they need to work through

Susan felt it was important that the relationship did not stray into therapy, although if a directee was in need of extra sessions, she was prepared to offer them:

> I think, you know if one were going through certain experiences you probably want to see someone more, but I think you have to be careful it doesn't become a relationship of, like a therapy kind of relationship, that's got to be really carefully balanced

Alice, a trainee, who works as a counsellor, was less clear:

> in one way, from how I see counselling, I'm not so sure that the actual qualities are that much different, for a counsellor who chooses not to explore spirituality it may be, but I'm not so sure for me that there's a vast distinction between the two because I can't separate the God bit out of my life and the secular over here and the spiritual in this pocket, and I don't conjure spirituality into a conversation, I try to be who I am.

Jane, a trainer, feels it is a matter of personal reflection:

> …many of our students are counsellors as well as training in spiritual direction so they have the basic skills and then they actually have to spend some time reflecting on where their boundary is between spiritual direction and counselling because there is a huge overlap... Personally I would say that the one big difference, being a counsellor myself and a spiritual director, I would say the one big difference between counselling and spiritual direction is spiritual direction has the focus, the main focus on relationship with, between the person and with God, which then affects their relationship within themselves and their relationship with others whereas counselling would tend to not have that as the major focus. It would be more focused on relationship within themselves and with others.

In some ways, she believes, it is easier for those who are not trained as counsellors, but she also feels the question of exactly where the boundaries are is an individual matter, and that:

> … a spiritual direction session can look like a counselling session without worrying too much about it, that's where the circles are overlapping, but actually if you're only looking at counselling issues, I think you then have to question whether this is really spiritual direction.

Being brought to voice – Do women have particular needs from the spiritual direction relationship?

> O women, whose wisdom has not been heeded:
> we desire that our time will be different and
> we commit ourselves to listen. (Slee, 2004a, p 30)

When I first started this project, I wondered whether women had particular needs from the spiritual direction relationship, especially in view of Slee's (2004b) research. I wanted to explore the relationship women had with their spiritual directors, and in each interview the issue either arose naturally because the participants were aware of my interest, or I asked for their views on it. I also reflected on the interview material in the light of the issues identified in the literature as relating to women's spirituality or women's experience.

Whilst Mary initially was not seeking a female director, she is pleased that her director is female:

> when I was looking for a spiritual director and I talked to my incumbent and he made some suggestions and there's a list of people and I didn't do anything about it actually, and I did say to him I don't think it matters whether it's a man or a woman but actually I think it does make a difference and when I had this suggestion of her from this friend of mine, I think I was glad that it was a woman, and now looking back, I don't think I'd like a man as a spiritual director but then that's difficult to say because it would depend on the man, and there are a few men you meet who just are, you know, would be fine, but it feels like they're in the minority in this kind of area. I don't know, I like it that it's a woman

As she reflected on this, she felt there were a number of reasons:

> …it seems slightly dodgy to say this but I think with men there's always the sexuality issue, I mean that in the purest sense, I think the way men and women interact is different from the way women interact with each other. I think intelligent women are very perceptive about other women, I think you can pull the wool over a man's eyes more easily!

This issue of sexuality was also important for Fiona as she reflected on our conversation:

> I suppose I'm still thinking about the stuff you said about sexuality and think I'm probably not owning up to how important it is that it's on a.. sometimes I can even feel I just can't talk to men in the same way and then I don't know if that's all women or whether it's lesbian women

Mary similarly had concerns about talking to a male director, about certain issues:

> I sort of have, at some subliminal level I had a feeling that woman would be better for me, and I think it's true, I think an intelligent woman's better for another woman really and also you just feel, I don't know, you feel more comfortable, it's easier, you are talking about very intimate things, I mean some of the stuff I've talked to her about I wouldn't have felt comfortable talking to a man about really.

Many clients in counselling, male and female, tell me at their initial assessment that they feel more comfortable with a female counsellor, and I think this may be due to a perception that men can't talk about feelings, drawn from their experience of this. There are some, of course, who feel more comfortable with men. Of course men who train as counsellors can be alongside feelings, but I am also aware that I feel more comfortable talking to

a woman than a man. I think this would be an interesting area for future research. Cooper (2008, pp 85-86) reviews the research evidence in the counselling field:

> A study of gender effects in brief psychodynamic psychotherapy, for instance, found that clients of female therapists were, on average, more satisfied with their therapy than clients of male therapists; and in a subsequent study, were rated by judges as experiencing less negative effect, appearing more trusting and secure, and being less worried about the kinds of impressions they were making on their therapists (Jones et al., 1987)

Mary also felt that perhaps there were different styles of direction, and that this may be related to gender:

> when I was talking…about getting another spiritual director, and talking about qualities of them and so on, you know and [the person I was talking to] he talked a bit about his, and he said you know he's quite kind of firm with me and you know and so you get a sense that there's a lot of different styles out there and maybe some people sort of major on being challenging and I think there is a place for that but I think that I definitely felt that that I didn't want somebody who was playing mind games with me, do you know what I mean? I didn't want somebody who you felt in every session was listening for the 'aha!' that sort of thing you know! Because you can do that for yourself actually and you know the sorts of things you want to talk about and the things that at the moment you don't want to talk about and she's far too intelligent to play that kind of game and that seems to me to be respectful, and I like that, there is a real respect there, and, so maybe there are styles of spiritual direction which work, I hesitate to be genderist, for men, which don't work so well for women, and I have a sort of sense that he was saying you know, oh well I need to go to my spiritual director to be sort

> of have that kind of prod and I thought well actually I don't need a comfort blanket but I don't think I want that.

These issues are explored in some of the literature, for example Bisson (2005, pp 126-129), identifies what he calls masculine and feminine approaches in spiritual direction, whilst acknowledging that some women may prefer what he describes as a masculine-insight approach, whilst some men may prefer what he describes as feminine-feeling approach. He notices that he adjusts his responses to the way of seeking of the seeker, and that I think is key, whilst I also think it is important, as he says, to raise awareness of the differences, which otherwise may be buried in cultural assumptions. My own experience is that I have been well trained in the masculine-insight approach, but it is not my preferred way of being, and I have needed to learn to risk expressing my feminine-feeling approach, which is my natural, more precious (to me) and inner way of knowing, without feeling that I will be criticised for it. In other words, it may be that the awareness needs to be of the dominant discourse, which I see as linear, sequential, action orientated, and seek to hear the stirrings of the culturally undervalued circular, or apparently random, emotionally expressed vulnerability. These differences may be related to gender, but also to culture. Slee saw this in her research where she felt that:

> What Fowler's stage account seems to miss is an adequate account of the role of intuitive knowing, imaginative, metaphoric, and concrete forms of thinking, in the movement to owned, responsible and self-consciously chosen faith. For many of the women in my study, it seems that such styles of thinking and awareness were at least as important in the achievement of a more owned faith as critical thinking and analysis. (Slee, 2004b, p 165)

Slee interviewed thirty women for her study which aimed to examine 'the patterns and processes of women's spirituality and faith development'

(Ibid, p 1). Her participants were all from the Christian tradition, or on the edges of it. In addition to the above, she identified:

> …a dominance of personalised and relational forms of appropriating faith over abstract and impersonal means: faith was worked out in relation to the other, and this is demonstrated in the preference of metaphors emerging from personal life and relationship, the use of exemplars drawn from personal life and narratives centred around issues of inclusion and exclusion from communities of belonging, as well as in the conversational nature of the interview itself, in which faith was articulated in dialogue with the presence of the other.
> (Slee, 2004b, pp 79-80)

A further point she makes is that 'it was not only *what* was said, but the *way* in which it was said, and the para-linguistic features that surrounded and supported the narrative, which indicated the nature and style of the women's faith.' (Ibid, p 80). The importance of attending to personal languages and having an awareness of modes of expression (and also what is not said) is a key finding from Slee's study and one which has implications for those wishing to offer spiritual accompaniment to women.

Slee also identified 'patterns' of alienation, awakenings and relationality in the faith development of the women she interviewed. Alienation is 'a profound loss of self, of authentic connection with others, and of faith' (Ibid, p 81). This may manifest in various ways, and be experienced as stuckness, a phenomenon known well in counselling but which perhaps has a slightly different significance in the context of faith development, and which can be described as the 'dark night of the soul' described by St John of the Cross (2003). I have certainly experienced a version of this alienation, and it led me to reading feminist theology, which validated my experience and enabled me to move towards the pattern of 'awakening' described by Slee. In particular I resonated with the description of 'Finding One's Own Creative Voice or

Sphere' (Slee, 2004b, p 129), this is where the textiles are so vital, but it also relates to taking on a more public role, being less invisible, and even the writing of this thesis:

> For most of these women, the discovery and exercise of their creative talents or particular vocation had been a long and gradual process, frequently requiring courage to stand out against the expectations of others, to be both visible and accountable within the public realm, overcoming their own self-doubt and claiming a voice. Being willing to stake all on the chosen calling and taking the risks of failure, rejection and ridicule, these women's insistence on their right to a creative and public voice had enabled them to break through the impasse of voicelessness, invisibility and passivity. (Slee, 2004b, p 131)

This has been the work of the past twenty years for me, and I have felt it to be a lonely process, with no female role models, particularly in the area of spirituality, until discovering feminist theology. Slee (Ibid, pp 52-54) acknowledges that her participants are well educated women, and also the bias towards middle class women. Although a third of the women she interviewed were women from UK ethnic minorities or overseas, she was unable to use three further interviews because of the risk of misrepresenting them as a result of the difficulties in interpreting meanings across different languages and cultures.

> The difficulties experienced by these women in communicating sensitive material across linguistic and cultural barriers were exacerbated by my ignorance of the cultural customs, speech patterns and taboos operative within the interview, such that I could not find an appropriate hermeneutical key to unlock the meanings which were undoubtedly present within the woman's story. Where the choice was between misrepresenting the stories of these women and not representing them at all, the lesser evil appeared to me to be the

> second option, but I am well aware of the resulting impoverishment to the research.

Mary's spiritual director is also a feminist, which has been helpful to a point:

> I didn't go to her looking for a feminist, you know, support, but it did, yes, I do sort of feel it is there, sometimes as I say I think she's more extreme than I would be, I have to say no I don't think I will do that thank you!

Connectedness is important to Mary and it is in the general style of relating and connecting that Mary feels women differ:

> I think, well women are just different, there are things they do which men just don't do, I mean they do talk, they're prepared to talk about small, trivial things, and listen and they don't feel they have to perhaps act all the time and I don't, you know, I don't necessarily only feel validated unless I've done a million and one things, I am prepared to 'waste' time I don't think wasting time is necessarily unhelpful, and I think women talk in different ways.

Drawing again on the research evidence for psychotherapy, Cooper (2008, p 86) says:

> …there is research to indicate that female therapists generally hold a more positive attitude towards their clients than male therapists (Bowers and Bieschke, 2005); and are more empathic, relational, and less likely to disempower female clients, though not all studies find significant differences on such variables (e g. Zlotnick et al., 1998)

I think there is a need for further research, but I am not sure how the effects can be demonstrated in the field of spiritual companionship, where it would be even more difficult to evidence.

On the other hand, for Joanne, there is an advantage in having a male viewpoint:

> at one point he told me I was being too scrupulous about things, and he didn't come out and say you're too scrupulous – I can't remember how it was he conveyed that to me but he was right and I was, I was obsessing about doing the right thing, rather than doing what it was that gives me the most joy, and I think that's quite an Ignatian thing that the way to God is through the things you enjoy, rather than I think in a way my kind of value system had been more about doing the right thing, you know and I can fall into that trap when I'm thinking I have to make a decision, and I'm more likely to choose doing the right thing than doing what I want, that was the sort of person I'd become….
> a self-sacrificing kind of thing and I could do that, choose to do the right thing but actually in order to grow as a person, I probably need to do the things I most like doing but it's very hard and I don't know whether that's just a woman's thing or whether that's to do with my upbringing and stuff but the idea that you would choose because it's what you like doing and that that's the route to growth and that you wouldn't just be always doing things for other people …so for someone to actually say well you've been too scrupulous, is quite an important thing to hear, and I think for women it's an important thing to hear, I think men are less concerned about – that's my impression, it might be wrong but it seems to me that men are less concerned about doing stuff that's just only for their own benefit where women are more kind of brought up to think that you're meant, you know, that that's wrong. And particularly if you have got other people saying how is it affecting

> your family? so you do need someone who's not just going to point out where you're going wrong, where it's something that's bad for you but is pointing out the way you're thinking about something the wrong way, you know to point out that you're being too scrupulous about being selfish, it's quite a refreshing thing.

This again is interesting because the issue of women and self-care is identified by Bisson (2005, p 124) as one which his female colleagues feel is a particular issue for women (he identifies five areas, this is one), and which needs to be addressed in the training of spiritual directors. Other writers also explore this in different ways in relation to the spiritual direction relationship (Fischer, 1989, p 8, Guenther, 1992, pp 113-144, Ruffing, 2000, pp 131-132, Vest, 2003a, p 196). In fact these authors clearly feel there is a need for an awareness of gender, as they all write about it in various ways.

Fischer's *'Women at the Well'* is written for spiritual directors working with women. The author has written from her own experience, and from a feminist perspective:

> While listening to these women explore their spiritual issues, I learned first-hand how deep and pervasive the results of sexism are in women's lives. At the same time I saw the tremendous gifts and strengths women possess. How, I wondered, could spiritual direction heal this damage and release these powers? (Fischer, 1989, p 1)

Although this book was written twenty years ago, Fischer's book continues to have relevance in today's society, as the issues she addresses continue to affect women, and of course men, as a consequence. Writing from a Christian framework, she gives a feminist perspective on the practice of spiritual direction in terms of 'spiritual direction itself, models of Christian growth, the experience of God, the role of Jesus, modes of prayer,

discernment' and also discusses 'topics which are of special significance to women but are usually not included in discussions of spiritual direction. These are power, anger, violence against women, and women's spiritual legacy'. (Ibid, p 3).

In her chapter on 'Women and Spiritual Direction', Guenther (1992) explores the differences between women and men both as directors and as directees. More women than men seek spiritual direction, she says, and women are also drawn to listening roles. Certainly the women I spoke with who were training all said that their training group had a majority of women, and the same is true of counsellor training. Because women have been marginalised and silenced in the church, both directors and seekers who are women have this in common, although this was not voiced by the women I interviewed, except Emma. Guenther also discusses the concept of spiritual maturity in relation to women and questions the assumptions that underpin Fowler's (1981) study. She looks at the ideal of self-sacrifice in relation to women, who are expected to give to others, saying:

> …while there are scriptural grounds in support of self-sacrifice, **there must first be a mature self to sacrifice**. The spiritual director can assist in the development of that self. (Guenther, 1992, p 127 original emphasis)

This seems to me to relate directly to Joanne's earlier comment about needing to do the things she most likes doing, in order to grow, rather than do her duty.

Guenther also explores the language women use, and how they can negate themselves by the way they speak so tentatively. I think this may be less true today, but still relevant. I had to learn to speak assertively, and even then I

found it hard to speak assertively in relation to my spirituality, until I had the support of my reading of feminist theology.

Women's bodily experience is often very negative, and although in recent years there has been more discussion of it, see for example Beattie (2003, 2008) and Isherwood and Stuart (1998), which influenced me in writing my poem *'Eucharist'* (Kitcatt, 2009b) and also the following poem (Kitcatt, 2005), among others:

I am woman
my body born
with the promise
of future generations

I am woman
my body prepares
the temple of my womb
to bear our children

I am woman
my womb renews itself
month by month
the sacred space within

I am woman
my body fertile and strong
ready to offer space
for life and growth

I am woman
my body bearing
the children of love
connecting to the future for eternity

I am woman
my body sheds no more
the warm red
blood of life

I am woman
my body rests
soft womb within
a tribute to my nurturing sustaining power

I am woman
my body bore the Christ child
bled in sorrow at his passion
my womb the empty tomb

I am woman
my body born of woman
given to man
blessed by God

Guenther also looks at sin and women, and particularly what she sees as the 'eighth deadly sin' of self-contempt (Guenther, 1992, pp 134-137), using the term in the sense of 'a denial of God's love and the goodness of God's creation' (p 136). Certainly low self-esteem is a problem for women, and more recently the pressure of the celebrity culture seems to have made it

more of a problem for men. In my role as a therapist I am seeing more and more young men who feel they simply don't measure up, as well as women. It would be interesting to compare how this may have changed.

Guenther (Ibid) writes about survivors of abuse, although she focuses on sexual abuse, and omits to include physical and emotional abuse, and I would also include spiritual abuse. Again she does not include men in this, and although numbers are fewer, it would have been helpful to include recognition that this does not only happen to women.

Essentially it seems to me that Guenther presents a thorough exploration of the consequences of patriarchal power, and that issues of power, inequality and trust are key issues for women, whether they are aware of that or not. However, an interesting perspective on this is revealed in Flanagan's (1999) study of spirituality in one of Dublin's poorest areas. How culturally and class specific is the activity of spiritual direction? Flanagan believes

> the term 'spiritual direction' carries such elitist overtones, perhaps a 'ministry of hospitality' might best describe the type of response that people seem to be seeking to address the spiritual dimension of issues of healing. (Ibid, pp 155-156)

The participants in Flanagan's study sought a listener who could help them heal, but from a spiritual perspective, to understand the meaning of their suffering, particularly, for many of them, within the Irish Roman Catholic tradition. There was a feeling that counselling had provided what priests would not, or could not, but that counselling in itself did not provide all the answers (Ibid p 155). The issues of power in relation to class are relevant to both men and women, but Flanagan also found seven factors 'which significantly shaped the nature of the experience of God in the interviewees'

lives' (Ibid, p 156): being 'churched'[11] which is something I have not heard of recently in the UK, but certainly is a message to women that their bodies are unclean; the roles in marriage, in particular the subordination of women to men in marriage in the past, but now shifting to the quality of the relationship; being an unmarried mother in a religious context leading to low self worth; 'the prevalence of violence against women'; 'exclusive representation of God with male images'; concerns about the middle class nature of the feminist movement; and the changing role of men, (extracted from pp 156-163). Flanagan believes:

> The seven issues isolated above indicate that it is not possible to appreciate the dialogue between Christian faith and life experience which is going on today without taking gender – the cultural experience of being male and female – into account. While many questions regarding the differences between men and women remain unanswered or are open to debate, men and women's social, and consequently spiritual experience diverges in significant ways. (Ibid, p 163)

I think this shows how crucial it is to have an awareness of social issues, of the impact of class and culture, inequality and poverty, on the needs of spiritual seekers. Flanagan's interviewees wanted the kind of relationship a spiritual companion could offer, but how many spiritual companions minister to the poor and the marginalised? Perhaps, just as counselling has become accessible to those who might not previously have been able to afford it, so might spiritual companionship, through the increasing involvement of lay people. The issue here is not one of payment, of course, since many spiritual companions do not charge, but perhaps one of image and awareness. Even

[11] This is a ceremony held when women return to church a certain number of days after having given birth, and originated in Jewish purification rites.

amongst those I interviewed, who were, I would say, all middle class, some had not heard of this activity, or had believed it to be reserved for clergy.

The term spiritual director seemed to Carol to be gender related:

> I think men are more comfortable with the term spiritual director, I really struggle with that, Caroline, I happily describe myself as somebody who talk about spiritual stuff with people, whereas spiritual direction, you know, it just feels too, uncomfortable

Perhaps that is because of the sense of power being used in the term 'direction'. But she was not sure that women had different needs from the relationship, although she put that partly down to lack of experience:

> I've only had two men come to me to talk about spiritual things, one comes irregularly, and the other is coming quite regularly at the moment… … I don't know that I've seen enough men to know that there is a big difference, because I don't think in the two that I've been working with, I don't think there is, I think it's the individual and every individual is different, and there may well, as the years go on if I continue to do it, there may well be things that emerge, Caroline, but I think at the moment I don't have enough experience of working with men to know that. So every individual is different.

For Susan, a trainee, it is the activity itself which seems suited to women:

> I find that with my current director I've seen since, just at the time, the first director I stopped seeing because she went forward for ordination, because she had to let go of people because she needed to focus and I then had about a year when I didn't see anybody, but in that time I was just sort of left by myself to be discerning what was happening

with me and then I felt, you know, really ready to go forward and started seeing another director and I've seen her for the last about six years I guess

CK: and was it important that they were also women?

Susan: I think so because when I went to go and look for another director, the first one happened to be because that was the person I met, I came to see [someone] here and talked about you know finding somebody and I did ask that it was a woman actually

CK: and was there a reason that you felt that was important?

Susan: it felt more instinctive, I don't know why. I think there's something about direction that is quite a maternal, there's a quite a maternal sense of God about it

CK: right so actually a woman would feel more, that would feel more in line with that I guess

Susan: I think so. I mean I haven't had, only in our direction sessions here have I had men directing me and it feels fine actually. So maybe that's just my idea of it.

It is true, as she later pointed out, that courses generally have far more women on them than men, just as counsellor training does. This may be because the very activity of having a one to one conversation about faith is one which is particularly helpful to women:

> Whilst conversation is a significant catalyst of faith for both women and men, the conversational context of faith may be particularly important for women. If it is the case……that women's identity and faith are embedded in relationship, then the conversational context may be a peculiarly appropriate means for women to articulate and shape their faith, in relation to an attentive and welcoming other.
> (Slee, 2004b, p 63)

This is, of course, of particular relevance to the activity of spiritual companionship. Slee's pattern of relational faith fits here.

Emma was in a similar place to me, since studying feminist theology and thinking about feminist perspectives, she had become interested in how these impact on spiritual direction. In fact she felt:

> I think I've got to a stage now where…if a man came and said could he have spiritual direction I probably would say I think you might find it easier to go to somebody else. It hasn't arisen, since I've done the feminist course, so I did have a man who came a few years ago and it was OK but I think my strength is to work with women

I was interested in this, as I reflected that in fact all those who have come to me for spiritual companionship so far have been women, but that hadn't been a deliberate choice of mine. Emma felt that having done the course she has done:

> having moved in to a new level of consciousness if you like or a new awakening, to some of the damage that's been done over the centuries, by the language, by religious language and society norms, it makes me want to help women move into a place that for some of them is perhaps a bit scary

She owns this agenda, but is aware of the need to be careful not to impose it on her directees. She also feels that she does not want to lose sight of her own roots:

> CK: I think it is quite difficult because if you do speak out like that it often does upset people, who don't like to hear it.
>
> Emma: Yes, yes and also confuses them because they then think we've gone off the rails, which OK we might have done but what they see and understand and all the meanings for them come within the context of the patriarchal Christian culture and I'm old enough not to be able to lose that completely and the Anglican church is very much a part of my backdrop so I don't want to lose it completely, but the edges are fuzzier and so in direction terms I think that is quite a factor
>
> CK: it feels like it's a challenge to accompany somebody with integrity, and transparency and that if it was a man it would be very difficult, because
>
> Emma: all the feminist understanding would, they're unlikely to have got hold of

I was interested to read that my own search for images could be gender related:

> When a woman no longer experiences herself as a dependent female in the social order, and the dominant God images of her faith-community require her to accept a male authority figure, then an often lonely journey in search of images of God which coincide with her new experience of her social identity may be sparked off. (Flanagan, 1999, pp 7-8)

I would not say my process was sparked off by a new experience of my social identity, rather that my social identity has caused me increasingly to resist that bestowed upon me by the church, and the validation I found in my reading of feminist theology led me to have the confidence to walk away, trust in my own experiencing and discover my own means of expression via images and poetry. The process can be lonely, but finding a spiritual companion who can work with my images has shown me that I am not alone, and I can also celebrate my uniqueness. I think it is significant that I am working with textiles, which are, and perhaps always have been, associated with women.

The '*Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola'*, which are very popular in spiritual direction, also merit some discussion here, they are a creative approach to experiencing God by using scripture (or as Jane explained other texts can be used – even the daily newspaper). The directee will be asked to imagine themselves in the story, and experience it as fully as possible:

> Ignatius began taking notes about what he experienced during the year he spent at the small town of Manresa, near the shrine of Montserrat. These careful notes were the earliest stages of what eventually became the handbook called the *Spiritual Exercises. (Jesuits in Britain)*

There are various ways of giving the Exercises, most commonly in a thirty day retreat, but also as a '19th Annotation' which means they are done as part of day to day life.

The London Centre for Spirituality hosts the three year Ignatian Spirituality course, from which I interviewed one trainer, Jane and one trainee, Teresa. However the Exercises featured in quite a few of the interviews:

Emma works as a spiritual companion, and has been part of a number of weeks of accompanied prayer, which originated out of the Ignatian exercises. She rarely uses them any more, but said:

> I suppose one of the reasons I don't use them so much is that I find that … if I'm leading an Ignatian meditation, I'm the one who's got the power and I find that a bit, it's a bit too much of a false situation. But if people are looking and needing to tap into imagination and have never done it before, and an awful lot of people haven't, then it's brilliant, both in terms of just using a secular setting but also a Gospel setting, so I mean Ignatian meditations are primarily about the Gospel meditations and using your imagination for placing yourself in a Gospel scene, and that can be so powerful, and when I'm doing that, then I don't feel the power thing so much, because actually it's Jesus' power and it's within somebody else's, it's happening in the imagination, not because of what I'm saying or doing and it's happening because Jesus is leading the meditation.

So for Emma the issue of power and who holds it is an important factor.

Joanne had been on an Ignatian retreat, Mary feels her spiritual director uses 'Ignatian method a lot', and Carol had struggled with the exercises which her spiritual director had encouraged her to try:

> I think one of the things that he has done with almost everyone who's come to him for spiritual direction eventually, is the Ignatian exercises, and for him that was a really important thing to do and for me it wasn't and I think in a moment of weakness I thought well let's give it a go, and I don't think it was appropriate for me. And I've only seen him once since, I stopped doing the practice exercises and explained to

> him I just don't think it's for me. I used the excuse of my dad dying, and said can I really just sort of say, you know, I've taken such a lot of time away from it and I've not really got the passion to go on with it, and I'm more interested in other things, than I am in using the exercises in the right way, to develop my spirituality in that way because I think, I want to develop my spirituality, I still do, but I don't want to go down this, well to me it's like a dead end street, a cul-de-sac

For Teresa, a trainee on the Ignatian course:

> In the Exercises Ignatius gives many rules for the discernment of spirits which are precious tools to help understand the ups and downs of spiritual life and how to deal with them in a beneficial way. Though direction can be done without the exercises, using the Ignatian tradition is very rich.

And she goes on to explain that they can and should be adapted:

> In the annotations, at the beginning of the book, there is something about adaptation in order to respect where the retreatant is. Ignatius himself didn't lead everybody through the whole process, it wasn't systematic. For some people the exercises of what he called the first week were enough. He really adapted to people in order to give them what they could take in.

Her trainer explains that this is particularly true in considering women:

> …that's why we spend so much time with the adaptations. There's an exercise where Ignatius invites you to kind of be in touch with a king and you're following the king rather in a battle type way, and this is not

> going to work for a lot of women, this is when we spend a lot of time, it's one that needs adapting, to the person. And so we spend a lot of time in looking at the adaptations and how to adapt without losing the essence of what Ignatius was really about so and we help the student with, even using the experience of the person, regardless of whether they are male or female, and listen to their experience, and adapting things to their particular experience. So although that brings up gender issues, it brings up all sorts of other issues as well, which crosses the gender things, so it's about being very with the person, getting to really know them, and today was really all about noticing kind of what the gender issues could be, and looking at, what might be right for a man, may not be right for a woman, and if a woman is directing a man, you need to be aware of those issues, or if you're a man directing a woman, so it's just highlighting the awareness of those things. (Jane)

In considering and researching this, I came across a book called *'The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women'* (Dyckman et al., 2001), in which the authors draw on their experience, and that of women making the exercises, to make a substantial contribution to the literature, which they saw as 'meagre' (p xiv) at the time of writing. They, like me, are concerned about the invisibility of women's spiritual experiencing, and they draw on feminist epistemology, theology, historical studies and psychology. They are careful to stress that they do not speak for all women, but seek to make visible aspects of women's experience:

> One of the characteristics of contemporary spiritual culture, however, is its feminisation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that far more women than men seriously explore their relationship with God, engage in retreats or approach a serious vocational choice through discernment. Anecdotal evidence also indicates that currently more women than

> men make the Spiritual Exercises and that increasing numbers of women give the Exercises to both women and men. (Ibid, p 67)

Like Jane and Teresa, they stress the importance of adaptation, and state:

> The one facilitating the Exercises has the primary responsibility for adapting them. This person assumes the responsibility to reverence the culture of the Exercises from deep personal experience and love, to reverence the reality of the one desiring to make the Exercises and to bring these two 'cultures' together in a way that respects both. The rest of the task requires that they stay out of the way of the direct relationship between God and the seeker. (Ibid, p 69)

The issues they identified were language, power and oppression, attitudes to the body, violence towards women, women's invisibility and silence, grounding in subjective experience, relationality, embodiment and connectedness, the psychological development of women's sense of self, and ways of knowing and learning, drawing on, amongst others, the work of the Stone Center (Jordan et al., 1991, Jordan, 1997, Jordan et al., 2004) and of Belenky et al (1997).

Certainly these are all issues I can resonate with, although they were not identified as issues by my participants, apart from Emma. This suggests to me that King (2005, p2), quoted earlier, is right, it is not a natural way of thinking, and does have to be 'intentionally developed'. Emma's studying of feminism made her aware of issues which previously she was unaware of, and my reading also raised my awareness, and explained much of my difficulty.

Although not identified as such by the interviewees, I believe the concern not to be told or directed can be seen as an example of women resisting power

over them. I also believe that the concern not to let the boundaries of the relationship slip into friendship, because of a fear of feeling responsible for the other, can be seen as gender related, since women are socialised to care for others, and can lose their sense of self in the process. Joanne's spiritual director's encouragement not to be 'over-scrupulous' is relevant here too, as is the concern felt by participants that they yearn for acceptance, to be listened to and not be judged. All of these things, I believe, are gender related, to some degree, and although perhaps not exclusively true of women, these issues have consistently been shown to relate to women's position in society, and to women's experience.

'Too religious to be religious' (Baldwin, 1987, p 50) – the contribution of the person-centred approach

Bearing in mind the themes which have emerged from the data, about the nature of the relationship and the skills and experience needed, what might the person-centred approach have to offer?

In an interview in 1987, Carl Rogers, the founder of the person-centred approach said:

> Recently my views have broadened into a new area about which I would like to comment. A friend, who is a minister, always kids me about the fact that I am one of the most spiritual people he knows, but I won't admit it. Another time, a group of young priests were trying to pin me to the wall, saying that I must be religious. I finally said to them and it is something I still stand by, 'I am too religious to be religious', and that has quite a lot of meaning for me. I have my own definition of spirituality. I would put it that the best of therapy sometimes leads to a dimension that is spiritual, rather than saying that the spiritual is having an impact on therapy. But it depends on your definition of spiritual. (Baldwin, 1987, p 50)

He goes on to describe his experiences in large groups, where 'there is something going on that is larger than what is evident', and in relationships, where 'power and energy get released which transcend what we thought was involved' (Baldwin, 1987, p 50). He had turned his back on institutional religion having had a strict Christian upbringing, but in later years, and particularly after the death of his wife, he became interested in the paranormal. This was not always viewed as a positive development, and there are those who believe he lost his empirical approach by being open to these possibilities, and yet it is in line with his openness to ideas which gradually encompassed a broader spectrum than when he was younger,

(Kirschenbaum, 2007, pp 486-487), perhaps because he no longer felt so constrained by the possible consequences for his career, or, as I believe, as a result of his continuing growth and living of the way of being which is the person-centred approach.

Kirschenbaum (2007, pp 477-491), gives a fascinating insight into Rogers' spiritual development, through interviews with those who knew him, but also through having access to Rogers' journals. However:

> While he continued to be interested in the spiritual arena, it claimed only a small part of his remaining time and attention. His work in international conflict and peacekeeping became his dominant interest. (Ibid, p 491)

To me, that could be seen as a consequence of his increasing openness to other realities, and his spiritual growth.

It is not my purpose here to debate Rogers' spiritual life, but to indicate briefly how he developed through his own practice of the approach, and how it seems to have led to spiritual growth. Others, and in particular Brian Thorne, have written about the person-centred approach and spirituality (Thorne, 1991, 1998, 2002).

Perhaps this is the point to draw together the threads of the themes which emerged from the interviews, and to explore in greater depth the relevance of the person-centred approach to the relationship between seeker and companion.

The participants in this study have spoken about various aspects of the relationship they have with their spiritual director/companion, how they chose them, what qualities they looked for, what problems they have encountered and how they feel about the relationship. They have spoken of their experience as seekers, companions and in training. I feel I have not been

able to do justice to the full complexity of the different aspects of each individual person's experience, and I hope they will forgive me for any omissions. They had the opportunity to comment on a draft of this analysis and the contributions I have chosen to use, if they wished. They could also withdraw at that point, but none did.

A sympathetic ear?

> …there appears to be a belief that being 'person-centred' involves somehow being 'nice' to people, listening to them with a sympathetic ear but doing little else. (Wilkins, 2003, p 1)

The term person-centred has been appropriated by many to indicate that they pay attention to the needs of others, but without an in-depth understanding of the term as meant by those trained in Rogers' approach and the subsequent developments of the theory. When I trained as a person-centred counsellor in 1995-6, the literature on the approach was manageable, in that it was possible to be aware of most of what had been written. Now the situation is very different, due, in part, to the role of Pete Sanders and Maggie Taylor Sanders and their publishing company, PCCS Books, in commissioning an extensive range of titles from authors experienced in the person-centred approach, including four relating to spirituality. International conferences, and an international journal, have enabled the voice of the person-centred approach to continue to be heard across the world. Yet, despite all this, and perhaps because it is out of tune, and counter to the dominant culture of fear and distrust, it remains poorly understood.

In 1987, Rogers spoke of the impact of the person-centred approach on education, counselling, and nursing (Baldwin, 1987), but he did not feel it had had an impact on other professions. Since then, the influence of the approach has been eroded, particularly in education, but despite that it is still

one of the major approaches to counselling/psychotherapy and as above, practitioners remain committed to developing the approach.

In the field of spiritual direction, Rogers' work was used as in counselling, as a way of helping people learn to listen, but it is only now that the potential of the person-centred approach is being explored at depth in relation to the spiritual direction/companion relationship.

I feel that meeting the participants in this study and listening to their experience has deepened my understanding, and having explored the various themes, I have gained insight into the way in which I might be able to accompany seekers. My way of being is, of course, deeply anchored in the person-centred approach. I can hear it in my responses in the interviews, and I hope and believe it permeates my being, even if I am not always the way I would wish. My task here, I feel, is to explore the ways in which the theory and practice of the person-centred approach works to enable me to offer myself as companion to others, and the way in which I draw on my personal knowledge and experience in order to do this. From this perspective, I hope to draw out some recommendations for training, for those who may wish to use this approach.

In reflecting on the themes, it seemed to me that many of them relate to issues of power in the relationship: the issue of not wanting to be told, of not wanting to feel judged, of acceptance, of staying in the frame of reference of the seeker, of not wanting to feel responsible for the other, of wanting the person to be someone based away from the location of the seeker, all carry implications about the way power is shared or experienced. This is also true, I believe, of the quality of presence required to enable the seeker to be drawn deeper. The issue of the boundaries of the relationship also relates to power and control, so it is the issue of power and the person-centred approach which I particularly wish to focus on first, along with the related issues of trust and equality.

Rogers (1978, p 14) states:

> The politics of the person-centred approach is a conscious renunciation and avoidance by the therapist of all control over, and decision making for, the client. It is the facilitation of self-ownership by the client and the strategies by which this can be achieved; the placing of the locus of decision making and the responsibility for the effects of these decisions. It is politically centred in the client.

It is important to note that this is not about empowering the client. We are aiming to create the conditions in which the client can empower themselves (Tudor and Worrall, 2006, pp 230-231):

> [Rogers] …locates personal power centrally as one of the manifestations of actualisation, and by implication therefore as one of the observable outcomes of effective therapy. This, we think, suggests that he saw personal power as one aspect of the organism in its natural state. A therapist, therefore, does not, and maybe cannot, *empower* her clients. It is simply not in her gift to make them powerful, or more powerful than they already are in potential. She can, however, ensure at least that she does nothing to impede or diminish her clients in their expression of personal power. At best she can help make a space within which they feel free enough to be personally powerful. Paraphrasing Gertrude Stein on Paris, Rogers (1978 p xii) says: 'It is not that this approach gives power to the person; it never takes it away.'

This is manifested by the non-directive attitude as Barbara Temaner Brodley writes:

> Client-centered therapy is also distinguishable by the extreme emphasis the practice places on the non-directiveness of the therapist. In client-centered therapy the therapist is intensely mindful to respect and protect the autonomy and self-direction of the client. The client is viewed as the expert about himself and the therapist views himself as expert only in maintaining the attitudinal conditions in the relationship with the client, not as an expert on the client.
>
> The therapeutic relationship is inherently an unequal relation in which the client is self-defined as vulnerable and in need of help and the therapist is self-defined as one who can help. An element in the person/client-centered perspective is the belief that unequal relationships are naturally, to some extent, hurtful or harmful to the persons involved in them.
>
> Unequal relationships are sometimes necessary, for example the physician and patient or the teacher and student, because they offer desired benefits. But the person/client-centered perspective fosters the abdication of the pursuit of power and would argue for minimizing the hurt or harm by sharing the authority as much as possible.
>
> The client-centered therapist is particularly mindful of the harmful potential side-effect of the unequal therapeutic relation and tries to share his authority as much as possible. This awareness and effort influences all of his actions in relations to the client. Basically, the client centered therapist's view on this matter is – the authority for the client's experience is the client and the way the client uses the relationship is always left up to the client. (Brodley, 1986)

In respect of the spiritual direction relationship, although the seeker is not generally vulnerable in the same way as counselling clients, there is still an issue of power, and perhaps it is more subtle and less obvious than in the

counselling relationship. This also relates directly to the issue of not wanting to be told, highlighted by several of the participants.

Natiello (2001, p 62) lists six qualities of relationships that develop in a climate of collaborative power:

1) openness (all information is fully shared)
2) responsiveness (all needs and ideas are carefully heard)
3) dignity (everyone is respected and considered)
4) personal empowerment (each person affected feels free and responsible to participate fully)
5) alternating influence (impact on group process moves from one person to another as a result of self-awareness, wisdom, experience, or expressed need)
6) cooperation (rather than competition)

She goes on to say:

> The concept of collaborative power is implicit in Rogers' work. Although it was quite late in his career when he came to realise that his theory had such strong political overtones, his early, persistent belief in the actualising tendency led him into a radical departure from the predominant dominator-subordinate model of therapeutic relationships. (Ibid, p 63)

Tudor and Worrall believe that this kind of personal power implicitly recognises that the organism is also pro-social:

> It seeks, that is, both to exert personal power, and to belong to a family, group or community. The dynamic tension between these two tendencies means that personal power is not an excuse for selfish or

> reckless self-assertion, and that the exercise of personal power will necessarily take self and other into account. We think this line of thought answers some of the criticisms of therapy in general, and of some therapies in particular, that they derive from and promote a selfish individualism. We think also that it challenges the practice of some therapists who attend more to an individual client's rights than to his familial or social responsibilities. (Tudor and Worrall, 2006, p 231)

This can be seen to relate to Heelas and Woodhead's polarities of 'individuated subjectivism' and 'relational subjectivism' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005).

Issues of power emerge when the therapist responds from his/her own frame of reference, especially if s/he is regarded as someone with status by the client (which is likely). As Proctor states, it does happen, although it should be rare, that the therapist responds from their own frame of reference:

> It is then that there is the greatest potential for the negative effects of the power held by the therapist in the relationship. This is recognised in person-centred theory, but it is also acknowledged that with these communications there is also the potential for the positive use of power. Generally these are the most risky comments that a person-centred therapist will make, and it is important that they are given great consideration and also be considered in clinical supervision. (Proctor, 2002, p 96)

In view of the comments made by the participants in this study, this should be considered as vitally important.

Issues of historical power i.e. the experiences of power and powerlessness in the histories of the therapist and the client, can mean that while the core

conditions can provide a corrective experience for the conditions of worth previously experienced by the client, it may be hard for the client to perceive these as genuine.

Khatidja Chantler (2006, p 48) believes that even though our intent may be to be non-directive, absolute non-directivity is hypothetical. She feels that the operation of power can be hidden by believing in the effectiveness of non-directiveness, that it can obscure the way that issues such as social location will influence practice. Intentions may be 'good' or non-sexist, racist, etc but may have the effect of producing racist/sexist/disablist outcomes. She argues that it is 'not sufficient to be well-intentioned, but also to consider, in the context of therapy, the key theoretical and practice components of the orientation and the power relations they speak to'.

Chantler (2004, p 128) also argues that we need to pay more attention to structural inequalities, in training we need to explore prejudice, power and privilege that may well be operating out of awareness, and to redress the balance by paying attention to the differences between people rather than focusing on sameness.

Was Rogers blind to the impact of being white, heterosexual, male, western, able-bodied, educated? Does the person-centred approach turn a blind eye to issues of structural power?

Proctor believes not:

> Rogers' theory has been misunderstood to focus exclusively on the concept of the individual, rather than on the individual in relationships and social context. However, PCT[12] already theorises the role of

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> power in the constitution of individuals with respect to the conditions of worth. ….[and is] ideally placed to work with socially constituted and positioned individuals. (Proctor, 2002, p 103)

Barbara Temaner Brodley writes about the actualising tendency:

> If this *organismic* tendency ……exists, then its specific processes in individuals are obviously affected by many factors including specific inherited characteristics, the person's history, and immediate and remote physical and social environments. (Brodley, 2006, p 39)

This includes the unequal and spiritually impoverished society in which we currently live in the Western world.

Another aspect of this is the ability of the person-centred practitioner to offer unconditional positive regard, which has also been described, and experienced, as non-possessive warmth (Mearns and Thorne, 2007, p 97). It is this non-possessiveness which I believe is an important aspect of the relationship which would contribute to an ability to hold appropriate boundaries. Possessiveness is generally a result of wanting to control, and therefore linked to the power issue, and to boundaries. What seems important here is that there needs to be a sophisticated understanding of the qualities that are offered by the person-centred practitioner. The core conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence are far more complex than they sound. Being in relationship offering oneself in this way is in itself a challenging practice, and a lifetime's work.

Training in the person-centred approach aims to highlight areas where acceptance is difficult, because although if asked, many people will say they do not judge others, this is unrealistic, and demonstrates a lack of awareness, which is soon revealed through the process of training in large unstructured

groups. Only once an awareness of judgement has been raised, can it be processed and either let go of, or put to one side. This then allows for deeper empathic understanding.

The ability to offer the three core conditions needs to be well-developed with a sophisticated understanding of the nuances and a great deal of self-awareness. In the context of the spiritual companion relationship, this way of being can provide the quality of relationship which is sought by the participants in this study. It can be a challenge, however, to stay within the frame of reference of the other:

> In the person-centred approach the client's frame of reference is what determines the content of therapy, and applying it to spiritual accompaniment it is the same, the work has to be within the frame of reference of those who we seek to accompany. I may have experience which I might offer, but the goal (if any) is theirs and the route is theirs. My frame of reference is not an equal ingredient in this model, and must not get in the way. If the seeker has no belief in a transcendent being, it doesn't stop my prayer for them, but they would not know about that unless they asked, nor would they know how I see the space I am holding between us (just as my clients in therapy don't). I would ask the seeker how they conceptualise their spirituality and spiritual growth and how they feel they want to honour that. I would ask them if they have a way of being with the sacred and how. Even if they believe in a transcendent being it may bear no relation to the experience of God that I have. (Kitcatt, 2007c, pp 26-27)

It is clear from this that anyone seeking to offer this must feel able to venture into the seeker's world without losing their sense of self, and without fear. One of the main needs in training is to develop the capacity to risk oneself in this way, and also to be able to hold ambiguity and paradox.

> Riet Bons-Storm (Bons-Storm, 1996) explores how often women's actual experience challenges the dominant cultural ideals of what it means to be a woman. She questions the male bias in the prevailing dominant theological and psychological discourses. She asserts that women are often silenced when they attempt to tell their pastoral counsellor about their experiences, because they are misunderstood at best, considered mad at the extreme. Certainly this resonates with my own experience. (Kitcatt, 2007c, p 27)

This is a strength of the person-centred approach, which has no techniques to flee into or impose, when things get difficult. Practitioners learn to be with the most challenging of feelings and ideas, without absenting themselves, rescuing, diverting, diminishing or analysing. This is a way of being which is characterised by the development of increasing empathic understanding, acceptance and congruence.

However, I believe these core conditions of the person-centred approach are necessary for the spiritual companion, but not sufficient. There needs to be an added quality of presence, as described by Rogers (1980, p 129), and explored by McLennan Tajiri (2009), which creates the environment for spiritual growth. This, together with the spiritual development necessary to be able to relate with presence, would provide insight into the complex issue of boundaries, and sensitivity to the implications of changing them, which is not achieved by imposing codes or regulations. That solution, in my view, simply creates a kind of impasse.

Chapter 4 Conclusions?

The words of *'Easter'* by Patti Smith (Smith, 2006, p 123),
especially her incantation at the end, are running round my mind…

It is not just that I am writing my conclusions at the beginning of Lent, but more the sense of integration and resurrection that has grown as I have stepped back to look at my process through this research and the point I have reached in myself though reflecting on it all. I have a belief that we are born complete, and deeply connected to the divine, but life often tears, breaks, and shatters us. I see the spiritual process of becoming or homecoming as being about reconnecting with that sense of completeness, which perhaps we will achieve only in eternity. This study, through the textiles, poetry and relationships which thread their way through it, and the process of reaching this point, has a great significance to me as a testimony to my personal growth and transformation.

This is a point in time to draw conclusions. But what conclusions are possible? There are always new insights; different layers unfolding even as I write. I am also aware I feel shy about making claims for my work, and I have been through a process of working with that, in order that I don't present weak conclusions. These will be my conclusions now, a time to stop adding, altering, to allow a moving on into the mystery of what happens next……

I believe that this study has revealed some interesting insights into the hopes, expectations and concerns of those seeking a spiritual companion, including myself. It has also highlighted the complexity of the relationship which is engaged in, and of particular interest are the ethical issues raised.

This study is important because I have researched the experience of seekers, and in particular women seekers, and I have included spiritual directors and trainees making this a more comprehensive study showing this relationship

from different perspectives. Their voices, and mine, are central to the presentation of the data. I believe this study breaks new ground in this respect as I have not been able to discover a similar project. Those accompanying seekers will need to be aware of the issues raised here, in particular, whilst spiritual directors may argue about professionalization, or the influence of therapy and its 'norms', these women have stated their expectations, and some of these are related to the influence of that culture, in particular the main focus of this study around boundary issues. The arguments need to be based around research such as this, into the needs and expectations of the seekers. I believe this study has an important contribution to make to the understanding of this relationship, to the awareness of spiritual companion/directors, and for the training of spiritual companions.

I believe I have achieved this by ensuring that the participants have been involved in the transcribing and in the presentation of the data, and also in my way of being as a researcher, in my way of responding in the interviews, and in subsequent contact. The person-centred approach allows the participant to be where they are, without judgement, and I believe this was significant in enabling the seekers to express their experience and to feel heard. All those who expressed an opinion were happy with my presentation and interpretation of the data, only minor adjustments were requested in order to protect confidentiality further, and to clarify points made. I believe this increases the reliability of the data, because it shows that I have not appropriated it for my own ends. As Mearns and McLeod write:

> The primary objective of the person-centred researcher is to give an account of the frames of reference or perspectives of research participants. In practical terms this objective will often be fulfilled by detailed descriptions of these perspectives. In many instances description will constitute an adequate conclusion to the research process, since merely opening out the frame of reference of a person

> or group can be an informative, useful, and powerful end in itself. At times, however, the researcher as an individual trained in the social sciences, will develop her own perspective on the material and will wish to present this analysis alongside the accounts of the participants. What is important, from a person-centred stance, is that the researcher's "theory" has no special status as regards validity. Meeting the participant as an equal involves not claiming to be able to explain his actions more adequately than he can himself. (Mearns and McLeod, 1984, p 388)

Knowledge and experience

So, what knowledge, experience and training does this study show are necessary in order to be able to offer spiritual accompaniment to others, and especially women?

The key finding is that the majority of these women want a relationship which is separate from day to day life, with a person who is away from their circle of acquaintance. They do not want to feel responsible for their spiritual director/companion, and do not want to know more about the companion than they need to know in order to assure themselves of the companion's ability to stay alongside them where they are, accept them, and provide a space where they can feel safe to explore deeper into their relationship with God or the sacred. They need to feel they can explore and question and not simply accept they must believe what they are told to believe. This person is not a friend in the social sense, but is someone who is warm, caring, and committed to the relationship. It is not a reciprocal relationship; it is one where the needs of the seeker are central. It is most often a relationship which supplements or complements the relationship with a religious institution, and one which provides a sense of connection. This relationship allows the seeker to be where they are, in contrast to the institutional church

which so often seems to require us to be where we are not, and when we are not, it criticises us, and calls us, to use Anne's words, a 'heretic'.

To seek a spiritual companion, in a formal sense, one has to be aware that such persons exist, and that they offer companionship to lay people as well as clergy. One needs to be able to access information about them, and the majority of participants in this study found their spiritual companions through their churches, or through church related events. Those exploring a vocation or training for ordination are required to have spiritual direction, but it is also clear that those ordained women who participated in this study used it to support their vocation and found it a valuable relationship. The lay participants sought a spiritual director for similar reasons, to deepen their faith, explore the meaning of spiritual experiences, and also often because this relationship provides an opportunity to engage at depth with one's own spiritual becoming, in an environment which they required to be accepting and warm, in a way that many had not experienced within the church.

For Anne, it was important that her spiritual director was not a priest, because she feels she is a 'heretic', and felt that would not be acceptable to a member of the clergy. Joanne also feared being judged, as she had been within the church, her spiritual director is a priest, although she was careful to interview him to make sure he could 'cope' with her. Carol also felt she could speak more freely to her spiritual director than she could in church, although she had concerns about his emphasis on the Ignatian exercises. Others saw members of religious orders. There was a sense in several of the interviews, and I have it myself, of being somehow 'too much' and of needing a person who can receive us. The precipitating reasons for seeking a spiritual companion varied, but were similar in that they (and I) were looking for a space within which they would be allowed to explore without judgement, and would not be told what they should believe, what they should do, or where they should be going. This is very much in line with the person-centred

approach, which believes we are each the expert on ourselves, and can be trusted to find our own way, given the right conditions in relationship.

I think that this study shows the role that church events play in making seekers aware of the existence of the activity of spiritual direction, and in view of the numbers of seekers both within and outside the various denominations, it might be valuable to consider how to raise awareness. This may be happening naturally as more lay people are training and experiencing this, but I do have a concern for seekers who are not connected in any way with a faith group, who remain outside or beyond religion and who could benefit from this, if they were aware of it. I have found Etty to be an inspiration in this respect, and I hope by including her voice I have been able to provide some insight into the possible process of those outside the institutional church. I also feel it is important that it does not continue to be perceived as elitist, that it is accessible to everyone.

I have explored some of the guidance available to those seeking a spiritual director, whilst noting that the participants in my study chose to meet the person, and did not mention asking any of the questions suggested by Spiritual Directors International, listed earlier. Joanne, however, described herself as interviewing her prospective spiritual director. I also did not ask those questions, except to clarify the limits of confidentiality.

The need to be allowed to be where one is, and not be directed, was important in these interviews. This can be seen as an aspect of the misuse of power, where one person consciously or unconsciously directs another to a particular agenda. An understanding of the contribution of the person-centred approach in respect of collaborative power is helpful here, I feel, and gave me insight into the reasons behind this concern. Equally important, I feel, is an understanding of issues of power in relation to gender, and here the feminist literature has much to offer.

The subtleties of the inappropriate use of power are often difficult to detect, can often be open to defensive justification, or denied completely. It is a life's work in developing self-awareness to be able to engage openly and honestly with this, as we can uncover different challenges to our ability to be alongside someone all the time, just by being alive. Experiential training with an emphasis on group work can be helpful, but I have also known people simply to become more and more skilled at turning things around on the other, the more psychological knowledge they gain, so it is no guarantee. I don't know if recordings are ever used in training in spiritual accompaniment, but in counsellor training they provide an excellent way to reflect on their responses and to see how they impact on the client. I would recommend that these should be used, and also reviewed by tutors, who often through experience can pick up nuances of agendas which the trainee can be totally unaware of.

I believe that the person-centred approach has much to offer in this context. It is an approach with an underlying philosophy of trusting the person to find their own way, and so trained and experienced practitioners will be sensitive to staying in the frame of reference of the seeker. However, I was struck by Paintner and Beckman's adaptation of a quote from Levine :

> In this passage, Stephen K Levine is speaking about psychotherapists, but his vision can equally be applied to spiritual directors and so, in brackets, I have replaced some of his words to illustrate this:
>
> > In fact, in their practice [spiritual directors] function more like artists than like scientists…They must, to be effective, let go of theory and be sensitive to the experience in the moment.
>
> (Levine, 1997, p 10, quoted in Paintner and Beckman, 2010, p 25)

The theory may be important, but the relationship is key.

Self-disclosure and also withholding of information are equally complex to judge. How much is it appropriate to reveal? I imagine this varies with each person, but one way of approaching this is to discuss the reasons knowledge is sought, without making it into the kind of power game that can be played by some in the therapy world.

That is where I believe a commitment to our own spiritual becoming is essential, because a regular spiritual practice, and engagement with our relationship with that which I call God, or the Divine, will allow us to become more open and less defensive.

This is also important, if not essential, in order to offer the quality of presence described in this study. Speaking about this quality in the conclusion to her study, McLennan Tajiri says:

> For spiritual directors, the most important application of this study lies in their own personal spiritual journey and the profound integrity and commitment to which contemplative presence calls each person. Spiritual directors-in-training can learn from the participants the value of a balanced lifestyle, a rich prayer life, and the support of supervisors, spiritual directors, and peer groups. Instead of seeing contemplative presence as something that one turns on and off for directees, directors can instead view spiritual direction as another mode of practicing the way of life they already live. (McLennan Tajiri, 2009, p 258)

Not all spiritual companions will be by nature drawn to contemplation, and those outside a formal faith may have very suitable practices that are equivalent to prayer. The commitment to engage with our own spiritual becoming, and to explore and deepen our experience of God or the Divine, or other appropriate way of naming the sacred, is, I believe, essential.

Engaging in our own practice and exploring our own spirituality with a spiritual director or companion will provide material for training sessions, and can be used in practice sessions while in training, in order to experience the process. I have not been convinced of this argument with regard to counselling, since it is not possible to create to order issues for therapy, they arise in their own time. I believe, however, that the activity of spiritual accompaniment is different, and that those who have not engaged in this exploration themselves, cannot offer companionship to others, no matter how empathic and accepting they may be.

Certainly being able to offer the quality of presence described by the participants, and the ability to accompany, depends on some, and perhaps quite a substantial, personal experience and knowledge of the process of spiritual becoming.

Boundaries and beyond…

It is Ash Wednesday, and my spiritual companion is holding a 'Creative Eucharist'. It is nearly eighteen months since I have attended a Eucharist, because I have vowed only to attend inclusive services which do not require me to say things I don't believe. Ash Wednesday is potentially risky in this respect, with its connotations of sin and impurity. I am also, by going to this, blurring a boundary. This, I believe, is not inappropriate, but I am more aware of it than I might have been, prior to writing this thesis. She will be wearing her cassock, she will be presiding, she will offer me bread, and wine.

When I arrive, I mention I have not been to a Eucharist for some time, and someone says 'there is no need to confess', but I was not confessing! What I

was saying was – ‘this is a significant day for me, I have chosen this carefully, I am feeling moved to be here’. But I didn’t get the chance to say it.

I enter the space. It is large, brick floor; under floor heating makes it warm. There is the scent of incense. Black pots of many different shapes and sizes have been placed around the room. We are invited to choose a place to sit, either on the floor, or on a chair.

I sit in the February sunlight, near to a large and a small pot. The large pot has a candle burning in it, and I can see the heat rising in its shadow, and its shadow appears and disappears as the sun shines and moves behind clouds. The pot is not really black, it is glistening with rainbow colours, tiny specks, stardust, we are stardust, remember we are stardust and to star dust we return – sounds much better than the words we say later, ‘remember you are dust’ – there is dust on the pot too, and on the floor, sand between the bricks also glistens and there are tiny fragments of shells. The words of the Eucharist are few, the sharing deep, and a shared meal after.

I am glad I went. It marks a point in this thesis, an end point to the writing. I will visit my spiritual companion tomorrow in her role as my spiritual companion. She has had the data analysis to read. I hope she feels comfortable with what I have shared of our meetings. The boundaries today feel right to me, she was creating the context, and I was part of that. It is connected to spiritual accompaniment, and in a way is a form of spiritual accompaniment.

7 ‘Ash Wednesday’ by the author

I have written two *'Ash Wednesday'* poems, three years apart, it just happened like that, and only when I wrote the second did I remember the first. I include them here as they demonstrate my spiritual growth during the course of working on this thesis, and are evidence of a process of transformation which is the goal of organic research, although whether my choice of that method as part of the bricolage actually led to this is hard to say. I believe it was a significant part, and the other significant part was choosing to stop attending church. The inner peace and increased self-acceptance I have felt and the growth I have experienced since that time is enormous, and I find that very sad, but perhaps, at some point it will enable me to return….

The first poem was written in February 2007:

Ash Wednesday

Death?

You mark me with ash

And I remember

I am made of stardust

I came from the dust of stars and to the stars I will return

Penitent?

Cleaning my soul?

In your image you made me God

My soul in your image

Who says it's tainted and impure?

You mark me with ash

And I remember

How Christ died for love

How he was betrayed

How they turned against him

And it killed him

And still he loves us

And I remember

How I have been the betrayer and the betrayed

And I remember

That for me so far

There has been no resurrection

(Kitcatt, 2007a)

Three years later, following my experience in the barn and having created the textile piece above, I wrote:

Ash Wednesday 2

Space, scent, sunlight

White walls, black words

Shadows grow and fade

The black pot glistens with stardust

And the ash is love

And the ash is eternity

And the ash is stardust

And we share the love

And we share eternity

And we are all stardust

And we are one

And in the desert

The forty days

A time of reflection

A time of realisation

To truly know

The meaning

Of that, and how

It led one man to

Go beyond the boundaries

Of life

For love

(Kitcatt, 2010)

I think the key area, which has been highlighted by this study, is around the many aspects of boundaries. I do not remember ever exploring them in such depth, or in the context of issues of power, although in counselling they are generally connected to issues of trust, and client safety. I started to wonder if the current emphasis on the need to protect the vulnerable by regulating and controlling is a result of women having a voice in society which they have not previously had. Women, on the whole, have not been brought up to seek out risk, their aggression is usually expressed emotionally rather than physically, and it is women and of course children, who are most often the victims of abuse. I would be more convinced of the arguments against regulation in counselling and psychotherapy, if the opponents were those who are marginalised, excluded and vulnerable. At the same time, I believe it is naïve to think codes of practice or regulation will completely solve the problem of exploitation and abuse, I see the issue as a symptom of a deeper issue of inequality in our society. I believe it is important to take into account the gender of the seeker, and to be aware that women may have particular needs which relate to issues of power. The idea of boundaries as a betrayal of trust is an important one to consider, in the context of the nature of the relationship being sought and offered.

The interviews show that the relationship with a spiritual director is a very precious one, and I think the data suggests that the boundaries need to be carefully negotiated and regularly reviewed, because each individual situation

will be different. Supervision of the spiritual director can be helpful here. At the same time I think it is a kind of friendship, but is it a professional relationship or not? What boundaries are appropriate, and should they be held at all costs? When might the holding of boundaries become abusive or a betrayal of trust? I feel that has to be an individual, and informed and prayerful decision, by both parties to the relationship. And maybe, just maybe, the relationship space is beyond boundaries, in the realms of the spiritual where there are no boundaries?

Training in spiritual direction needs to include space to explore the issue of boundaries in depth, in relation to each individual person's situation, and a high level of self awareness is important here, as it is in order to listen and be present with empathy and acceptance. I believe both the person-centred approach and contemporary gender analyses of structural power are relevant here.

The boundary between therapy and spiritual accompaniment is sometimes unclear, but needs to be reflected on. For Joanne the spiritual direction relationship was the main one, and counselling was undertaken in order to help her progress in her spiritual growth. Alice saw a considerable overlap, in that for her all counselling is also spiritual accompaniment, and for Jane it was a matter for individual reflection. My own view is that there is a difference, because the intention of the relationship in counselling is to work with people experiencing difficulties such as relationship issues, poor mental health, abuse, bereavement, etc, and whilst the person may also explore these within the context of their religious or spiritual beliefs, therapy is not focussed primarily on their relationship with God, or their spiritual life. I see the intention of the relationship with a spiritual companion as focussing on that, and whilst other issues may arise, they are not the main focus.

Gender

At the start of my research, I said that I hoped to 'highlight some of the knowledge about women that needs to be integrated into knowledge about humanity, and to attempt that integration in the context of this research.' I believe that the women whose voices are heard through this research have contributed this knowledge in respect of the expectations, and problems they have shared, and in particular to the issue of ethics and boundaries which came up in various ways, but particularly in respect of the boundary with friendship. I had not anticipated this, and found it fascinating to explore. Whether this is particularly a gender issue cannot be stated with absolute certainty, but the concerns around it and my understanding of issues of power suggest to me that it is likely, and that further research, perhaps with men and those of other classes and cultures would be helpful. I hope that this is a valuable contribution, and I believe it does relate to the concerns of women in particular.

Limitations

A limitation of this study, which was deliberate, is that I interviewed only women. This means that no comparison can be attempted, and makes it harder to be able to state a definitive difference, even if the numbers of participants made that possible. I have been very surprised by the lack of research into the activity of spiritual accompaniment, and particularly the experience of seekers, even though it is probably engaged in by relatively few people. I think more research would be interesting and helpful, and one avenue of investigation would be to research the experience of men.

Another limitation is that of lack of diversity, and it would be interesting to interview those from different class backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic minorities, as well as those with disabilities, to discover their

experiences. I also feel research with those outside the institutional church, and outside the Christian faith would be important. What are their needs? And how might this relationship meet them?

I conclude that this is a complex relationship which requires commitment on the part of the spiritual companion to their own spiritual growth, alongside a person-centred approach to being alongside the seeker, and also a sophisticated awareness of the issue of appropriate boundaries, with particular reference to the needs of women.

Finally

When I started this research, and decided on my methodology, I was interested in using Organic Enquiry (Braud, 2004) as a part of the bricolage, because it allowed the method to evolve. Both the method and the data unfolded in ways I had not expected and could not have anticipated. I had no thought, at that point, of using my poetry, song lyrics or textiles as part of the analysis and presentation, or as a method to reflect on the meaning of the data. In fact at the beginning I had only just started to work with textiles, and to see their possibilities in expressing my experience and exploring my relationship with God. It was the encouragement of my supervisor, as a result of having a poem published, which allowed me to include aspects of my processing which normally would have remained in my personal, research and spiritual journals. I had learned to keep this aspect of my being separate, especially in academic work, even though it has always been the place from which I work. I particularly like the fact that I have combined using computer software with textiles and poetry in the analysis, because they do represent my way of processing and reflecting on information. All the songs and poems have meaning for me in relation to the process of interpreting and presenting the data. I was interested to discover, having used my own poems, and two of Patti Smith's songs, her perspective on writing poetry:

> …what matters is the work: the string of words propelled by God becoming a poem, the weave of color and graphite scrawled upon the sheet that becomes His motion. To achieve within the work a perfect balance of faith and execution. From this state of mind comes a light, life-charged. (Smith, 2010, p 65)

That 'light, life-charged' can illuminate, and for me it has been a source of inspiration and insight, as I have engaged in the process of this research.

I have also found Etty to be an interesting and at times challenging companion through the process, her insights and her experiences have been valuable sources of illumination for me, and I hope also for those reading this. Including some of her diary entries gave a voice to someone outside any religious institution, and therefore insight into a process which evolves in that way. On 18th August 1943 she wrote from the camp at Westerbork to a friend, Henny Tideman, and included these words from her diary:

> You have made me so rich, oh God, please let me share out Your beauty with open hands. My life has become an uninterrupted dialogue with You, oh God, one great dialogue. Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on Your earth, my eyes raised towards Your heaven, tears sometimes run down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude. At night, too, when I lie in my bed and rest in You, oh God, tears of gratitude run down my face, and that is my prayer.
>
> I have been terribly tired for several days, but that too will pass. Things come and go in a deeper rhythm, and people must be taught to listen; it is the most important thing we have to learn in this life. (Smelik, 1986, p 640)

Etty died in Auschwitz on 30th November 1943.

I have revealed my own spiritual concerns and my process of engagement with them, and I have also revealed my own relationship with my spiritual companion. I am grateful to her for allowing me to do this. I certainly feel transformed by the experience, and it has opened up new possibilities for me to explore.

I have not wanted to impose my meaning on the reader too much, as I have wanted to allow the reader to engage and reflect from where they are, just as I am advocating a spiritual companion or seeker needs to do. I have, however, shared my reflections to allow transparency, and for a judgement to be made of my influences in reading the data. I hope that I have struck the necessary balance in this; it is a risky approach, both personally and academically, but it is, as stated earlier, completely in keeping with the philosophy of the person-centred approach.

Dancing Barefoot...

8 'Harlech Beach' by the author

It is warm for the time of year. I reach the beach having walked through the sand dunes. The sand is wet and firm. I take off my shoes and socks, and, for the first time in years, I feel the sand beneath my feet. It is cold and hard as I walk out to the water's edge. I stand at the edge of the sea where the

next wave runs around my feet, the sensation cool, flowing, round, over. The sun glistens on the waves, barely a whisper of wind, the sound of the water, gentle lapping, not crashing, the sensation which moves my feet… the sight, the sound, the feel, the strange music of the water draws me in…..

I am

dancing

barefoot…….

Appendix 1 Information Sheet for Participants

This research is for my Doctorate in Education. Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research. Please note that you may withdraw at any time during or after the interview.

Aims of the study

In my pilot study I conducted life story interviews with three women:

1. A woman who remained within the church
2. A woman who had left but retained her Christian faith
3. A woman who did not have a faith and perhaps never did have.

The interviews highlighted the importance for all of them of feelings of connection or disconnection in relation to their experience of the institutional church. This had a direct impact on their relationship with and understanding of the spiritual dimension.

I am researching the relationship women have with their spiritual directors. I am looking at my findings in the context of the training and experience of those offering spiritual direction.

Research Design and Method

A search will be made of the substantive literature.

In order to understand better the needs of seekers, and the ways in which these courses aim to train those offering spiritual direction/companionship I propose three parts to this research. I want to build on my previous research and interview:

4. Six female seekers who have spiritual directors/companions

   I am aiming to discover the participants' experience of the relationship with their spiritual director/companion. What do they feel they gain from it, what do they find helpful and what (if anything) unhelpful.

5. A female (if possible) trainer from the London course, and either use my own experience of ours, or one of the other facilitators (both are men).

   I am aiming to explore the curriculum design, content and methods of delivery, and assessment of each of the two courses. What do

they/we believe is necessary in order for a trainee to become a spiritual companion?

6. Female course participants about their experience of training, at least one from each course.

   I am aiming to learn how the trainees experience their training, why did they choose it? How do they feel it is contributing to their development as spiritual companions? Are they working in this role and if so how do they feel they have benefited from the course? Where does this all fit in the context of their spiritual becoming?

7. Four spiritual directors about their experience of accompanying female directees.

   I am aiming to understand the relationship from the perspective of spiritual directors. What training have they had? What do they feel spiritual directors need to know in order to be able to offer companionship to others? What do they feel is important to be able to accompany women?

Ideally participants might have experienced or been trained in other approaches, and it would be especially helpful to interview seekers who have had experience of traditional 'spiritual direction'.

Ethical issues

The study will be conducted in line with the guidelines of the university and also of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy by which I am bound.

The courses will be named, and therefore it will not be possible to offer complete anonymity to the trainers, however it will be possible to offer this to the course participants and to the spiritual directors and directees and they will not be named in the thesis. I will keep anonymity and confidentiality to the extent it is possible in each context, and limits to this will be made explicit so that informed consent can be given by participants.

The transcript of the interview will be given to you for your final comments/qualifications if you wish to make any. I hope you will also respond to any subsequent questions that may arise as the data is analysed. The tapes will be kept securely and marked with a reference number which will not identify the interviewee. You will be able to choose a pseudonym if you wish. You will be given the relevant parts of the analysis for any further comments and to allow for any issues of misrepresentation to be discussed and resolved as far as possible.

The data will be available to my supervisors, and may be used for conference papers, journal articles, and possibly publication in book form. The final thesis will be available to my examiners and on completion will be available from the university library at the University of East Anglia.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on 01603 617709, C.Kitcatt@uea.ac.uk or at the Norwich Centre, 7 Earlham Road, Norwich NR2 3RA.
My research supervisor is Esther Priyadharshini, Centre for Applied Research in Education, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, Tel: 01603 592858

Thank you very much for helping me with my research.

Caroline Kitcatt
01 June 2008 (Revised November 2008)

Appendix 2 Confidentiality Agreement

Caroline Kitcatt University of East Anglia Doctorate in Education

Confidentiality Agreement

I, …….(name of participant) agree that Caroline Kitcatt (the interviewer) may audio record our interview on …….(date).

I understand that the recording will be used for research purposes. A transcript will be made of the recording, and the interviewer may use this as data for her thesis for Doctorate in Education, for conference or other papers relating to her research, and for publications. Appropriate measures will be taken to conceal my identity.

The study will be conducted in line with the guidelines of the University of East Anglia and also of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and the interviewer will observe the strictest confidentiality at all times.

I understand that I may ask the interviewer to stop recording at any point. I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point during or after the interview.

I understand that the recording will be kept securely and marked with a reference number that does not identify me.

Signed……..(Participant)

Date……

Appendix 3 Email invitation to participate

An increasing number of people are seeking what has traditionally been known as spiritual direction. Once the preserve of priests, in recent years both within and outside the churches, people visit a spiritual director or companion for help and support in their spiritual lives, and these are not always Christian, although predominantly the directors or companions are ordained or lay Christians.

What leads people to seek a spiritual director? What do they look for in choosing one? What is important about the relationship? How does it impact on their spiritual lives? What training do spiritual directors have? What do they feel is important in the relationship with directees?

I am researching the relationship women have with their spiritual directors. I am looking at my findings in the context of the training and experience of those offering spiritual direction. I would like to interview women who have a spiritual director and also spiritual directors (female or male).

I am looking for people in Norfolk or London (for logistical reasons) who would be interested in participating in this research by being interviewed for around one to one and a half hours. Interviews would be face to face and recorded. Participants will be anonymous. This research is for the final thesis of my Doctorate in Education.

If you would be interested in taking part, please contact me on ckitcatt@norwichcentre.org

Appendix 4 Research Participants

Pseudonym	Category	Gender of first spiritual director	Gender of second spiritual director
Alice	Trainee	N/A	
Anne	Directee	Male	
Barbara	Director/Trainer/Directee	Male	
Carol	Director/Directee	Female	Male
Emma	Director	N/A	
Fiona	Directee	Female	Female
Jane	Trainer/Director	N/K	
Joanne	Directee	Male	
Mary	Directee	Female	Female
Sarah	Directee/Trainee	Female	Female
Sophie	Trainee	N/A	
Susan	Trainee/Director	Female	Female
Teresa	Trainee/Director	N/K	

N/A These participants did not have a spiritual director, Alice and Sophie never had one, Emma did not have one, and did not refer to any formal spiritual director in her past.

N/K These participants did not refer to their spiritual directors, but indicated that they had one

Appendix 5 Coding summary using Nvivo 8

The coding was done using tree nodes and free nodes. I read and re-read each interview and coded every response to a theme, or sometimes to more than one theme. I summarized the themes into three overall themes. The main tree nodes were as follows:

Name	Sources	References
Spiritual Direction Relationship	11	108
Boundary issues	11	47
Gender Issues	9	23

Within that node, I also put codes for various related subjects, which resulted in a large number of detailed codes, and the software shows a table of the number of references to each node. The report for this is 34 pages long, so I am giving a list of the nodes which belong to each major theme here:

<u>Spiritual Direction Relationship:</u>

Name	**Sources**	**References**
themes in relationship with spiritual director	1	1
Knowledge about spiritual director	4	6
Nature of the relationship	11	68
Qualities looked for	6	23
Significant or profound moments	0	0
Subjects discussed with spiritual director	7	32
Support	4	8
Silence	3	7
Prayer	6	16
The space between us	5	9
Trust	3	5
Endings	1	2
Finding a spiritual director	10	28
Ignatian exercises	6	29
Email spiritual direction	2	3
Feelings about being a spiritual companion or director	6	14
Frame of reference	4	4
Knowledge of spiritual director	7	17
Recommending or giving books or poems, reading etc	7	9

Reviews	1	1
Language	4	4
Treats	1	1
What is spiritual direction	10	34
Listening	9	12
Modeling	2	2
Experience of being a spiritual director	5	14
Working with Non Christian seekers	3	3
Reviewing the relationship	1	1

Boundary Issues:

Name	Sources	References
charging for spiritual direction	2	2
Confidentiality	1	4
Contact in between sessions	2	3
Environment where it takes place	4	5
Frequency and time of meeting	9	13
Friendship	5	11
Location issues	6	10
Record keeping	1	1
Structure of session	5	8
Supervision	8	13
Time issues	6	6
Touch	0	0

Gender Issues:

Name	Sources	References
Feminism	3	7
Gender Issues	12	25
Maternal God	1	1
Sexuality	4	6

This is a slightly misleading representation as it does not give the percentage coverage, which in the main themes was large, but it does show how I selected the main themes and how I broke them down. For example one theme I did not mention in the thesis was frequency and time of meeting, which was mentioned in nine interviews, but the percentage coverage was low. Also I found I had not always picked up all the references in the initial coding, for example I knew that trust was mentioned more often than it

showed, in fact trust was mentioned in eight interviews, but I had not coded eight. I found this error through my knowledge having listened and read the interviews many times, and therefore I created a word search query, which found the remaining references. Outside these, there were various free nodes:

Name	Memo Link	Sources	References
Experience of being in training		8	66
Counselling and spiritual direction		9	17
Power		4	7
Spiritual direction outside religious faith		4	7
Reason for undergoing training		4	6
Spiritual direction in relation to church, Meeting etc		2	3
Non religious spiritual direction		2	2
Self-sacrifice		1	2
Love		2	2
Integration of spiritual direction with rest of life		1	2
Self-care		1	1
Saying it out loud		1	1
Process of spiritual direction		1	1
Role model		0	0

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