

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

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Holly A. McFarland

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This study considers the meaning and experience of presence and how it impacts processes of personal transformation. Although for centuries presence has existed in the lexicon of religious and philosophical epistemologies, its significance in the field of psychology has only recently been examined from an empirical perspective. Findings from the extant literature suggest that the therapist's presence positively impacts the therapeutic alliance and treatment outcome regardless of theoretical orientation (Geller & Greenberg, 2012). This study globally examined the phenomenon of presence by including participants from three different fields, each representing one sect of the *mind* (psychology), *body* (massage therapy), and *spirit* (Buddhism) trifecta. Results indicated that presence is more than a strategy but an ongoing process of transformation. The participants discussed presence as the true nature of being, which transcends empiricism and duality. It is experienced as connecting with the greater whole of life and losing identification with a separate *self*. Engagement with the other highlighted aspects of mutuality, listening with the body, openness and sincerity, and approaching the relationship without agendas or judgments. Presence also enhances self-development, such as cultivating inner gifts and finding meaningful work. When presence is obscured both inter- and intra-personally, the healing process stagnates and blockages such as anger, frustration, and fear arise. Systemic influences of the surrounding environment were also noted to affect presence. Presence was identified as being healing in and of itself and having a significant impact on treatment outcome.

Dedication

I dedicate this to You, the reader, and this moment of meeting we share. Half the work is yours.

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Chapter I. Introduction

Important contributors to the field of psychology, such as Otto Rank and Carl Rogers, have alluded to the utility and impact of presence in bolstering the therapeutic alliance and effecting treatment outcome (Rank, 1929–1931; Rogers, 1961). However, few studies have examined the value of presence, its meaning, how it is experienced, and what impact it has on relational connection. One qualitative study by Geller and Greenberg (2002) investigated the meaning of presence from seasoned therapists and uncovered themes of *attending*, *receptivity*, *grounding*, and *being with and for the client*. From these findings, Geller and Greenberg (2002) proposed *therapeutic presence* as a working theoretical model. They further expanded their work to a quantitative inquiry that attempted to empirically measure therapeutic presence (Geller et al., 2010).

This current inquiry expands upon Geller and Greenberg's (2002) foundational work through a global examination of the phenomenon by including participants not just from a psychoanalytic background, but by capturing the perspectives of individuals that work dyadically within various fields. Each participant in this study represents one category of three aspects of nature: mind, body, and spirit. This epistemological trilogy has long existed throughout sociocultural human evolution as ways of experiencing knowledge and discovering internal and external truths about what it means to be alive. *Mind* refers to the world of thought and internal examination of ideas that help us make meaning of our realities. This includes processes like thinking, reflection, logic, intelligence, and rationalization (Aluli-Meyer, 2013). *Body* describes the physical forces of being, including perceptions, sensations, and somatic experiences connected to our existence. Finally, *spirit* encompasses the numinous aspects of experience that

may be described as beyond space and time, consciousness, awareness, silence, or intuition (Aluli-Meyer, 2013).

It is possible that presence is so ubiquitous and implicit to relational building that it is often overlooked and potentially misunderstood. Sometimes that which is closest is hardest to see. This study intended to excavate a more global, accurate, comprehensible, and meaningful definition of presence, serving to enhance therapeutic relationships and expand upon working theory.

Situating the Study

In qualitative inquiry, to situate a study is to purposefully construct and position the phenomenon within a certain paradigm, such as a particular philosophical tradition, phenomenology, or theory (Creswell, 1998). Contextual framing communicates how the researcher's concepts, assumptions, expectations, and theories shape the study's ontological and epistemological design and methodological strategies (Moustakas, 1994). The qualitative researcher also often begins a study by situating it on the basis of his or her personal preferences and beliefs about the value of conducting such a study in the context of his/her life experiences (Wolcott, 1992). Therefore, it is the researchers' onus to dissect and flesh out how their study is impacted by favored assumptions, theories, and approaches. In effect, contextual frames affect how the research is communicated and interpreted. Theoretical biases or frames must be carefully examined through reflexive processes, such as critical thinking, challenging preconceived notions, and remaining open to differences. Personal processes must also be carefully examined. How a topic or phenomenon of interest is chosen is intricately interwoven into the unique experiences, worldviews, and story from which the researcher emerged.

Identifying the contextual backdrop provides a reference point that guides the study and provides justification for decision-making. Acknowledging these implications and assumptions enable the researcher to construct a clear and concrete approach to research, rather than having to clumsily build from scratch (Creswell, 1998). Choosing to utilize multiple contextual frameworks necessitates careful assessment of the various modules and how they add value and utility to the design (Glesne, 2016). In qualitative inquiry, it is important that the researcher feels comfortable with the paradigm from which he/she is operating; a poor fit can lead to endless frustrations and poorly executed work (Glesne, 2016).

Furthermore, in qualitative inquiry, situating the study is discussed at the beginning of the proposal. Although it is linked to the review of biases, it has more utility at the front of the write-up because it informs the reader of what biases and personal viewpoints influenced the desire to generate such a project; to consider this study meaningful to do (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

This study has particular relevance for me because of my personal interest in living a life that is fully alive and realized. From my personal exploration of meditation, ontology, and spiritual practices, I have discovered for myself that life engaged in the present moment—whatever is existing and happening in the here and now—is where truth, meaning, and authenticity exists. Personally, I question if the word “present” is the appropriate terminology, because to associate it with time turns it into a concept that implies a parallel with past and future. My intuitive sense feels is that what we collectively call “the present moment” or “presence” is essentially timeless. Therefore, the label we have given this phenomenon associates it with something that I intuitively believe it is not (time).

I have found in my own experiences that personal maladaptive beliefs and concepts fade away when I am “present” or attuned to the immediacy of the here and now. These experiences

and skepticism of how we have generally defined it as a society have incited a curiosity that wonders if this phenomenon we call presence could be better understood. I am also motivated to discover if the experience of “presence” has a ubiquitous quality to it or if it is understood and experienced differently amongst individuals. As a student of psychology and Buddhism, I am driven to learn more about what role it can play in understanding self and others. I wonder how much utility simply being as present and attuned to the moment with a client has on the therapeutic alliance and if presence can actually serve as a mechanism of change. In such a theory-dependent field, I question if the emphasis on analyzing, organizing, and labeling clients internal dynamics is out of balance with utilizing intuition and knowledge that is not cognitively based but more rooted in the simple act of being engaged in the here and now. If one is fully and wholly present, it seems that right response and right action can better arise and help inform the theory and conceptualization of the client’s issues.

From my perspective, our society disproportionately promotes cognitive analysis compared to experiential and implicit knowledge. Perhaps what would be more effective is looking primarily at implicit knowledge—gained by being fully present to the experience—to help inform mental processes. My unique composition as a human being and the context from which I have experienced life has given these specific questions and ideas salience within my own existence. It is a lack of clarity to these questions that generate a desire to more deeply understand this phenomenon.

Review of Literature

A review of literature is an examination of the existing body of knowledge within the researcher’s field of interest. Reviewing the work of others provides guidance in differentiating what has been established, what remains inconclusive, and what has yet to be discovered. This

information can ignite novel interest, influence designs, techniques, conceptual frameworks, and hypotheses through building off of existing findings and identifying gaps in knowledge (Glesne, 2016). This phase of the inquiry is typically conducted before data collection begins, and continues throughout the process, notwithstanding arguments that exposure to previous knowledge can unduly bias the researcher (Glesne, 2016). Thus, the literature review serves as the launching point from which the inquiry arises, helping to support and qualify the purpose of the study and how it connects to the larger body of literature.

Reviews of literature in qualitative inquiry help identify what contexts and sub-contexts within the field necessitate examination. The literature review aids in narrowing a study's focus—it enables the researcher to discover where greater precision can be applied to generate more breadth or depth of knowledge (Glesne, 2016). Qualitative inquiry also requires the researcher to approach previous works with curiosity and critical thinking; examination of the accomplishments and missteps of others provides information that can shape novel research questions and designs.

The review of literature within the qualitative inquiry is also a continuous process (Glesne, 2016). As the journey unfolds, the researcher will often discover surprising insights and realizations that will compel further digging into new subtexts. In essence, the literature review is conducted as part of a qualitative inquiry to further inform the researcher and establish a framework for the study. Reviews of literature also specifically contribute to a qualitative inquiry by enhancing the researcher's *theoretical sensitivity* or knowing what is meaningful to ask. By extracting background knowledge about the phenomenon, the researcher avoids asking meaningless questions (Glesne, 2016).

Historical Context of Relational Dynamics in Therapy

Historical impressions of the relationship between the therapist and client often start with Freud's (1966, as cited in Bachelor & Horvath, 2001) concepts of transference, countertransference, and positive linking. The later concept has often been the primary focus of cultivating an alliance in psychodynamic theory. The psychodynamic perspective views the alliance as the "glue" that binds the client and therapist together, but is not necessarily therapeutic in nature.

This viewpoint dominated psychotherapy until Otto Rank (1929–1931) redefined the relationship between therapist and client. Rank initially gained public recognition in his early twenties for being one of Freud's most prized disciples; Freud (as cited in Liberman & Kramer, 2012) benignly described Rank as being "as good an analyst as any man" (p. 120). Their close relationship endured for nearly 20 years, until Rank published *The Trauma of Birth*, which most notably included a direct refutation of Freud's Oedipus complex theory. Amidst this schism of theoretical viewpoints, Rank emerged with hypotheses and works that diametrically opposed the core assumptions of his longstanding mentor and friend.

In one of the first post-Freudian offerings on psychotherapy, Rank (1929, as cited in Wadlington, 2012) emphasized relational, existential concepts, highlighting the salience of experience, emotional healing, and creativity. Rank (1996) rejected pathologizing and instead recognized creation and engagement as unique processes and experiences for each individual. He believed that each case mandated the application of distinctive methods, inquiries, and solutions (Rank, 1996). Unlike Freud, whose methodology Rank labeled as "reductive," Rank viewed conflict and challenges as opportunities from which to create new and meaningful experiences.

He reasoned that humans inherently are in charge of their own reality and have the natural resources to shape their destiny and relationships with their internal and external worlds.

Rank (1929, as cited in Wadlington, 2012) encouraged therapists to experiment with intuitive responses and techniques, promoting original thinking as a form of artistic expression. He was known to quote Nietzsche in this matter, quipping, “This is *my* way, where is yours?” (1933, as cited in Wadlington, 2012, p. 385). For Rank, it was crucial that each therapist develop his/her own voice and remained true to his/her own authentic connection to life.

Carl Rogers was deeply impacted by Rank’s works and continued the efforts to shift the popular Freudian view of the therapeutic alliance from an expert model to a more egalitarian meeting, predicated on an existential approach that emphasized therapeutic healing (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001). From Rogers’ (1951, as cited in Bachelor & Horvath, 2001) interpretation of the contingencies that determined a successful therapeutic alliance burgeoned the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence.

Disagreement with Rogers’ (1951, as cited in Bachelor & Horvath, 2001) conceptualization gave momentum to a divergent framework founded in social psychology, which posited that a successful therapeutic relationship depended upon the client’s attitudinal perceptions and beliefs about the therapist. This model hypothesized that “the degree to which clients believed that therapists had these socially valued qualities [expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness], they had ‘power to influence’ the client’s thinking, feeling and behavior, and thus to promote therapeutic change” (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001, p. 134).

This type of thinking starkly contrasted with classical behaviorists who argued that in order for transformation to occur, the client required direction from a third-party expert who could intervene and teach the client missing skills (Skinner, 1985). Behaviorists posited that

psychopathology was the result of maladaptive interactions between behaviors and situational consequences, which caused psychopathology. The pedagogical qualities of the therapist, as well as therapeutic techniques, were the most salient variables in determining effective therapy outcomes.

This phase in the development of psychotherapy research consisted of theories on therapeutic relationships based on inductive and deductive reasoning, and anecdotal evidence. However, in the 1950s, a call for empirical analyses of treatment efficacy resonated in the professional community when Hans Eysenck (1952, as cited in Horvath & Bachelor, 2001) published works criticizing the deficits of scientific data within the field of psychology.

Rogers, who was one of the first major psychotherapists to demand that the validity of clinical concepts be established through research, also shared these criticisms. According to Elliot and Farber (2010), “Rogers pioneered or foreshadowed most of the major genres of psychotherapy research: process research; systematic, controlled outcome research; process-outcome research; and finally, surprisingly, qualitative research” (p. 18). He was also one of the first major psychotherapists to analyze ineffective cases, demonstrating that just as much can be learned from perceived failures as from ostensible successes. This dedication to scientifically testing and verifying theories paved the path for the therapeutic alliance to be recognized as a key construct of positive treatment outcomes.

By the late 1970s, hundreds of studies emerged that examined the efficacy of treatment modalities and their impacts on patients. One of these studies was Luborsky et al.’s (1975) exploration of what works in therapy. One of the main conclusions drawn from these findings was that there was little difference in therapy outcomes between theoretical approaches. This data steered researchers towards a more novel perspective of treatment theory: that

commonalities across all theoretical modalities might be accountable for a substantial portion of successful therapy outcomes. The common factors literature suggested that 30% of outcome variance may be attributable to the quality of the therapeutic relationship (Lambert, 1992, as cited in Hubble et al., 2001). This, in turn, has led to a revival of interest in examining and underscoring the relationship between therapist and client. A new wave of empirical study on therapeutic processes has emerged.

Initially dismissed, work done by Rogers in 1957 received more notable recognition (Elliot & Garber, 2010). Rogers and his team had invented a new paradigm termed *process outcome*. The *process outcome approach* attempted to predict post-therapy outcome by sampling key therapy processes. Results from this methodology compelled Rogers to make the then radical claim that the therapist's warmth, empathy, and genuineness wholly accounted for the client's post-therapy transformation (Elliot & Farber, 2010).

Much of the theoretical and empirical interest in therapy was redirected towards understanding the therapeutic alliance. Compared to the client centered approach, which emphasized the client as the authority within the relational dynamic, a new perspective emerged that viewed the relationship as an evolving organism that required a collaborative and interactive effort between client and therapist (Bordin, 1979). Edward Bordin (1979), an early investigator of psychotherapeutic processes, postulated that the therapeutic alliance involved three major components: interpersonal bonds, agreement on the goals of therapy, and collaboration on therapeutic tasks. Bordin (1979) argued that positive growth and nurturance of the alliance was in and of itself healing.

Growing curiosity about the significance of the therapeutic alliance has compelled researchers to devise more empirical measures, such as scales and assessments, to further explore

the value of the alliance. Instruments such as the *Helping Alliance Questionnaire*, the *Vanderbilt Psychotherapy Process Scale*, the *Working Alliance Inventory*, and the *California Psychotherapy Alliance Scales* are widely used in current research (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001). According to Bachelor and Horvath (2001), these instruments “opened the door to the empirical investigation of the quality and quantity of the alliance in a variety of therapeutic contexts, as well as the link between the alliance and therapeutic outcome” (p. 136). Research on this topic is continuing to flourish, as findings are showing that a constructive relationship between client and therapist correlates to successful therapy outcomes.

While a number of definitions of the therapeutic alliance continue to emerge and grow, a common denominator within these definitions involves a mutual effort to alleviate the client’s suffering. Different means of developing this relationship continue to evolve in an effort to obtain a deeper and more robust understanding of how therapists can help clients heal and transform.

Common Factors Literature on the Therapeutic Alliance

Despite repeated findings, the debate regarding what contributes most to therapeutic outcomes continues (Norcross, 2002; Wampold, 2013). Various meta-models still argue that methodology bears greater significance to effective change (Wampold, 2001), while others contend that the relationship between the therapist and client holds greater value (Norcross, 2002; Wampold, 2013).

An extensive meta-analysis by Crits-Christoph et al. (1991) examined the impact of the therapist as a predictive factor in treatment outcomes and utilized data from 15 formerly published studies. They estimated the amount of variance attributable to therapists in the context of 27 distinct treatment methods. Results from the regression analysis found that 20-70% of

therapy outcome variance was attributable to the therapist (Crits-Christoph et al., 1991). In a similar study, Luborsky et al. (1986) concluded that the “frequency and size of the therapists’ effects generally overshadowed any differences between different forms of treatment in these investigations” (pp. 508–509).

Findings from an exhaustive evaluation of 40 years worth of outcome research on the efficacy of various models of therapeutic change suggested that the therapeutic alliance is vital to effective treatment results (Hubble et al., 2001; Norcross, 2002). The evidence suggested that relationship dynamics between client and therapist comprise the second most significant factor to transformation in psychotherapy, subsequent to client-related factors like the client’s strengths and if the client experiences the relationship as positive (Hubble et al., 2001).

Bachelor and Horvath (2001) conducted an empirical review of therapists’ and clients’ characteristics and contributions to the therapeutic relationship. They investigated research that focused on the moment-to-moment communications between therapist and client, dispositional states (e.g., relational capacity, attachment style) and preexisting characteristics of both the therapist and client. They argued that the conditions of accurate empathy, warmth, and genuineness identified by Rogers and colleagues in the 1950s and 1960s continue to be the essential building materials in creating a constructive alliance, particularly from the vantage point of the client (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001).

The efficacy of Rogers’ core conditions is further supported by a quantitative study conducted by Duff and Bedi (2009). The authors attempted to identify specific therapeutic behaviors that aid in strengthening the therapeutic alliance. They defined *alliance* as an intersubjective experience between the therapist and client; this partnership is predicated on mutual collaboration of treatment goals and results in a relational connection that matures over

the course of therapy (Duff & Bedi, 2009). Although the strength of the therapeutic alliance has been identified as one of the most salient predictors of therapy outcome, the authors' argued that little research has focused on the behavioral components that assist in fortifying the alliance. These mediating variables included reflecting the client's feelings, eye contact, smiling, stillness, therapist's disclosures, validation of the client's feelings, asking the client questions, and keeping administrative processes outside of the session. Furthermore, they contended that conceptualizations centered on the client's perspective of the therapeutic alliance are rare.

The literature review in this study was mildly anemic, providing limited context and background to the topic. The efficacy of building a strong therapeutic alliance to enhance treatment outcome was sufficiently supported by current and relevant studies; however, citations were primarily utilized to highlight the deficiencies in available research rather than inform the reader of congruent or competing theories or schemas related to the therapeutic alliance. Thus, the literature review provided an adequate defense for the authors' research proposal and purpose yet provided minimal exposure to relevant theoretical or background information.

The study involved distributing the Therapeutic Alliance Critical Incidents Questionnaire (TACIQ) to 79 adult counseling clients. Participants were asked to specify the frequency with which 15 critical behavioral factors occurred. These critical items were derived from previous research from client-identified counselor behaviors (Bedi & Duff, 2008, as cited in Duff & Bedi, 2009) believed to aid in alliance development and strengthen the partnership for counseling clients. Participants were also asked to complete the *Working Alliance Inventory, Short Form, Revised* (WAI-SR). Individuals were recruited using posters and flyers in numerous populated cities in Western Canada and were screened for eligibility.

The researchers offered participants the opportunity to win \$100 in cash in exchange for participation. A third party web-based provider administered the questionnaires online. It is plausible that these procedures may have encouraged participants to take a more cursory approach to the internet questionnaires, compared to a volunteer population that may have been more motivated by pro-social behavior rather than monetary gains.

Results evidenced that the majority of behaviors (11 out of 15) were significantly linked to the strength of the alliance through correlational analyses. More specifically, three counselor behaviors (encouraging remarks, offering positive comments about the client, and smiling when meeting the client) accounted for 62% of the variance in alliance scores using hierarchical regression analyses. Four therapeutic behaviors (therapist disclosure, allowing the client direct the topic of conversation, verbally prompting the client, and addressing administrative tasks before or after the session) were not found to be correlated with the alliance. The outcome that therapist self-disclosure did not linearly correlate to alliance echoed results from prior research, which had indicated that therapist self-disclosures can be both positively and negatively related to alliance (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001; Bachelor & Horvath, 1999, as cited in Duff & Bedi, 2009).

Duff and Bedi (2009) reasoned that smiling when meeting the client and providing encouraging statements and positive comments about the client were related to behaviors that embodied Rogers' core condition of unconditional positive regard. Unconditional positive regard has been argued to be one of the principal foundations of successful therapy outcome and alliance (Duff & Bedi, 2009). While these results support the efficacy of Rogers' core conditions and the therapeutic alliance, Bachelor and Horvath (2001) noted that between the years 1985 to 1994, only a small handful of studies (around 12) focused on one or more of the facilitative

conditions, with most research focusing exclusively on empathy (Bachelor & Hovarth, 2001). Geller et al. (2010) have posited that while there is evidence that the therapeutic alliance contributes to the client's ability to change, the factors that contribute to building a healthy therapeutic alliance still remain unclear. Therefore, research on the specific constructs of the therapeutic relationship needs to be expanded and further explored for more in-depth understanding.

Constructs of the Therapeutic Alliance

Otto Rank and the Here and Now. Current scholarship has argued that the therapist's presence may be the fundamental condition that enables the therapeutic alliance to grow, thereby supporting the client's transformation. Rank was one of the first modern psychologists to place significant emphasis on present experiencing, as defined as "experience that is not immediately rationalized, justified, interpreted, or explained" (Wadlington, 2012, p. 386). He believed that a state of present experiencing could be realized in therapy by helping the mind return to what is true and real; to freedom and naturalness, full and robust aliveness. This intimacy with what is felt in the here and now requires embracing the diversity of feelings and sensations that perpetually arise, without needing to completely understand or rationalize their existence. Rank embraced joy and pain, acknowledging both as inevitable in the human experience; he discouraged people from attempting to escape discomfort and suffering, as these experiences often create depth and meaning to one's existence.

This acceptance of the present experience requires the client to "endure every experience as such without tying it up casually, totally or finally with the rest of life, or with what goes on in the world at all. The person lives more in the present, in the moment, without the longing to

make it eternal” (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 177). Rank posited that the creation of space and curiosity for present awareness to arise in therapy would further transpire into daily living experiences.

In contrast to Freud, Rank (1929–1931) viewed the client as an imaginative driver of change, and the moment-to-moment engagement with the therapist as an opening to galvanize such change. Freud, conversely, approached the therapeutic moment as an occasion to unearth and dissect accumulated layers of one’s past. Rank was critical of this approach, arguing that limiting the scope of one’s existence predominantly to analyzing past experiences undermines the power of what is being created and experienced in the present moment. In effect, Rank believed that Freud undervalued the client’s own resilience and capability to discern and choose their own path. This perspective, Rank contended, confined a person to his/her history and restricted the possibility of forming new beliefs; it disenfranchised the freedom to engage in a new relational paradigm with one’s life. Rank placed considerable emphasis on intuitive processes, valuing spontaneity and allowing space for the unexpected and irrational to occur (Wadlington, 2012). He questioned how people could move forward if they are constantly being held back by or investing most of their energies into the past.

He viewed individuals as artists who must live life artfully, wholly, painting their own reality into existence. In his diary at age 20 he wrote, “Real living must be created so that it has need of no other life, no art, beyond itself” (Lieberman & Kramer, 2012, p. 37). From Rank’s perspective, the world is full of inevitable challenges and discomforts; however, these experiences, often wrongfully characterized as failures, can be used to create something fresh and novel (Wadlington, 2012).

Rank (1929-1931) referred to the present moment as the “here and now” or the “therapeutic moment of experience” (pp. 39–41). It is in this moment that conceptualizations

predicated on a sense of separateness fall away. The mental construct that we are constricted by physical boundaries, which maintains our own sense of self that is distinct and separate from others, dissipates as the present moment is fully realized. Life instead transcends from muddled fragmentations, encapsulated on a spectrum demarcated by past and future experiences, into a timeless, complete whole. As Rank (1929–1931) explained, “Here in actual experience as in the therapeutic process, is contained not only the whole present, but also the whole past, and only here in the present are psychological understanding and therapeutic effect to be attained” (p. 28).

Rank committed himself to a lifelong pursuit in investigating the interplay of the microcosm and macrocosm. He purported that therapy was a necessary agent in understanding the microcosm of experience. He interpreted the *psychic* to be a phenomenon of the here and now, as all as things always have and always will occur in the present moment (Rank 1929–1931). The client’s difficulties and insights can only be wholly experienced and realized in the therapeutic moment. Rank posited that the *psychical* was not necessarily the repetition of past unconscious memories but rather insight manifesting from direct emotional experiencing and free will. He embraced a holistic, non-linear approach, and was ahead of his time, paving the way for Gestalt, systemic, and neurobiologically-based methods, which would emerge nearly 50 years later (Wadlington, 2012). Rank’s approach provided a way for clients to fully experience the here and now, allowing them to explore and take accountability for their own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions without adding the need to justify, rationalize, or deny their experiences (Taft, 1933).

Rank (1929–1931) doubted the idea of an objective, historical foundation from which the patient could be analyzed. He disputed the view that present behavior was solely a result of the patient reenacting the past but rather saw it as simply the therapist’s own interpretation of the

client's experience. Historical facts, in other words, were nothing more than interpretations of the past or self-created myths. Rank (1929–1931) asserted that “the so-called fixation on the past, the living in reminiscence, is only a protection from the surrender to the present....[One] lives too much in the past anyway, that is, to that extent that he actually does not live” (pp. 27–39). He made distinctions between “making conscious,” the process of decoding and clarifying experiences, and “becoming conscious” (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 22). Becoming conscious—tapping into the essence of one's true nature—involves the present experiencing of emotions and sensations.

Rank termed this lived, authentic connection with the present as *erlebnis*, which is often translated in German as “experience” or “adventure” (“Erlebnis,” 2017). It spoke to the immediacy with which one connects to their direct experience. This focus on *erlebnis* persisted as a recurring theme throughout Rank's works and portrayed an immediate sense of aliveness and intimacy with one's experience. Rank defined the antithesis of *erlebnis* as *erfahrung*, which Kramer describes in his prologue as “an external happening from which practical knowledge, leanings, or discoveries are drawn” (Rank, 1996, p. xviii). Rank truly viewed the experience of the present as an invitation to engage with new experiences and know oneself more deeply. He viewed the inevitability of death not as a dour march walked in fear, but as reminder to dance and live fully in the moment. The innate resistance to death is a testament to the urge towards life and experiencing.

The undertones of Rank's approach are saturated in optimism and opportunity; moments lived in fear that serve to shrink rather than expand in effect are premature experiences of death. He supported the notion of self-determinism believing that individuals willfully and meaningfully pave their own paths. Every human being has the ability to consciously choose

his/her reality; nothing is fixed, static, or unalterable. He was one of the first in his era to shift from emphasizing the past to focusing on the present, on the newness of the here and now. For Rank, insight was not enough; new experience was the real mechanism of change.

Rank also placed significant value on the therapeutic alliance, viewing the collaboration between therapist and client as a vehicle for spontaneity, creativity, and presence to arise. He understood the relationship to be a process; that transformation can arise from paying attention to the present moment and the ever-changing dynamism within the therapeutic alliance (Wadlington, 2012).

The client must be seen as a unique individual, in need of unique solutions. What worked for one individual should not necessarily be carried over to others. He noted that the “therapeutic relationship is the freeing of the creative tendency in the individual and allowing its utilization in the creating, transforming, and endless destroying of the therapeutic relationship” (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 190). In essence, because the therapist and client are constantly changing in tandem with life’s dynamically transformative nature, the relationship is in a constant state of birth and death; it must evolve in the same way a garden must be weeded to allow for new growth. Rank placed significant emphasis on improvisation, working without premeditated techniques or agendas. He did not prescribe to a particular theory; he took what was presented to him and reacted intuitively, presently, letting right action flow from his being. Rank was one of the first therapists to highlight the salience of the client as a significant participant within the alliance; to emphasize that therapy is situational and should be guided for and by the client. Each relationship and approach is a customized experience that cannot be imitated or repeated.

Therapeutic Presence and Rogers' Core Conditions. Largely influenced by Rank's work, Rogers built upon his predecessor's theories predicated on the view that the client is a significant agent to the therapeutic relationship and therapeutic outcome. Late in his career, Rogers reflected on a fundamental element that he might have excluded from his esteemed theory of core conditions, noting in a 1987 interview with Baldwin:

I am inclined to think that in my writing I have stressed too much the three basic conditions (congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding). Perhaps it is something around the edges of those conditions that is really the most important element of therapy — when my self is very clearly, obviously present. (p. 45)

Since Rogers articulated this key insight in the final year of his life, it is unclear if he intended to include presence as a fourth condition or as a precondition of the core conditions. Thorne (1992, as cited in Geller & Greenberg, 2002, 1992) argued that Rogers resisted expanding upon his theory because he was unable to research it empirically. He suggested that had Rogers lived longer to further investigate the nature and role of presence in the therapeutic alliance, person-centered therapy might have gone through some further significant theoretical alterations. Sadly, Rogers' genius in successfully marrying the ethereal with the empirical was not applied to the study of presence before his passing.

In a study conducted by Geller et al. (2010), the researchers attempted to develop an instrument that measured therapeutic presence from the client and therapist's perspectives. The authors found that therapeutic presence promoted positive session outcomes and enhanced the therapeutic alliance, irrespective of theoretical orientation or methodology. While therapists' self-ratings of being present in session were higher amongst process experiential (PE) and client

centered (CC) therapists compared to cognitive behavioral (CBT) therapists, the clients' ratings of presence did not significantly change across theoretical orientations (Geller et al., 2010). Geller et al. (2010) discovered both correlations and differences in therapists' evaluations of presence with each of Rogers' core conditions. This study supported their hypothesis that presence is simultaneously connected to and distinctively different from the conditions of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

Greenberg and Geller (2001) also built a theoretical case for correctly understanding and defining the process and experience of congruence and its relationship to therapeutic presence. Citing a pre-existing study by Schutz in 1970, the author's argued that in the 1960s and 1970s, humanistic therapies casually highlighted the significance of "congruence" without carefully analyzing the underlying meaning of the term. Misunderstanding of the terminology has led therapists to utilize techniques without the necessary deftness, such as self-disclosure and transparency, often leading to unproductive outcomes (Greenberg & Geller, 2001). Using theoretical literature focused on person centered methodologies (Buber, 1958, as cited in Greenberg & Geller 2001), the author's attempted to correct this error and propose that congruence arises from the therapists' intent to cause no harm and enhance the client's growth (Greenberg & Geller, 2001).

Greenberg and Geller (2001) further explored the intentions, beliefs, and attitudes that construct the phenomenon of congruence. From the related literature, they found themes related to trust, viewing the self as an ongoing process of construction, empathy, interpersonal connection and internal awareness (Greenberg & Geller, 2001). They then attempted to formulate their own definitions of *incongruence*, which they defined as deliberately remaining silent (which is sometimes fitting and other times not), allowing anxiety or doubt to muddy their

lived experience or clarity, and being blind to what they are experiencing (Greenberg & Geller, 2001).

By citing previous publications and theoretical literature related to the therapeutic effects of presence, they distinguished the differences between therapeutic presence and congruence, maintaining that presence focuses on being with and for the intention of the client's healing (Greenberg & Geller, 2001). They concluded that therapeutic presence is a precondition to the expression of congruence.

Geller (2013) further defended this assertion in a meta-analysis of therapeutic presence. In this work, she postulated that therapeutic presence is the foundation upon which empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard can emerge. She noted that while it is possible to be present without being empathic, it is not possible to be empathic without being present. These findings support the theory that, in order for the core conditions to arise, being present is unequivocally essential and enables the relationship between client and therapist to thrive and grow.

Geller and Porges (2014) also asserted from a study focused on bio-behavioral mechanisms related to therapeutic presence that certain therapeutic qualities or features that arise from the therapeutic bond have been shown to significantly impact the cultivation of safety, healthy relationship building, and ideal conditions for development and transformation within the therapeutic alliance.

Therapeutic Presence: A Working Model

In one of the most influential modern studies on the subject of therapeutic presence, Geller and Greenberg (2002) used qualitative methodology to explore both the semantic and experiential meaning of "therapeutic presence" from the therapist's perspective. Utilizing data

from their findings, they constructed a working model of therapeutic presence, which included three nascent purviews: (1) *pre-session* presence, (2) the *process* of presence, and (3) the *experience* of presence. They further argued that presence is the anchoring condition that allows Rogers' core conditions of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard to burgeon.

Geller and Greenberg (2002) noted that presence is “one of the most therapeutic gifts a therapist can offer a client” (p. 72). They also attempted to introduce concepts that are a part of presence in the therapeutic alliance; constructs that have been previously touched upon by other theorists, although not explicitly or extensively probed.

Upon examining the literature's *mélange* of descriptions and conceptions of presence, the authors sought to create a more concrete and specific paradigm for engaging in therapeutic presence. Their study consisted of interviewing seven experienced therapists who supported and intentionally practiced presence as a therapeutic method. All of the therapists had been practicing as psychotherapists for at least 10 years and were still actively practicing at the time of the study. The therapists came from a variety of theoretical backgrounds: four identified as humanistic/experiential, one as cognitive-behavioral (CBT), one from an Eriksonian view, and one from an Adlerian/transpersonal perspective. Each therapist was interviewed and asked to describe and reflect upon his/her experience of presence.

The interviews were recorded and analyzed by combining condensation and categorization of meaning in a five-step process explained in a book by Kvale (1996, as cited in Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Meanings, themes, and categories were explicated; non-redundant themes and categories were then linked together to develop emergent domains (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Both a second rater and three expert therapists were also called upon to peer

examine the analysis and check for reliability. The final results of the study yielded the aforementioned three domains of presence: preparation, process, and experience of presence.

Preparation. Preparing the ground for presence included preparatory undertakings that cultivate presence, whether at the beginning of a session or beyond the walls of the therapy setting. These acts involved attitudes and behaviors related to creating an intention for presence; putting aside personal preoccupations and therapy plans, quieting of the mind, and approaching the session with an attitude of openness, curiosity, and non-judgment. Commitments in daily life, like self-care, dedication to personal growth, practicing presence with family and friends, as well as regular meditation practice, and minimizing daily distractions were also reported to be significant to building presence power (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Process. The process of therapeutic presence reflected the doing aspect of being present in session, which is differentiated from the experiencing facet of presence. The experience of presence is predicated on the process of arriving to a state of presence. Geller and Greenberg (2002) found that the process involved three main subcategories: *receptivity*, *inwardly attending*, and *extending and contact*. The common thread interwoven into each of these domains, categories, and subcategories of presence was the notion that the therapists both impact and are impacted by the client's essence or true nature (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). The authors defined *receptivity* as being involved with the client on a vicissitude of sensory levels: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). It requires the therapist to be open, accepting, and allowing whatever arises in the moment to be as it is.

This idea of receptivity gives credence to the concept of listening with the third ear, as several therapists reported feeling that through the process of presence, communication between the therapist and client transpires on an extrasensory level (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). There is

a transpersonal quality related to a heightening or alteration of the therapist's state of consciousness that also occurs. *Inwardly attending* refers to being connected with a kind of embodied knowledge that may manifest through imagery, intuitions, guiding voices, feeling, or physical sensations (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). The therapists noted that they felt more creative and spontaneous in their responses and were able to express themselves more authentically (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Rogers' core condition of congruence, that is, the ability to openly experience feelings if it is beneficial to the client, is a component of inwardly attending (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Finally, *extending and contact* involves appropriately expanding energetically to meet the client in a very expeditious and intimate way. This requires a kind of accessibility and transparency; an unabashed honesty lacking in any attached fear, shame, or guilt, which is expressed outwardly. This expression is conveyed intuitively, without hesitancy, as the response comes organically rather than cognitively (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Experience. The experience of presence consisted of four domains: *immersion*, *expansion*, *grounding*, and *being with and for* the client. *Immersion* involves an absorbed engagement with the present moment, as attention is wholly and undividedly directed towards the client (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). The experience also elicits an experience of non-attachment with the present moment; feeling whatever arises and letting it pass into the next felt sense. It also involves letting go of any expectations or hopeful outcomes for the session. This present centeredness allows for greater focus, awareness, and attunement to the client's verbal and physical cues to arise.

Greenberg and Geller (2002) also identified *expansion* as an integral part of the experiencing of presence. They found that expansion often occurs on both the physical as well as conscious level of being (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). This experience of expansiveness includes

the dissolution of space and time; the identity of self and other merge and function as a whole, no longer separate. Time ceases to exist on a linear continuum, as there is only the here and now.

Therapists described feeling an inner spaciousness while being immersed in the present moment (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). The spaciousness flows both microscopically and macroscopically; therapists feel connected to a “larger sphere of something” (Geller & Greenberg, 2002, p. 81) yet are also acutely attuned to nuanced sensations, feelings, and perceptions. There is also a noted improvement in the therapist’s quality of thinking and emotional experiencing, allowing for the therapist to respond in a more meaningful and effective manner.

Geller and Greenberg (2002) further found a definitive measure of experiencing presence involved *grounding*, that is, even when absorbed in the client’s painful feelings, the therapist remains rooted and centered in his/her own existence. This experience depicts the therapist as a poised anchor, unflinching and unshakable in the midst of emotional turbulence and distress. The therapist must have a deft ability to not separate from the client’s suffering while simultaneously remaining calm, steady, and unfazed by the emotional outpouring. Therapists recognized that they must possess an implicit feeling of trust in their selves, their clients, and the therapeutic process when engaging in presence (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

The final subcategory of Geller and Greenberg’s domain of experiencing presence entails *being with and for the client*. In other words, the therapist’s intention is wholly devoted to alleviating the client’s suffering. The authors make an important distinction here, noting that this requires the therapist to refrain from taking an expert role in the relationship and humbly checking one’s ego at the door; the therapist cannot assume to know what the client inherently needs to heal (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Instead, *being with and for the client* will allow the client to organically discover his/her inherent needs. Furthermore, therapists noted that presence

also elicited feelings of wonder, awe, compassion, warmth, and love (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Rumination and worries were also reported to disappear when therapists fully engaged in the present moment.

Thus, the authors argued that therapeutic presence could be used as tool for therapists to monitor both their own experience as well as the client's response to therapy. Like Robbins, Geller and Greenberg (2002) asserted that presence involves a "dual level of consciousness," which is "the process of shifting from internal to external, from self to other, from being open and receiving to being responsive" (Geller & Greenberg, 2002, p. 83). Therapeutic presence involves a deluge of paradoxes: to remain objective while being subjective, to extend while inwardly attending, to flow with the client while remaining anchored in one's own existence, to merge while remaining distinct, and to let go of knowledge while intuitively using it.

Geller (2013) further expanded on her schema by juxtaposing her definition of therapeutic presence with examples of non-presence, which included immediate transitioning from session to session (lack of pause), ignoring bodily needs (hunger, thirst), stress, continuous checking of time in session, being too enmeshed with the client, boredom, self-judgment at own responses to the client, not hearing what the client is saying, fatigue, and relief that the session is finished. She argued that concrete exercises should be incorporated into the therapist's daily routine to strengthen the manifestation of therapeutic presence, which included pausing, breathing deeply into the moment, rituals to start and end the day, centering, and meditation exercises (Geller, 2013). In order for the therapist to be present, presence and empathy must be practiced outside of the therapy setting. In other words, the therapist must be present and empathic with himself/herself in order to cultivate greater therapeutic presence with the client.

From their findings, Geller and Greenberg (2002) hypothesized that presence is the precondition to the expression of Rogers' core conditions, rather than the oppositional view that presence is the unification of the three conditions or a separate fourth condition. They believe that "without presence the other conditions would not be possible" (p. 85). They contend that the therapist's presence helps the client feel seen and heard, breaking any sense of isolation or separation. Attuned responsiveness and genuineness, they argued, is highly contingent upon presence. In effect, they surmised that the theory of therapeutic presence involves: 1) placing more value on the therapists' attitudes and authenticity than on methods; 2) the way that the therapists utilizes or delivers techniques contributes to their efficacy; and 3) the timing of implementing the technique is of great importance and presence allows the therapist to be attuned to when the appropriate window of opportunity is available (Geller & Greenberg, 2012).

Presence is thus a reciprocal process; the quality of both the client's and the therapist's presence serve to deepen the connection and enhance the quality of the therapeutic alliance. From these reflections, presence may be an allowing of life or consciousness to experience itself through the many forms of being.

Therapeutic Presence: Cultivating Safety

The impacts of therapeutic presence have been studied from a biological perspective, demonstrating that the experience of therapeutic presence can trigger a series of neurophysiological mechanisms that cultivates an emotional and physiological sense of safety and security within the body. In a study by Geller and Porges (2014), the authors attempted to provide a neuroscientific and bio-behavioral explanation of how therapeutic presence provides both the therapist and client with a feeling of safety, thus strengthening the therapeutic alliance and fostering efficacious therapy. Geller and Porges (2014) argued that the therapeutic alliance is

fundamental to progressive transformation, and therapy outcome may only be marginally related to particular theoretical methodologies. A healthy therapeutic relationship is predicated on the client feeling safe and secure in the therapists' presence. The authors provided a definition of *therapeutic presence*, surmising that it involves therapists being completely engaged in the present moment, somatically, emotionally, mentally, and relationally (Geller & Porges, 2014).

Utilizing research from the polyvagal theory developed by Porges in 2011 (as cited in Geller & Porges, 2014), the authors offered a neurophysiological explanation for the effectiveness of therapeutic presence. Polyvagal theory offers “an innovative reconceptualization of how autonomic state and behavior interface” (Geller & Porges, 2014, p. 179). The theory integrates knowledge about the sympathetic nervous system; the flight-fight-or-freeze defenses of the body; and activation of the phylogenetic vagal pathway, a system traditionally associated with defenses related to immobilization and dissociation.

The polyvagal system has two circuits: the more commonly aforementioned defense circuit, and a newer circuit, only observed in mammals, which is associated with feelings of safety and expression of extemporaneous social behavior (Geller & Porges, 2014). The vagus nerve is a cranial nerve that communicates between the brainstem and other gut organs. It also helps monitor the parasympathetic system. The “older” vagal circuit consists of unmyelinated motor fibers, allowing for faster, more efficient communication between the gut and brain. Mammals, however, possess a second distinct vagal circuit, which consists of myelinated motor fibers that assist in slowing down the heart rate and promoting states of relaxation. This “newer” circuit connection between the face and heart allows for mammals to both express their own feelings of safety and detect if an environment is socially safe by examining the facial expressions of others (Geller & Porges, 2014).

The polyvagal theory therefore attempts to explain the neurological mechanisms used to activate physiological states that convey the experience of safety and support the expression of spontaneous engagement with others or, conversely, to shut down and react defensively. It has been used to explain the dissociation and suppression of emotions that often arises proceeding trauma related events. Part of the polyvagal theory posits that when the nervous system receives cues of safety within the environment, physiological defenses down regulate and spontaneous social engagement behaviors increase (Geller & Porges, 2014). In this condition, a therapeutic experience can more fluidly materialize. Through inviting facial expressions, open body language, calm vocal intonations and rhythms, physiological activation can be regulated, and fearful reactive patterns can be transformed into adaptive reactions rooted in feelings of safety and calmness. This experience of feeling calm and safe thus provides a fertile foundation from which the relationship between therapist and client can grow. As the client engages more frequently in this emotional and physiological state of safety with the therapist, new neural pathways form, helping habitual attachment injuries that have remained frozen in the client's body heal. In short, the therapeutic alliance can help the client reprogram maladaptive brain patterns that may be causing significant emotional and physical distress.

Components that Contribute to Strong Alliances: Relational Closeness

The Identity of Self and Other. When investigating the meaning of relational closeness, scholars have found that dualistic thinking that views one's "self" as separate from "other" becomes less rigid, transforming the concept of "I, mine, or me" into a concept of oneness or "we-ness." Buber (1958) characterized this kind of relationship—predicated on dualistic experience in which the "I" is dependent upon an "other"—as an "*I-it*" relationship. For Buber, the *I-It* relationship exists on an objective, linear continuum, defined by past, present, and future.

On the other end of the phenomenological dichotomy is the “*I-Thou*” relationship. Whereas the *I-It* relationship is unidirectional, the *I-Thou* relationship is collaborative and dynamic, flexing based on spontaneous feedback both given and received in the present moment. Forms meet each other with mutual awareness.

Buber (1948, as cited in Friedman, 1960) termed the definitive quality that characterizes the *I-Thou* relationships as *presentness*. Moreover, he described the present not as "the abstract point between past and future," but "like the eternal now of the mystic, it is the present of intensity and wholeness" and "exists only insofar as meeting and relation exist" (p. 58). Systemic theorist Gregory Bateson described this concept as a *dyad*, or something consisting of two elements or parts, positing that there is no smaller entity or unit of knowledge than the dyad itself (Charlton, 2008).

The *I-Thou dyad* defies conventional boundaries of space and time, unfolding in a single moment that encompasses past, present and future. Its ideology echoes that of Rank's (1929–1931) description of the here-and-now. Underlying the *I-Thou* relationship is the notion that the concept of identification with a “self” or an “other” dissolves, and a connectedness that is bigger than any mental construct is experienced. As Buber (1958) explained in his own words:

If I face a human being as my *Thou*...he is not a thing among things and does not consist of things...nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described...whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in *his* light. (p. 8)

In this evolved and deepened meeting, the concept of “we-ness” or “presentness” emerges and the other becomes integrated into the self. Greenwald and Prakanis (1984, as cited in Aron et al., 1991) referred to this overlapping as the “collective” aspect of self. According to Buber (1958),

it is this collective, non-dualistic way of relating, which can only occur in the present moment, that gives real meaning to our lives.

Aron et al. (1991) took up the mantle to empirically explore this challenging topic by examining intimate relationships and how self-identity may be impacted by feelings of closeness. The authors argued that the effects of close relationships cause each party to “act as if some or all aspects of the partner are partially the person’s own” (Aron et al., 1991, p. 242). The authors argued that a significant aspect of closeness involves integrating the other into the self. They posited that incorporating this concept of a non-dual self and other into the therapeutic relationship represents a radical departure from the traditional psychoanalytic role and exchange between client and therapist (Aron et al., 1991). However, it should be noted that this understanding of the relationship between self and other—examining the human experience as a complex eco-system of parts that are engaged inter-dependently and are interwoven into a community of membership—had been developing in systemic theory many years earlier under the tutelage of anthropologist, ecologist, and cyberneticist, Gregory Bateson (Charlton, 2008).

Investigation of the phenomenon of “we-ness” or “*I-Thou*” had primarily been undertaken from a philosophical or anecdotal approach. There was a scarcity of analyses on “presentness” in the canon of psychological research from a quantitative lens. In an effort to study such an elusive concept, Aron et al. (1991) conducted an analogue study composed of three experiments. The first experiment was relevant to resource allocation in different relationship contexts. In this experiment, 24 students were asked to explore the extent to which an individual would allocate resources to another. They were asked to make choices about hypothetical monetary gains for self, which coordinated with a loss of monetary gain for another. The other was at times presented as a close friend, an acquaintance, and a stranger. The results

confirmed their hypothesis that the type of other (close friend or stranger) impacted allocation of resources. Using Bonferroni *ts* ($F=14.60, p < 0.01$), the patterns showed that the student was more likely to accept less gains in exchange for having their close friend lose less; the greatest difference in resource allocation predictably existed between the student and the stranger. The authors' conducted a follow-up experiment using real money, which yielded similar results.

The results from this experiment implied that irrespective of whether the other is knowledgeable of self's decision, variance in dispersion of money to self and other decline as relational closeness increases. While these results supported the authors' hypothesis, the sample size was both relatively small and lacking in diversity. However, this research indicated that distinguishing characteristics between self and other are minimized by relational closeness.

In a theoretical handbook, Geller and Greenberg (2012) outlined a presence-based theory of therapeutic relating. Part of their research investigated relational therapeutic presence and intersubjective and reflective consciousness. They posited that intersubjective consciousness is expressed when the therapist and client collectively share a present-moment experience; the consciousness of one intersects with the other, compelling the other to adjoin in the experience of presence. This provides a "reentry loop between the two, which in a shared present moment gives rise to intersubjective consciousness" (Geller & Greenberg, 2012, p. 62). Reflective consciousness demands that the therapist be highly attuned to the specific timing of response and reaction required within the moment-to-moment interaction.

Emotional Experiencing, Intimacy, and Consciousness. Research has recently emerged indicating that affective intensity experienced in session by the client is positively correlated to treatment outcome (Beutler et al., 2012). This quantitative study (Beutler et al., 2012) further stipulated that the therapeutic relationship played a significant mitigating factor in

activating and enhancing the expression of affect. These findings suggest that therapeutic relationships predicated on trust provide a safe environment in which painful and vulnerable emotions can be accessed, tolerated, and transformed. It is important then to consider how presence facilitates the expression of intense emotional experiences into conscious awareness, potentially generating key moments of intimacy within the therapeutic dyad.

In an analytical study that explored the interplay of intimacy, affect, and consciousness between the therapist and client, Noelle Burton (2012) took a transpersonal approach to investigating the therapeutic relationship. She posited that the therapeutic alliance becomes alive when the internal, unconscious workings of the client activate the unconscious, dissociative processes of the therapist. The interdependent nature of the relationship, therefore, implies that both the client and the therapist are equally moved and changed by the relational interaction. The therapist must be conscious of his/her own emotional shifts and unexplored feelings that may arise from deep contact with the client in order to be effective and maintain the vibrancy of the relationship. Burton (2012) noted that the relationship sways to-and-fro, until new insight or meaning emerges.

Burton argued that when the client is capable of creating intimate and empathic relating between various self-states or parts of self—a systemic view of the individual that Burton does not specifically define. This, in turn, will facilitate intimacy, empathic understanding, and compassionate acceptance of another person's self state. She posited that when the client and therapist share an intimate moment of meeting, "they each dream the other's self-states into existence," which "contain core truths for the patient to discover about him- or herself, and in a likewise manner, for the analyst" (Burton, 2012, p. 663). In effect, the relationship provides an opportunity for what has been inaccessible in both individuals to surface. This process of

opening up, however, is not robotic and free of pain, as it requires necessary strain and destabilization, particularly when one is reorganizing his/her identity and relationship with life at large. In order for new understanding to arise, old perspectives must pass away.

Burton further explored the sense of self from the therapist's perspective, highlighting experiences of vulnerability and affective strain. She argued that avoiding feelings of vulnerability and emotional intimacy serve a protective purpose; these feelings are often daunting and disruptive and may lead us into unfamiliar territory of the unconscious. Studies have shown (Bar-Anan et al., 2009) that feelings of uncertainty intensify people's emotional responses. Thus, when the client deeply touches the therapist, the therapist will need to find an appropriate way to handle his or her own intense affective reactions.

Ruth Stein (1998) described emotional experiencing as carrying both necessary information as well as being pleasure-pain givers. She hypothesized that affective experience works via two parallel vectors. The first vector moves to open and express the present moment experience; to give light to that which was previously unseen. The second vector serves to regulate emotion and maintain dissociative measures. These two vectors communicate through two means: articulation (which she called Principle A) and affect limiting (Principle B). She argued that "[p]rotecting consciousness from pain (Principle B) opens the door to develop and expand the self (Principle A), whereas explaining one's self awareness, including knowledge of one's feelings (Principle A), enables one to contain more pain (Principle B)" (p. 215). In effect, Stein contended that this very complex process, which is often experienced unconsciously, demonstrates a person's capacity for present awareness and what one is willing to let in or directly experience in any given moment.

The therapists' ability to openly tap into these intense emotional experiences and effectively tolerate them can also have significant impacts on the client. As Mitchell (2000) posited, affective states have a boundaryless, contagious quality to them. The ability to hold and create space for emotional experiencing to occur enables the self to become more fluid; and the knowledge being communicated by the emotion allows for spontaneous right action to arise. This attunement to the internal dynamic workings within enables parts of the self to dissolve and protective walls to crumble, creating an authentic meeting between self and other.

Becoming intimate with intense feelings can require bravery and trust. As Ehrenberg (1996) noted, "I believe that our willingness to risk knowing and being known, touching and being touched by another human being, may be far more important than has been recognized. Perhaps our willingness to recognize the terror this holds for us, as well as for our patients, is critical if we are to dare work at this level" (p. 284). It is this kind of deep contact with the other where the therapist must be keenly aware of any tendency to dissociate or avoid, as it is in this realm of experiencing where true insight and transformation can happen. Burton (2012) argued that if the therapist attempts to overly safeguard against vulnerability both inter- and intra-personally, "we may deny the patient crucial experiences of deep self-knowledge and the subsequent self-organizational shifts that can occur through intimate relating" (p. 666).

Burton (2012) acknowledged that becoming too intimate with the client could potentially lead to crossing ethical and moral boundaries that can be harmful. Freud frequently cautioned his colleagues from engaging in emotional intimacy with their clients, as he observed many romantic relationships burgeoning from the therapeutic relationship. However, Burton argued that this in turn created an exaggerated phobic reaction and anxiety towards emotional intimacy, promulgating the creation of a separate, professional self state that is less vulnerable with the

client. While many stories abound about inappropriate discretions between client and therapist, the causalities of those clients who missed opportunities to be deeply moved by an emotionally intimate encounter with their therapist remain untold.

As the level of intimacy within the therapeutic relationship deepens, the opportunities for shifts in consciousness in both the patient and therapist also increase. It is critical that therapists actively participate in their internal experience, observing shifts in consciousness that allow them to move from a state of dissociation to state of engagement. As the therapist becomes more consciousness of his/her self states and the dynamics occurring between the self states, the client is likely to sense this openness and deepening of intimacy and feel safe to engage in a similar fashion. As the therapist begins to know and accept himself/herself more deeply, then the separation between self and other begins to dissipate. Since there are no boundaries to overcome and no self-state to resist or be rejected by, the client can fluidly merge with the therapist's conscious state of being.

There is a bi-directionality to trust and safety and a linking that can occur when confronted by intense emotional affect. Burton (2012) observed that when the self and other meet in a deepened state of connectivity, affective experiences that were once intolerable and strategically avoided are transformed into deeper, more meaningful experiences. It should be noted that this conscious state of being fully intimate and connected with whatever emotions are arising, however, can only be experienced in the present moment.

Relational Closeness and Meaningful Experiences. Building relational closeness also involves sharing experiences, particularly experiences that hold significant meaning or value. In a phenomenological study of nurses' experiences with patients, Drew (1997) attempted to identify the descriptive constructs of what makes a shared interaction meaningful from the

caretaker's perspective. In a qualitative analysis, the author interviewed 10 women and one male from 26 to 54 years old, each in various stages of a nursing program. Participants had 1-35 years of experience in the medical field. Drew conducted audiotaped interviews 1 to 1.5 hours in length with each participant, over the course of two years. Participants were asked to recall and describe in-depth a significant meaningful experience with a patient. The interview was then transcribed and sent to the interviewee for reactions; follow up calls were also recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were then read several times; consultations were made with other qualitative researchers, and the content was organized into themes and schemas to help clarify the phenomenon of meaningfulness.

From the data, the author identified two prevalent types of experiences: (1) lived meaningful experiences, and (2) essential structures of experiencing meaningfulness. *Lived meaningful* experiences are similar to implicit experiencing—it is nonverbal and understood intuitively through bodily sensations and a felt sense. It involves relating to the client through self-disclosure, authenticity (being themselves versus being professional), increasing levels of intimacy, and painful involvement (putting themselves directly in the patient's shoes). Many participants reported feeling frustrated by not finding the words or knowing what to say in such moments. Lived experience is thus an understanding of the inherent personal significance of experiences. These experiences are often not reflected upon; a type of alexithymia persists in such experiences. The participants recognized that these interactions were important but could not explain why.

The second category of experience, *essential structures of experiencing meaningfulness*, involved a more immediate reflection process to identifying the explicit meaning of the interaction. Drew (1997) found that in this type of experiencing, participants vacillated from

their emotional reaction in the immediate, present moment experience in recalling the story to the memories of the intense emotional past. Drew noted that this reflection, articulation, and self-discovery elicited a sense of wholeness and brought them deeper understanding of the experience. She posited that the experience of meaningfulness is never completed; it is constantly expanding and emerging into new meaning when examined in the context of the present moment, “limited only by the readiness of the individual to enlarge his or her understanding” (Drew, 1997, p. 419). The boundary between self and other became less concrete; these nurses desired for their patients what they also desired for themselves.

Drew thus concluded that merging the past with the present creates greater depth and richness to meaningful interaction. She also highlighted the importance of having someone bear witness to the sharing of one’s phenomenological experience. She posited that attentive, interested listening can help creative and insightful meaning emerge. Hence, she supported the theory that the therapeutic alliance and an intimate connection of self with other is crucial to self-discovery and transformation.

This ability to derive meaning and insight from a shared experience, thereby generating greater trust and closeness within the relationship, requires deft awareness of the state of being of both self and other. Geller and Greenberg (2012) argued that the window to respond in ways that can create lasting, effective, and profound change is often extremely fleeting, and the opportunity to create such an impact can only be detected if the therapist is wholly present in both his/her own self and the experience of the client.

Therapist and Client Perspectives of Therapeutic Presence

Literature on the theory and efficacy of therapeutic presence as a model is relatively limited due to the topic's recent emergence in the field. From the current selection of studies, few have harnessed their focus on the client's reception or experience of therapeutic presence.

In an attempt to empirically measure the effects of therapeutic presence from both the client and therapists' perspectives, Geller et al. (2010) constructed two variations of a therapeutic presence assessment tool: the *Therapeutic Presence Inventory-therapist* (TPI-T) and the *Therapeutic Presence Inventory-client* (TPI-C). They constructed this tool by building upon an earlier theory of therapeutic presence as aforementioned (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). To test reliability and validity measures, they conducted two studies.

The first study was based on 150 items generated from the previous model created by the authors that formulated the primary standard and themes of presence. These items were then independently reviewed and refined by one male and one female expert rater. The final questionnaire consisted of 84 items that reflected the major constructs of the process and experience of therapeutic presence (Geller et al., 2010). Nine expert raters, defined as practicing psychologists with a minimum of 10 years experience (six practicing from an experiential perspective, two practicing existentialism, and one with a dialogical/systemic background), reviewed the items. Their analysis led to the final version, which includes 21 questions, 11 positively written, and 10 negatively written items, addressing the process of therapeutic presence: *receptivity* (n=4); *inwardly attending* (n = 2); *extending and contact* (n =4); and the experience of presence: *immersion* (n = 4); *expansion* (n = 4); *grounding*, (n = 1); and *being with and for the client*, (n = 2) (Geller et al., 2010).

The TPI-C was developed in a two-fold process: (1) utilizing questions from the TPI-T that explored the clients' experience with various characteristics related to presence, and (2) filtering questions that appropriately reflected the client's process and experience of presence with the therapist. The TPI-C included 3 items presented in a 7-point Likert scale and was deemed to possess strong face validity (Geller et al., 2010).

In their study (Geller et al., 2010), 25 therapists participated with various backgrounds and theoretical orientations (4 registered psychologists, 2 with PhDs in clinical psychology, and 19 doctoral students; 8 cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), 4 process-experiential (PE), and 13 PE and client-centered (CC), ranging from 26 to 46 years old. The therapists of PE and CC orientations received approximately 6 months of training by two experts in these approaches, and the CBT therapists received 12 weeks of manualized training by experts in CBT.

Thirty-nine male and 75 female clients with DSM-IV diagnoses of major depression ranging from 21 to 65 years old were offered 16 individual sessions once a week. Immediately following every third session, therapists and clients completed the appropriate inventories. The surveys were disseminated in this fashion to help alleviate temptations of the therapist to dishonestly answer the questionnaire for fear of having to disclose multiple bad sessions in a row. Additionally, for validity measures, the client was given the *Working Alliance Inventory* (WAI) and the *Client Task Specific Measure* (CTSC-R) while the therapist completed the *Relationship Inventory* (RI), all of which assess the therapeutic alliance.

Using an ANOVA, Geller et al. (2010) examined variances between the rated sessions and theoretical orientations on the TPI-T and the TPI-C. Results revealed significant differences amongst the theoretical orientations on the TPI-T, $F(2, 111) = 28.54, p < .01$, and TPI-C, $F(2, 81) = 13.21, p < .01$. Bonferroni post hoc tests demonstrated that PE and CC therapists reported

experiencing higher levels of presence on the TPI-T than CBT based therapists; the CC therapists had the highest ratings of presence amongst all participating orientations. Bonferroni post hoc tests on the TPI-C indicated that CBT clients felt less presence from their therapists compared to clients with PE and CC therapists, however there was not a significant difference in the client's perception of the therapist's presence between PE and CC approaches.

The researchers further attempted to determine if the therapists' experience of presence positively correlated with the clients' perceptions of their therapists' presence. Validity measures from the WAI, RI, and STSC-R indicated that the relationships between the therapists' experience of presence (TPI-T), the clients' perception of the therapeutic alliance (WAI), and the session outcome (CTSC-R) as rated by the client had no statistical significance. Regression coefficients between the TPI-T and the WAI and CTSC-R were also not significant.

Overall, these findings evidenced no substantial links between therapists' and clients' evaluations on the presence measures. Data showed that clients consistently ranked their therapists as being highly present, in spite of the therapists' assessment of their experience of presence. This led the authors to conclude that the clients' experiences of their therapists and their relational alliance, built upon Rogers' core conditions of empathy, unconditional regard, and congruence, hold greater significance for therapeutic outcome than the therapists' ratings of themselves. These results coincide with meta-analyses (Bachelor, 1988, as cited in Hubble et al., 2001) of the therapeutic alliance, which demonstrated that the client's perception of the alliance has the greatest effects on the relationship, as opposed to a set of core or relational conditions provided by the therapist. As Geller et al. (2001) noted, "It may be the degree to which clients perceive the therapist as present that impacts session outcome and the therapeutic relationship" (pp. 607–608). However, clients did indicate a strengthening of the therapeutic alliance and

greater efficacy in therapy outcome when they experienced increased levels of presence from their therapist.

While both TPI instruments demonstrated good face reliability and validity, the TPI-T's predicative validity was low whereas the TPI-C demonstrated high predictive validity. The authors should consider revising the TPI-T, with more comprehensive and sophisticated questions, to determine if their experience of presence is being measured by the same conditions and standards as the client's experience of presence.

Clients' and Therapists' Experiential Differences of Therapeutic Presence

The conclusions drawn by Geller et al.'s (2010) quantitative experiment demonstrated significant variations between the client's and the therapist's experiences of therapeutic presence. Even when the therapist rated himself/herself as experiencing low levels of presence power, the client still rated the therapist's presence level as high. These conclusions were further confirmed in a quantitative study that explored the impacts of therapists' engagement in a 5-minute mindfulness centering exercise prior to a therapy session (Dunn et al., 2013).

Dunn et al. (2013) examined the effects the exercise had on the session's outcome, specifically with regard to the therapists' ability to remain present for the client. Examining recent literature on the effects of mindfulness training, the authors argued that mindfulness practices contribute to greater capacities of presence, attunement, and responsiveness within a therapy session (Dunn et al., 2013). They posited that research is lacking in understanding how daily, pre-session mindfulness routines impact therapy outcome. The authors cited recent quantitative studies that surveyed the relationship between therapist mindfulness and client outcome, providing a thorough discussion and critique of earlier methodologies and various discrepancies in findings. However, the authors failed to precisely and necessarily operationalize

relevant terminology and specific processes, most notably related to the key construct of *mindfulness* and predicted variables of *presence*, *attunement* and *responsiveness*. Mindfulness techniques are diverse—with various traditions using distinctive approaches and beholding certain attitudes and beliefs about the meaning of mindfulness. Additionally, the experience and state of mindfulness also markedly varies across certain cultural, philosophical, and religious practitioners. Highlighting the distinctive characteristics and techniques of mindfulness-based practices would have provided greater clarity and value to the study.

Dunn et al. (2013) hypothesized that therapists who utilized a short, mindfulness centering exercise prior to meeting with the client would experience elevations in relational presence; they further postulated that the client would rate the session as more effective, compared to sessions when the therapist did not engage in the mindfulness exercise. Session effectiveness was measured by data gathered from self-reporting measures: the TPI-C (reliability .82), TPI-T (reliability .94), and *Session Rating Scale* (SRS; reliability .64).

To test their hypothesis, they conducted a study using 24 graduate doctoral/master's level psychology students, all involved in a practicum training experience. The majority of participants were female (68%) and the ages ranged from 22 to 34 years old. Client participants ($n = 89$) were those adults who had been seen for at least one individual therapy session during the study. The students were trained over five weeks on practices of mindfulness and told to continue the practices as homework. Minimal explanation of the mindfulness training, prescribed activity prior to the therapy session, or homework was provided.

Prior to meeting with clients, one group engaged in a five-minute guided meditation while a controlled group abstained from the mindfulness practice. Self-reports from the TPI-T (given to the therapist) and the TPI-C and SRS (given to the client) were administered

immediately following sessions. Reliability of the TPI-T and TPI-C were deemed adequate; however, the SRS reliability was noted to be significantly lower, thereby potentially compromising the reliability of this study.

Using hierarchical linear regression modeling to analyze data, the results revealed that therapists viewed themselves as being more present in session when they participated in the mindfulness centering exercise ($d = .45$). However, the results from the clients' reports nullified the latter part of their hypothesis: clients rated their therapists as being highly present in session, regardless of whether the therapists participated in the pre-session grounding exercise (Dunn et al., 2013). Clients did identify the sessions as being more effective ($d = .52$), through analysis of client's responses to the *Session Rating Scale* (SRS), when their therapists engaged in the pre-session mindfulness activity (Dunn et al., 2013).

The correlations of this study and Geller et al.'s 2010 experiment with the TPI-T and TPI-C instrument could indicate that just the intention of cultivating presence can be felt and experienced by the client; in spite of the therapists' own evaluation of presence level. While the client's experience of the therapists' presence was unfazed by the mindfulness exercise, it is interesting to note that the effectiveness of the session from the client's viewpoint was significantly impacted by the grounding exercise. While the perception of presence may not be impacted, therapeutic outcome should be further investigated. Since the mindfulness centering exercise was only tested with trainee therapists, further research is needed to investigate whether mindfulness practice before a session could be beneficial for experienced therapists. Additionally, more specificity into the techniques and concept of mindfulness would help therapists better engage in and utilize such techniques. A future study investigating if different

kinds of mindfulness exercises have distinctive impacts on specific qualities or characteristics of presence would add robust data to the existing literature.

These studies raise the question of how impactful the role of the client is in the cultivation of therapeutic presence and the forging of the alliance. As Duff and Bedi (2009) noted from their findings in examining behaviors that aide in strengthening the therapeutic alliance, “some empirical relationship exists between what clients think plays a role in alliance development and what actually does play a role, giving some credence to the client as an insightful and knowledgeable agent” (Miller et al., 2005, p. 102). As a result, it is important throughout the course of therapy to continuously elicit the client’s feedback about the perceived health of the therapeutic alliance. Although little research has been done to measure or evaluate the client’s level of presence within the therapy session, some studies have attempted to better understand the role of the client within the therapeutic alliance.

In a recent quantitative study, authors Frühauf et al. (2015) examined predictors that enhance the quality of the therapeutic alliance between client and patient. The authors posited that although there are numerous studies that focus on the therapists’ impact on the client, there is a significant gap in field research that examines how patients influence their therapists. They focused on how self-presentational tactics, such as impression management defined as behaviors used to construct, alter, or sustain impressions, impact the therapeutic relationship. For example, in a previous study, they found that patients used impression management tactics in 30% of utterances within their intake interview (Frühauf et al., 2015).

They formulated four hypotheses: (1) Agenda setting is positively associated with the early therapeutic alliance; that is, when the patient determines the topics, goals, and process of therapy; (2) Provoking a response (direct questions, hints, searching look) from the therapist is

positively associated with the early therapeutic alliance; (3) Client self-promotion (highlighting one's achievements/competence) is positively associated with the early therapeutic alliance; and (4) Supplication, defined as the client's report of difficulties, complaining, poor posture, etc., is negatively related to the therapeutic alliance. Their hypotheses were clearly stated, and terminology and mediating variables were thoroughly defined and explained.

The literature review offered some background research on the therapeutic relationships, primarily focusing on the lopsided nature of the therapeutic alliance. Frühauf et al. (2015) cited research that demonstrated clients often do not honestly disclose their true feelings towards the therapist in an effort to maintain a cooperative, likable image. However, counter arguments or studies to refute this concept were absent, with no literary offerings to suggest that some clients are not preoccupied or concerned with impressing the therapist. The literature therefore lacked breadth and depth and appeared relatively biased towards supporting the authors' purpose and hypotheses.

To test their hypotheses, the authors videotaped the intake interviews of 60 randomly selected patients. Each interview took place between the years 2002 to 2012. Transcripts of the interviews were then coded using an utterance-to-utterance basis structured manual for patients' self-presentational tactics by random judges who were unaware of the research questions. They utilized the *Bern Post-Session Report* to measure the therapeutic alliance between client and therapist. Internal consistency was deemed adequate, as values from the first three sessions for the patient form was .82 and .83 for the therapist form.

Results from the study found that from the therapists' perspective, agenda setting, and self-promotion positively correlated with a successful therapeutic alliance, whereas supplication resulted in negative correlations. Self-promotion was defined as underscoring one's own

achievements or capabilities. Agenda setting referred to verbally establishing specific goals, topics, or collaboration of therapeutic processes at the beginning of session. Supplication was defined as the client's verbal and nonverbal expression of complaints or difficulties.

Alternatively, from the clients' perspective, self-promotion was related positively to the therapeutic alliance while agenda setting correlated negatively with the relationship. Baiting a response from the therapist was found to be irrelevant to the therapeutic alliance as arbitrated from both therapist and patient viewpoints. Correlations were of small to moderate in size. Findings also suggested a lack of congruence between the therapists' and patients' ratings of the therapeutic alliance within the first three sessions. The authors concluded that such findings might have significant effects for building a healthy alliance and identifying the patient's needs.

Overall, these results suggested that the perception of the factors that influence the building of trust and connection is not necessarily consistent between therapist and client. Whereas the therapist views the client's assertiveness in setting goals and shaping the agenda of the session as a sign of healthy rapport building, the client appears to prefer the guidance of the therapist in structuring the session. This may be due to the fact that some clients seek therapy because of the lack of support, structure, and safety they feel in their external and internal environment. It is possible that the client is seeking emotional refuge—a sanctuary where they can feel cared for, safe, protected, and heard—and the therapists' ability to initially lead the way may be helpful in cultivating trustworthy rapport. Experimental findings indicate that the subjective feeling of uncertainty intensifies individual's emotional responses (Bar-Anan et al., 2009).

Frühauf et al.'s (2015) study chose a limited range of factors that may not be identifying the underlying variables that do effectively impact positive alliance building, such as body

language cues, warmth in vocal intonation, eye contact, and attentive listening. However, these findings suggest that client and therapist perceptions of relating and connecting are not always unequivocally shared. It is possible to conclude that while a shared experience of significant power that serves to deepen trust and respect may impact both therapist and client; the meaning and insight derived from the impact may be remarkably different between the two parties. Yet if the therapist is completely present for the client in that moment of impact and awareness, it is reasonable to conclude that he/she will feel the resonance of intimacy and connection experienced by the client. As Mitchell (2000) observed, affective states that are shared on a profound level are frequently transpersonal, implying that intense emotional states may be transmissible and defy conventional concepts of boundaries.

Client Contributions in the Therapeutic Relationship. Much of the literature on the power of presence in building the therapeutic alliance tends to focus on the therapists' ability to cultivate presence and how this impacts the client. However, if one considers the therapeutic alliance to be an even partnership that is egalitarian by nature, then the client's contributions' to and experience of the relationship must be examined with equal merit. Using empirical research from their former studies, Geller and Greenberg (2012) posited that the efficacy of therapeutic presence is wholly contingent upon the client's experience of the presence. In other words, the therapists' own intent and experience of presence is not germane in building the alliance if the client cannot feel or receive the presence.

Bachelor and Horvath (2001) found data measuring therapeutic interventions that contribute to constructive therapeutic processes and outcomes to be inconclusive and often unreliable. They surmised that individuals possess unique dispositions and constitutions; therefore personal responses to various types of therapists, relationships, and interventions are

difficult to predict or quantitatively measure (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001). From an extensive review of literature on the subject of the therapeutic relationship, the authors provided evidence supporting the hypothesis that the therapist's attitudes or behaviors may be perceived and processed differently by separate clients. Bachelor (1988, as cited in Bachelor & Horvath, 2001) examined client's perceptions of therapist offered empathy, found that approximately 44% of clients preferred a cognitive based expression of empathy, 30% desired an affective-toned response, and the remaining participants understood empathy to be an open or collaborative exchange of personal information. These findings suggested that a standard response style to communicate empathy, and potentially other affective states, would not necessarily be received in equal measure amongst all clients. For example, findings revealed some clients placed greater value on what the therapist offered them, such as empathy, non-judgment, attunement, respect, uninterrupted listening, whereas other clients placed more credence in therapeutic outcomes, such as gaining greater insight, self-compassion, and problem clarity. This may suggest that some clients place more emphasis on therapeutic outcome while others find greater satisfaction with the therapeutic process. In short, "clients appear to have heterogeneous perceptions of what constitutes a positive therapeutic relationship" (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001, p. 146).

Otto Rank (1929–1931) was one of the first renowned psychologists to support the notion that successful therapy depended upon the distinctive characteristics and resources beholden to each individual client. If the client's unique resources were not met in a uniquely authentic manner, then the opportunities to engage in deep and meaningful explorations and transformative insights would be missed. He was known to urge analysts to develop their own individualistic response styles and to heed caution to relying on mechanical approaches, tricks, catchalls, general theories, or overused techniques (Rank, 1929–1931).

Allowing space for the client's irreplaceable individuality to flourish and adopting an attitude that values the client's contributions to the relational dynamic creates fertile soil for the therapeutic alliance to grow. In their extensive research, Bachelor and Horvath (2001) integrated years of empirical studies to identify characteristics of both the patient and therapist that contributed to a healthy therapeutic alliance. From research findings, Bachelor and Horvath (2001) posited that the patient's contribution to the alliance significantly impacts the likelihood of a successful therapeutic outcome. They noted several studies indicate that the client's own motivation and active participation in the therapeutic process is a strong indicator for successful therapy outcome, particularly when compared to therapists' contributions, such as techniques and attitudes (Gomes-Schwartz, 1978, as cited in Bachelor & Horvath, 2001). Beutler et al.'s (2012) found that client distress can be highly motivating factor to therapeutic outcome and spur individuals to work harder in therapy. Results concluded that client levels of distress were directly related to increases in treatment improvement. This research (Beutler et al., 2012) also indicates that the therapeutic alliance activates client related factors, having a complex moderating impact on client-expressed traits. Tallman and Bohart (1999, as cited in Hubble et al., 2001) argue that it is the client's own internal ability to heal himself/herself that makes treatment successful—the relationship serves as tool or resource from which those efforts are catalyzed.

It has been demonstrated that client communications that signify an invested commitment to therapy are in fact more crucial to the alliance than are the therapists' contributive messages. This can be interpreted as the client's willingness and readiness to embark on the journey of exploring their internal processes and experiences that enables outcome success. Other predictive factors include the client's resiliency within the therapeutic relationship—that is, the client's

investment in the therapeutic process—was more predictive of outcome than preexisting traits of the client (Kolb et al., 1985, as cited in Bachelor & Horvath, 2001). Thus, client-related factors, such as motivation for and commitment to the therapeutic process, have more significant value than the therapists' contributions in predicting successful therapy outcome.

Teaching Therapists Therapeutic Presence through Meditation

Traditionally, educating therapists on ways to cultivate robust therapeutic relationships has primarily concentrated on techniques such as reflective listening, joining, or attending (Young, 2005). Therapeutic presence requires an ineffable quality of being, which can be difficult to approach verbally or pedagogically. Western culture has recently borrowed from Eastern philosophies, which for centuries, has developed techniques for garnering presence power and greater awareness of the here and now. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) was introduced in 1979 at the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center under the direction of Professor and Buddhist practitioner, Jon Kabat-Zinn (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Kabat-Zinn's work integrated Buddhist meditation rooted in *Dharma* (the translations are vast and varied, but commonly understood as *teaching* or *cosmic law*) with mainstream science and medicine. Mindfulness has captured the interest of many practitioners and researchers within the field, and more recently, has been utilized in numerous empirical studies as a technique for developing empathy, compassion, and presence (Hick & Bien, 2008).

McCollum and Gerhart (2010) qualitatively measured the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation on teaching beginning therapists' therapeutic presence. Borrowing from Geller and Greenberg's (2002) research, they conceptualized therapeutic presence as having three components: 1) openness to the client, 2) openness to one's own experience with the client, and

3) the capacity to respond authentically to the client (McCollum & Gehart, 2010). In turn, they borrowed from Kabat-Zinn's (1990, as cited in McCollum & Gerhart, 2010) work to define *mindfulness* as "a meditation practice that involves bringing the practitioner's awareness fully into the present moment without judging or evaluating that experience" (p. 347). While this definition provides a general conceptualization of mindfulness, it could be argued that "the present moment" is not an exact or complete definition. As Geller and Greenberg's (2002) work revealed, therapeutic presence actually has an element of timelessness to it. It is not past, present, or future, but an immediate engagement with what is that is not confined to space or time.

McCollum and Gehart (2010) contend that mindfulness has two primary features:

- 1) deliberate focusing of attention on whatever feelings, sensations or thoughts arise, and
- 2) maintaining curiosity, acceptance, or interest in those experiences. Perhaps it can be argued that the western conceptualization of mindfulness is also not an accurate definition, as truly, it is movement away from a busy or full mind. Awareness or immediate engagement with the moment, without attachments or agendas, potentially gets to the heart of the concept more precisely.

The authors provide ample literature to support the effects of mindfulness on applications in family therapy, psychoanalytic work, substance abuse treatment, counseling, and cognitive behavioral therapies (McCollum & Gerhart, 2010). Several studies have shown that mindfulness techniques have increased levels of empathy amongst professionals in the health field, such as medical and counseling students (Kabat-Zinn; Schwartz & Bonner; Shapiro & Izzet, 2008, as cited in McCollum & Gerhart, 2010). They posit that mindfulness increases empathy by three means: 1) decreasing stress; 2) promoting self-compassion, and 3) moving away from an

identification with a subjective, personal experience (“self”) that is fundamentally different from that of others (McCollum & Gerhart, 2010).

In a therapy training program that offered a course on mindfulness, which included skills training in meditation, yoga, and qigong, Schure et al. (2008) found that of the three techniques, mediation was the only practice in which students reported experiencing greater awareness and acceptance of emotions. The students specifically cited increases in their comfort with silence, attentiveness, and expansion of perceptions, including connecting with both physical and spiritual aspects of being (Schure et al., 2008). Many of these reflections mirror the characteristics of therapeutic presence described by seasoned therapists in Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) pioneering study.

McCollum and Gerhart (2010) collected data from 13 master’s-level practicum students in a psychology program. Students were enrolled in a class that integrated mindfulness techniques with concurrent practicum experiences; they were asked to journal about their personal and professional experiences in learning and applying the material. The course was divided into two sections, led by two different professors, both with over 20 years of experience in mindfulness-based meditation practices. The professors assigned readings, practiced mindfulness experiences in class, and asked students to complete 5-10 minutes of mediation practices daily, encouraging breath work, mantras, walking meditation, or other personal preferences of engaging in mindful activities (McCollum & Gerhart, 2010).

Part of the course requirement was for participants to journal their positive and negative experiences in this practice. *Imperfection* was discussed to foster realistic expectations for long-term consistency. Students were not penalized for missing daily mindfulness activities but were asked to journal their reason and feelings about not completing a task for that day. The journals

were not graded based on completion of mindfulness activities but on documenting their experiences of the process. This methodology may have impacted the validity of the data, as it is possible that some students did not accurately reflect upon their true feelings and wrote information based on what they hoped the professors wanted to hear, or potentially wrote a cursory entry to quickly finish the assignment rather than carefully explore their experiences. A further limitation of this design was the sample was self-selected in that only students who voluntarily offered their journals to the study were included. It is possible that students who chose to withhold their entries did not find the course or practices beneficial; it is plausible that only those who gained from the exercises felt inspired to contribute to the study.

The authors used thematic analysis from a social constructionist model to code and identify general domains amongst the journal entries. Due to space constraints, the authors focused on the student's perceptions of meditation's effects on their clinical practice (*effects of meditation on the student's clinical practice*) as the primary domain of this research study (McCollum & Gerhart, 2010). This domain was coded by the first author, reviewed by the second author, then coded again by both authors. The codes then were conferred with a second reviewer in the final course of data analysis. The following year's cohort students, who were completing the same assignment, were asked if the results accurately represented their experiences. The second-year students strongly agreed with the overall findings, even though their journal entries were not included in the study.

Findings from the study indicated that students felt more present in their sessions. The results supported "being present" as involving several components, including attending to their inner experience, awareness of the client's processes, and simultaneous attending to both their own inner experience as well as the client's (McCollum & Gerhart, 2010). The authors also

coded for a theme they termed *centering*—the ability to hold space for the client’s deep experience without absorbing or being swept away by the emotional intensity (McCollum & Gerhart, 2010). They also found consistencies in reports of generally feeling calmer, reduction of inner chatter, slowing down the pace, and practicing soothing rituals between client sessions. The results further suggested that students developed a greater capacity to shift their focus from one of doing to one rooted more in being.

In observing how their affect was positively impacting the client, students felt encouraged to approach the client with a felt sense of being present with and for them rather than imposing a premeditated agenda. A pervasive theme throughout the participant narratives was a heightened feeling of acceptance and compassion, towards themselves, their roles as a therapist, and the client. Several students reported a sense of totality and oneness with humanity; a more relational sense of being with the other, a lack of distinction between self and other. It is possible that from the structure of the journaling assignment a parallel process transpired. The task of pausing, reflecting, and materializing one’s choices and experiences in a journal entry—that is, did the student engage in an intentional act of mindfulness—may have been parallel to experiences in the role of therapist. The journaling assignment may have encoded and reiterated behaviors of pausing, reflecting, and transforming one’s experience in the here and now with the client.

The study also proposed a model for implementation of training and supervision. McCollum and Gerhart (2010) argued that therapeutic presence training requires the supervisor to be intimately engaged in a regular meditation practice. They posited that an established and continuous commitment to such a practice was paramount to both utility and efficacy as an instructor (McCollum & Gerhart, 2010). In essence, practice should be an authentically lived

experience and integrated as lifestyle choice for aspiring supervisors or teachers. This allows for parallel processes to be acknowledged and utilized—the supervisors own experiences in the meditative process can be used to inform, connect, and enhance both individuals within the dyad.

Furthermore, the authors recommended that therapeutic presence be taught in groups, as shared collaboration, insight, and encouragement is an integral component to sustaining and building an individual practice. Practice supervisors should also impose minimum requirements, but not create an atmosphere of judgment or failure for those who do not complete the minimums. They proposed that the assignments foster discussion and openness, including struggles with consistency and motivation. Additionally, McCollum and Gerhart (2010) described the preferred style of training as “down-to-earth and practical” (p. 358). It is important that humor is utilized, and realistic goal setting and expectations be discussed. Finally, ethical issues also need to be presented to avoid any conflicts regarding issues of diversity, religion, or spirituality. The discussion of mindfulness needs to be explicitly connected to educational learning goals, so students do not feel as if they are being coerced into a religious practice.

Overall, results from this research correspond with those found in Geller and Greenberg’s 2002 qualitative study of therapeutic presence and suggest that deliberate training and practice of mindfulness techniques may effectively increase therapeutic presence within the therapeutic alliance. These results yield evidence for expanding the depth and breadth of training models for both trainees and supervisors to include techniques that promote therapeutic presence and strengthen the alliance through mindfulness practices, such as meditation, reading, and dialogue. As McCollum and Gerhart (2010) noted, “Supervision in family therapy has privileged a doing orientation to therapy: how to conceptualize problems and how to effectively intervene” (p. 357), rather than equally demonstrating how to effectively be, allow, and improvise. The practice of

mindfulness may in turn help trainees develop the quality of their presence with the client, thereby in tandem augmenting the quality of the therapeutic alliance.

Cautions for Using Mindfulness Applications

Since the early 2000s, the West has experienced exponential growth in the application of mindfulness-based techniques—particularly within medical and mental health professions—but also more recently broadening in scope to include law, business, education, and leadership fields (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). The term mindfulness has become a buzzword in the Western lexicon, gaining extreme popularity in both empirical research and mainstream media. While scientific evidence largely points to the efficacy of meditation-based practices, conversely, it has created a fashionable trend that haphazardly covets the westernized concept of mindfulness. This narrative naively lacks a broader understanding of the actual experiences connected to, and the grander commitment required of, such practices. Mindfulness is all too often portrayed as a relaxing and carefree experience that wondrously erases life's discomforts and stressors. Rarely is the physical uneasiness, the incessant brain chatter, and the surfacing of deep emotional pain depicted, particularly by mainstream media. Questions therefore arise in how to properly cultivate and express mindfulness within professional disciplines, in an effort to maintain the integrity and set realistic expectations for the processes and impacts of mindfulness-based practices.

The acceleration of mindfulness-based practices into the secular world arguably has denatured some of the meaning of mindfulness, chopping up a complete process into less comprehensive but more easily digestible concepts. Methodological approaches and quantitative measures can restrict and limit the ability to understand the phenomenon of mindfulness; these efforts neglect other multilayered aspects of knowledge and experience that comprise Buddhism

as a practice (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). When other essential components of Buddhist practice are excluded from the discussion of mindfulness (i.e., the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, etc.), mindfulness, in effect, loses some of its fullness.

For example, most forms of mindfulness practices highlight maintaining awareness of the breath, whether it is through counting breaths, intentional slowing down of the breath, or visualizing the breath in the body. While inexperienced professionals may advertise such a treatment recommendation as simple and easy to follow, it negates many of the complexities and nuanced aspects that can require a certain level of skill and deftness. In fact, many traditions anchored in meditative practices require the guidance of a mastered teacher and the support of a practicing community. Grossman and Van Dam (2011) observed this overt simplifying of breathing exercises by noting,

A committed engagement with the practice of mindfulness of breathing quickly makes clear that the process is challenging and complex, and that the learning curve is steep and long. The “simple” breath becomes a microcosm of experience, with constantly changing textures, pleasures and discomforts, allures and aversions, mental presence in one moment and its utter absence in the next. (p. 224)

As observed in the aforementioned study conducted by Dunn et al. (2013), the mindfulness exercise required a mere five-minute practice prior to the session. Arguably, this kind of the practice of connecting with the breath infrequently and at a short duration—often stemming from an academic Western understanding of mindfulness—can shortchange some of the more intensive work that serves to elicit deep insight and genuine transformation.

The westernization of mindfulness has imposed a kind of quick fix mentality towards its application. The authors argue that much of the literature points towards quick, short-term thinking with regard to psychological treatment planning and interventional methods. This pervasive attitude, in turn, may better explain why the field's recent captivation with mindfulness does not seriously consider the necessity for commitment and longevity in mindfulness application and efficacy (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011).

Furthermore, most training programs emphasize the intellectual and conceptual aspects of therapeutic work. However, mindfulness requires an absence of concrete knowing or thinking, as an underlying theme within dharma teachings is that life is simultaneously comprehensible and incomprehensible. Pure awareness encompasses both the transparent and the opaque. It is greater than thought or feelings; it is whole, complete, with nothing missing. As Williams and Kabat Zinn (2011) postulated, "Indeed, in essence, it is awareness itself, an entirely different and one might say, larger capacity than thought, since any and all thought and emotion can be held in awareness" (p. 15).

This paradoxical ambiguity might be difficult for psychologists and clients to grasp. The lack of training in doing personal intrapsychic, subjective work within educational settings may be a barrier for clinicians seeking to apply and teach mindfulness-based techniques. This haphazard passing of information can potentially be dangerous, as one who has not developed a personal practice to mindfulness may not be apt to guiding others in the emotional and mental impacts that arise from such work. Meta-analyses from Lustyk et al. (2009) revealed that indiscriminate prescriptions of mindfulness meditation practices have had adverse effects on certain populations, including elevations in anxious distress, depersonalization, hallucinations, persecutory feelings, insomnia, psychosis-like behavior, and mania. The authors (Lustyk et al.,

2009) specifically note that mindfulness meditation can be especially contraindicated in individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder and seizure disorder. They noted that Buddhist meditative practices were not introduced for the aim of achieving greater happiness or bliss in one's life but target a much deeper question of understanding one's own self nature and radically cutting through delusions and ignorance. Not every individual may be ready to or interested in embarking on such a journey.

As Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2011) warns, if the widespread applications of mindfulness “become dogma, they may give false comfort for a while to some, but they are likely to ossify, creating needless disputes and losing their enlivening and liberating potential. A dried flower can be very beautiful, but it is no use to a bee” (p. 16). In effect, it is advised that any professional teaching mindfulness applications should have a well-established personal practice of their own and be aware of the client's interest and abilities in managing this type of depth work.

Summary

The value of the therapeutic alliance has incrementally increased since the burgeoning of psychoanalysis. This heightened focus on the relationship between client and therapist was aided by empirical research that evidenced the efficacy of the therapeutic relationship as a significant predictor to treatment outcome. Theoretical molds cast by psychoanalytic mavericks like Otto Rank and Carl Rogers galvanized ideas that emphasized respect and care for the client's innately unique and wise nature. From this dynamic reframing of the therapist's role from an authority figure to an equal partner emerged a new kind of therapeutic relationship rooted in presence. Untethered by conventional conceptualizations of space, time or form, being with and for the client in the here and now allows for authentic, meaningful connections to arise in which both the client and the therapist are deeply touched and transformed.

Geller and Greenberg (2002) attempted to construct a viable working therapy model from this way of being and relating, using qualitative analysis from interviews with seasoned professional from various theoretical backgrounds. Themes of reciprocity, inward attending, expansion, and grounding surfaced as experiences connected to the practice of therapeutic presence. This study was limited in its sample size but has provided a catalyst from future studies looking to expand and support this relatively new but promising model.

Therapeutic presence as a theoretical orientation faces challenges, such as constructing ways to teach and train professionals within the field. Entry into the here and now is always accessible—unscrupulously welcoming and unfailingly open. However, accessing the ability to steadily return to the present moment can take considerable time and practice to cultivate. The art of building presence power to access a richer, more meaningfully engaged life has been the prominent life work of countless people in ancient and eastern cultures. Yet this craftwork was only acculturated into modernized western society recently, with public discourse on mindfulness and meditation practices surging since the 1990s. Using mindfulness to teach therapeutic presence presents some potential dilemmas. For example, the depiction of meditation as an experience that alleviates all of one's suffering and life problems undercuts many of the painful and frustrating aspects of meditation. In the context of expanding one's capacity for therapeutic presence, a long-term commitment to such practices is often necessitated; frequently mindfulness misses the mark in discussing the daily personal commitment needed in order to gain greater awareness of the present moment.

Nevertheless, the expansion of practices that focus on direct experiencing of the here and now are an encouraging development in a world full of distractions that often serves to disconnect us from our own lives. Therapeutic presence provides a means for healing,

connections, and transformation—without the need for thinking, tricks, or agendas. Simply being present is a method in and of itself. Therefore, it is essential that psychologists continue to explore ways of learning, teaching, and practicing therapeutic presence with their clients and within their own daily lives. Presence is life at its most authentic, sacred, and intimate; it is the foundation of all experience.

Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problem provides the justification or logic for undertaking the inquiry process (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The statement of the problem is typically placed after the review of literature, providing a natural segue into how the study will necessarily address missing gaps within the existing literature. This statement provides a framework for why examination of the phenomenon is necessitated and identifying the consequences linked to lacking access to this knowledge (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

The statement of the problem provides the reader with an understanding of the worth and value of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). It places the study within a broader context, indicating why and how the inquiry matters. The statement of the problem enhances the reader's understanding of where this study fits within the breadth and scope of present findings. This statement is significant in identifying unanswered questions, adverse effects of not having access to such knowledge, and how discovering new information will enhance the existing literature and those impacted by potential findings (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Although theorists and philosophers across various disciplines have attempted to define and understand presence as a phenomenon, few studies have qualitatively explored the phenomenological or emic experience of presence as more than a therapeutic strategy. This study will explore presence as an actual process that fosters transformation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is a declarative statement that identifies the phenomenon of interest, units of analysis, methodology that will be used, rationale for the study, objectives for the inquiry, and a provisional definition of the phenomenon based on the extant literature (Creswell, 1998, as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2017). It is typically placed at the beginning of the write-up, following the “statement of the problem” section to provide the reader with an accurate and concrete description of the study’s intent and framework.

In qualitative inquiry, the purpose of the study should speak to the study’s utility, that is, the study must benefit and serve potential stakeholders and skillfully address covenantal ethical issues (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The statement of purpose should provide an outline for the inquiry, while simultaneously allowing space and flexibility for the unknown to arise and be addressed. The fundamental purpose of the study should be nested in identifying an emic understanding of the phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Constructing the purpose of the study is a dynamic process; the statement of purpose may be reshaped and refined based on emergent findings.

The purpose of the study is to describe and explore the phenomenon of presence using a transcendental phenomenological design for individuals working in relational dyads, with each participant representing one category of the theme of *mind*, *body*, and *spirit*. The result will be presented in a discussion of themes and patterns. At this stage in the research, *presence* within relational dyads will be provisionally defined as “being fully in the moment on a multitude of levels, physically, emotionally, cognitively, spiritually and relationally” (Geller, 2013, p. 175).

Research Questions

A research question essentially serves as the fulcrum of the study—it is the point on which the inquiry is braced and on which it pivots. It is the central question of the inquiry, establishing the conceptual framework, and guiding all phases of investigation, examination, and review (Glesne, 2016).

The purpose of a research question is to direct the trajectory of the research. The question positions the examiner at a workable point of excavation; a place where the digging into the how's and why's of a particular phenomenon can commensurate. It provides focus, direction, and the boundaries from which to maneuver in the processes of inquiry (Glesne, 2016). The question tends to require movement between the explicit and the implicit. Furthermore, in qualitative inquiry, the research question is generally guided by moral praxis, an ethical obligation to right action and authenticity.

There are four general categories of questions used to direct a phenomenological inquiry: *descriptive*, *experiential*, *process*, and *meaning* questions (Glesne, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). *Descriptive* questions are typically utilized when gathering information about what is happening or what exists within a particular phenomenon. They help to describe or explain something and often are framed as “what is,” “how often,” “what is not” (Creswell, 1998).

Experiential questions seek to understand the lived experience of the participant in relationship to the phenomenon. Experiential questions are typically open-ended and scenario-based. They provide a gateway into the participants' feelings, insights, perceptions and engagement with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Process questions are designed to explore the progression and evolution of a phenomenon over time. *Process* questions tend to encourage reflection and examination of the

phenomenon from a macroscopic view by observing the ebb and flow from past to present.

These questions often unearth discovery into new meanings, perceptions, and insights of lived experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Meaning questions focus on the specific meaning or value of the phenomenon. These questions highlight the importance and the weight of impact that the phenomenon has on the participant (Moustakas, 1994).

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. **Descriptive:** What is the nature of presence?
2. **Experiential:** How is presence experienced individually? How is presence experienced in a therapeutic relationship?
3. **Process:** How is presence maintained and deepened during the course of a relationship?
4. **Meaning:** What is the significance of presence for the relationship? What is the significance of its absence?

Grand Tour Questions

Grand tour questions are designed to elicit deep and rich sharing of personal experiences and perspectives. The term *grand tour* suggests that the participant is invited to give the researcher an all-inclusive tour of his/her experience and make meaning with respect to the phenomenon. The questions are typically constructed as open-ended queries that encourage natural conversational ebb and flow between researcher and participant. While the researcher outlines broad thematic questions beforehand, the participant is given credence to guide salient conversational topics related to the phenomenon (Spradley, 1979). The researcher and participant thus engage collaboratively sharing in the dynamic interplay of give-and-take throughout the course of the interview (Spradley, 1979).

Grand tour questions are concerned with capturing a holistic understanding of the participants' experience. Detailed explorations of sweeping themes and nuanced details of the participants' thoughts, beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and personal processes related to the phenomenon are cooperatively undertaken (Spradley, 1979). These questions often provide the researcher with information about common experiences, routine processes, and critical incidents that expand understanding of the phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Grand tour questions can be constructed in a variety of ways in order to examine distinctive angles of the emic experience. *Typical grand tour questions* elicit phenomenological experiences that are typical or common (Spradley, 1979). *Specific grand tour questions* are concerned with identifying a particular time or critical event connected to the phenomenon (Spradley, 1979). *Guided grand tour questions* ask permission for a comprehensive tour of the actual space or setting where the phenomenon is experienced (Spradley, 1979). *Task related grand tour questions* are action oriented and may involve a physical demonstration or ask the participant to draw or depict various aspects of the phenomenon (Spradley, 1979). *Native language grand tour questions* assist in identifying cultural or specific dialectal understanding of the phenomenon (Spradley, 1979).

Grand tour questions encourage descriptive, personal responses, which enhances emic understanding of the phenomenon. Grand tour questions tend to focus the conversation away from cognitive, abstract, and etic interpretations of the phenomenon and direct the participant towards connecting with their experiences in a more visceral, authentic, and spontaneous manner (Spradley, 1979). They elicit personal narratives, which can often uncover more insights than abstract questions. Through narratives, an individual can often report more of what he or she knows because narratives are holistic and include denotative and connotative information. By

empowering the participant to guide the course of conversation and directly point to phenomenological significance, both emic accuracy and methodological rigor are enhanced.

This inquiry will utilize the following initial grand tour questions:

1. I've heard different people talk about presence—not just in psychology—and over the last year, I've become very interested in what that is. What is presence to you?
2. Can you tell me about an experience where you felt deeply present with another?
3. How do you know if you are fully present? Can you give me an example of a time recently when you were fully present with someone? How do you know if you are not fully present? Can you give me an example of a time recently when you were not fully present with someone?
4. Can you describe your most recent experience of presence with another person from the moment the interaction happened to the time it ended?
5. Can you guide me through a process of preparing for or engage in being with me during our conversation?
6. You've probably had some interesting interactions where you did not feel very present with the other individual. Can you describe some experiences in which you did not feel present with another?
7. How would presence be described or understood in the context of _____ (e.g., mind, body, spiritual practice etc.)?
8. How can you tell if someone is present with you? How can you tell if someone is not present with you?

Significance of the Study

In quantitative inquiry, the statement of significance refers to a technical term referenced in statistical analysis. Significance in quantitative theory is concerned with describing results in terms of rejecting or accepting the researcher's hypothesis. However, in qualitative inquiry, significance is understood in terms of utility and intentionality. The statement of significance in qualitative inquiry explores the beneficiaries of the study and how the findings will extend existing knowledge.

The significance of the study refers to both an aspirational statement about what the study hopes to accomplish and a process of broadening the study's view finder to include the interests of other potential stakeholders. The significance of the study identifies relevant stakeholders and provides a discussion of how the study will inform and benefit these stakeholders; it also addresses how the study will contribute to existing literature and theories (Spradley, 1979).

Identifying the major stakeholders and establishing a vision for how the prospective findings will contribute to the field at large serves to enhance the study's utility and ethical rigor. This statement addresses how the study will refine and add to current knowledge, as well as how the findings will be readily utilizable by primary stakeholders (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

This study aspires to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of presence and how it impacts relational alliances within dyads. Greater insight into this phenomenon has the potential to benefit individuals working within a dyadic framework, including but not limited to therapists, teachers, social workers, chaplains, couples, parents, families, and friends. This research also aspires to contribute to the existing theory of *Therapeutic Presence* developed by Geller and Greenberg (2002), which may extend field knowledge related to improving therapeutic techniques and treatment outcomes.

Chapter II: Approach

[The following chapter appears in its original form. It documents the methodology for the study as originally proposed and therefore is written in future tense. Chapter III documents what actually transpired in the field in order to better capture the experiences and unique storytelling style of the participants. The presentation of both the proposed and articulated field method allows for more methodological transparency.]

Rationale for Use of Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is the study of the various perspectives, experiences, and narratives that create diversity and meaning in life. It seeks to explore and understand how and why constructs related to belief systems and identities are built (Glesne, 2016).

Qualitative inquiry elicits the researcher's ability to be curious, to listen and observe with an open mind, and to acknowledge and suspend embedded biases to the best of one's ability. While it is not possible to entirely remove implicit bias, qualitative inquiry forces the researcher to observe his/her own perspectives, attitudes, and phenomenological account of personal identity with the same veracity given to the participant(s). In other words, qualitative inquiry necessitates that the observational lens focuses both internally and externally with equal measure (Glesne, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

While both quantitative and qualitative research use exploratory methods to pursue greater insight and understanding of the world at large, the approaches significantly differ. Whereas quantitative research relies on hard data, utilizing mathematical language and statistical knowledge to evidence meaning and connection, qualitative research relies more heavily on descriptive data and intuitive intelligence. Thus, qualitative research is typically more interested in the subjective perceptions of the participant(s), and bound by time and context—and thereby definitive conclusions are more difficult to extrapolate (Glesne, 2016).

Primary Approaches

Participant-observation (playing the role of a learner), asking questions, and thematically analyzing narratives are the primary approaches used in qualitative research, whereas quantitative study often employs questionnaires, surveys, polls, and examining pre-existing statistical data. The method of analysis also markedly contrasts. Qualitative analysis utilizes transcription, transcript analysis, coding, and reflection for data interpretation, compared to quantitative research, which often uses computer software and mathematical computation to unveil significance or nullification. Quantitative research thusly uses a process of negation to test the accuracy of hypotheses that follow systematically from a grand theory (Glesne, 2016).

Quantitative research questions are usually structured as polar questions and therefore lead to a more absolute conclusion: is there significance? Qualitative questions, on the other hand, are more descriptive, and the conclusions are more impressionistic in nature. This ambiguity, however, allows more space for the researcher to go deeper and broader into the data compared to a quantitative approach (Glesne, 2016).

Primary Uses

The four primary uses of qualitative research are instrumental, enlightened, symbolic, and transformative/emancipatory. Qualitative research's *instrumental use* involves using the methodology to address and find solutions to practical problems (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). For example, if funds are available for disaster relief, surveying the community by asking what is most needed provides information that can enhance the utility of those funds. Thus, the collected knowledge is directly linked to an effective solution. Descriptive studies also provide opportunities for enlightened use of information. Qualitative research's *enlightened use* involves

deconstructing complex social processes and understandings of self and other through detailed analytic description. This kind of knowledge can generate deep insights about human experiences and perspectives, and thereby have the power to significantly impact decision-making processes and worldviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative research's *symbolic use* involves using the methodology to uncover novel ways of understanding phenomena. It provides a way to reframe information, so that it may be seen in a new light or understood in a more nuanced manner. Symbolic use also affords broader understanding amongst people of differing cultures and backgrounds. By communicating information through metaphor or symbolism, language barriers can be bypassed, and experiences can be understood through imagery and sensory perceptions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative research's *transformative/emancipatory use* involves using the methodology to uncover information that can help shake a system and galvanize change. Transformative use of qualitative data describes when knowledge influences individuals to become more empowered by manifesting change in oppressive systems and practices (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

This study is projected to enhance the enlightened and symbolic use of its findings. The essence of presence is difficult to pin down; its meaning is rooted in knowledge that is intrinsically enigmatic, intuitive, ineffable, and abstract. To explore the deeper meaning and insights into the phenomenon therefore requires inquiry tools that can directly access the felt sense or internal wisdom gained from direct experiential understanding. Thus, a qualitative approach best serves the objectives of this study to produce enlightened knowledge of a phenomenon that is difficult to measure or cognitively grasp. These findings may therefore be utilized to contribute to existing theories and research. Additionally, presence may often be

overlooked in the broad literature, particularly in the field of psychology, due to its pervasiveness and ubiquity within the human experience. As a result, these findings may also be utilized symbolically by restructuring readers' feelings and beliefs about the meaning of presence.

This study proposes to utilize a transcendental phenomenological approach. As aforementioned, uncovering deeper meaning and insight into an abstract and experientially oriented phenomenon presents challenges that are not adequately met with quantitative methods. Thus, this study requires a heuristic approach rooted in discovering hidden meanings through narratives and lived experiences. Constructing a comprehensive understanding of presence necessitates identifying overlapping themes and schemas across various perspectives. This study will also employ the use of *bracketing* and *epoché* by reviewing personal biases and enhancing awareness of interfering and impactful subjectivities. While interview questions will be outlined by the researcher beforehand, the interview structure will allow space for the participant to guide the flow of conversation and direct which topics related to the phenomenon are salient and meaningful. This approach will encourage deep listening on the part of the researcher as well as provide a flexible and safe container for the participant's story to unfold.

Specific Methodology

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenological methodology seeks to understand how conceptualizations and constructs of belief systems impact and are impacted by the lived experience or perceived reality of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological methods are rooted in philosophical inquiries that focus on the nature of reality, deeply examining enigmatic questions about truth and illusion. This approach aspires to catch an accurate glimpse of the world through the eyes of

another—to acquire novel meaning from a distinctive vantage point. Thus, authentically capturing the participant’s experience, with as little interference from the researcher as possible, is a primary tenet of phenomenological methodology. This style of qualitative inquiry captures the participant’s narrative through pre-determined questions. The interview is relatively structured, and the researcher typically does not stray from the formatted questions (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental Phenomenological Approach

The transcendental phenomenological approach is a postmodern version of the phenomenological method. It shares many of the same fundamental beliefs as the phenomenological method. However, it deviates from its predecessor in its variation on certain approaches. The transcendental method relies more heavily on spontaneity and intuition, imparting greater influence on the role of the participant. It also gives more power to the present moment, ascribing greater space for unseen paths to lay open. The researcher may outline some provisional questions, but the construction and flow of queries are intrinsically tied to the participant’s responses. This interaction style is more reminiscent of a humanistic or Rogerian approach. The transcendental method also incorporates *bracketing*, that is, attempting to mitigate the researcher’s biases and assumptions. This process of suspending judgment in order to become more embedded in a state of “beginner’s mind” is known as *epoché* or phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). The aim is to remove as much bias and judgment as possible, thereby encouraging the researcher to ask open ended questions and create a space of receptivity, attunement, and openness (Moustakas, 1994). Both of these processes are ongoing and continue into the analysis of individual and global meaning.

The transcendental method would be particularly relevant to my area of interest because I am interested in looking at the phenomenology of therapeutic relationships (connection) and presence through phenomena that are very difficult to quantify. I also am interested in exploring whether therapeutic presence and the therapeutic alliance are core mechanisms of change rather than just relationship building skills. Because I am unclear of how presence is experienced and understood by others, I believe this approach will be the most effective in this particular research design. While I have my own personal understandings about the topic of study, I want to suspend them as much as possible and let the participants describe their reality of the experience to me. Since I am not sure how people will respond or what will come up, having a more semi-structured approach will be beneficial. I would like to keep my questions as open and unloaded as possible and really let the participants direct me where to go.

Role of the Researcher

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity explores the phenomenology and interplay of self and other. It is a way to describe the interexchange of the objective world with subjective experiences (Moustakas, 1994). While form creates a container through which organisms experience the world, there is an innate interconnectivity comprised of experiences, sensations, and intuitions that unite these varied forms. This interconnectivity dissolves the boundaries that separate the “me” from the “that.” Intersubjectivity is an idea that one can ostensibly understand, feel, and consciously connect with the experiences of another. Empathy is a primary tenet of intersubjectivity; it enables an individual to perceive and identify with the feelings and experiences of other beings (Moustakas, 1994). It also involves the concept of *pairing* or *copresence*, that is, seeing one’s

self in other and the other in one's self (Moustakas, 1994). In short, it argues that in this intersubjective state, there is no separation of self and other.

While in theory this may be the ideal state of engagement, in practice, preconceptions and prejudices often arise when connecting with others. In an effort to effectively capture the experience of another, intersubjectivity calls for greater awareness of the implicit thoughts, biases, and judgments that each individual projects and imposes on another (Glesne, 2016).

Participant-Observer Role

Participant-observer is a data collection method that immerses the researcher into the lives and experiences of its participants (Glesne, 2016). The researcher plays a dual role of participant and observer, often living, interacting, acculturating, and subscribing to the systems being observed. The participant-observer role lies on a spectrum, ranging from non-participatory observation to full participation (Glesne, 2016). Most researchers will subscribe to moderate or active participation. This is because full immersion into a phenomenon can cloud the researcher's ability to manage subjectivity, to reflexively challenge his or her assumptive lens and going native, losing awareness that the etic is not the emic. Subsequently, overt distancing can obscure the real lived and authentic experiences of the study's participants and result in missing the forest for the trees (Glesne, 2016).

The etic researcher can only gain insider access by receiving permission from the participants, often by offering respect, humility, and reverence for the community and its values. This technique was paramount to the development of anthropological fieldwork; it allowed outside researchers a more emic perspective of the phenomenon (Glesne, 2016).

This role enables the researcher to gain thorough insight into the phenomenological, social, and cultural constructs of its participants. Participant-observation allows the researcher insider access and first-hand closeness to the phenomenon, therein by enhancing opportunities to learn (Glesne, 2016). It provides greater openings for intersubjective awareness to arise, as the emic and etic come into greater contact (Moustakas, 1994). In effect, access to these valuable sources of information and perspectives is earned and given to the researcher by the participants. This enhances the validity of the study, as participants' experiences are more accurately captured.

However, the participant-observation method also contains some marked limitations. As the involvement of the researcher increases, the risks of imposing personal biases and implicitly influencing the data proportionately escalate. Greater identification with the group (i.e., *going native*) endangers the researcher's ability to discern the implicit from the explicit (Glesne, 2016). In effect, good questions may not be raised because the researcher believes he/she implicitly understands the phenomenon due to having first-hand knowledge (Glesne, 2016). Additionally, researchers can become more vulnerable to ethical misconduct, using manipulative and deceptive tactics to gain insider access or partaking in immoral or illegal activities to receive legitimacy. Furthermore, participant-observation can demand a significant investment of time and energy from both the researcher and participants that may not always be afforded (Glesne, 2016).

Ideally, the researcher attempts to seamlessly flow between the extremes of participant and observer, knowing when and how to appropriately wear each hat. The ability to shape shift in such a manner allows for the strengths of both emic and etic perspectives to be realized, creating a robust and insightful examination of the phenomenon. Acknowledging one's position

as both participant and observer provides an authenticity to the researcher's role and is most likely to elicit trust and respect from the participants. In sum, in every moment there is an opportunity to experience a nuance of the phenomenon. By moving toward and away from the phenomenon, one essentially keeps experiencing the phenomenon in new ways.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Theories

In qualitative inquiry, *ethics*—moral principles that guide one's decision making—can be categorized into four general theoretical frameworks: *consequences*, *rights and responsibilities*, *social justice*, and *care* (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Consequential ethical theories fundamentally explore decision-making outcomes and effects (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This theory posits that decisions are not inherently good or bad; rather it is the framework or context from which the decision is made that produces the perception of a “good” or “bad” outcome (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Utilitarianism is one ethical doctrine that falls under the umbrella of *consequential* ethics. It promotes the idea that right action is predicated on the intent of promoting happiness; moreover, the guiding principal of action should be concerned with producing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of individuals (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This doctrine, however, does not adequately address issues related to justice and morality. For example, the persecution of an innocent being in order to appease multiple members of society (e.g., witch hunting) is an unjust act of moral betrayal.

Also within this category is *teleological ethics*. This theory promotes the doctrine that the outcome of rightness outweighs the means by which it was achieved (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

This theory is also imperfect, as it posits that moral responsibility results from situations that lack any moral component (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Additionally, the means by which an outcome is derived may have unseen negative consequences that arise beyond the immediate context.

The category of *nonconsequentialist* theories includes the domains of *rights and responsibilities* and *social justice*. This theory is concerned with universal codes or standards to guide ethical action, despite context or consequences (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The ethics of *rights and responsibilities* suggests that all individuals are entitled to equal treatment and protection of rights, worth, and respect (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Adherence to the principals of equality, rights, and responsibilities is not concerned with the happiness of the greatest good. The ethics of *social justice* upholds the notion that equity and balance in the distribution of opportunities and resources should direct behaviors (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In effect, decision-making should bring greater equilibrium to the whole by serving those that are the least advantaged. This theory address concerns surrounding marginalization and unfair social stratification by giving voice to those suffering in silence.

However, *nonconsequentialist* theories also encounter certain limitations. For example, because responsibilities are considered absolute, it struggles to address conflicts of duty (i.e., telling the truth vs. protecting a loved one). Furthermore, it negates emotions linked to noble moral decision-making—like compassion, empathy, and regret—as suitable and ethical reasons for action.

Care theories focus on grounding decision making in the here and now by placing greater value on concrete situations than on abstract principals (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This theory looks at the context, uniqueness, and immediacy of the circumstances by asking what is right

action and what is right speech in this particular moment for this particular situation? Mutual care, respect for self and other, and collaboration are key constructs of this theory (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). However, this theory subsumes that individuals are adequately attentive to acknowledge a need to respond. Additionally, ambiguity within concepts of caretaking roles and responsibility may lead to a lack of necessary action being taken or a care need being met.

Ethical Responsibilities of the Researcher

A qualitative researcher must honor and respect critical and covenantal ethical principles. It is the researcher's responsibility to acknowledge and skillfully address power dynamics throughout the inquiry process. Maintaining keen awareness of role management is particularly critical when working with marginalized and vulnerable populations. The researcher must also take great care to minimize any risks or adverse effects that his/her presence or work may have on participants or stakeholders (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Entry and immersion should be approached respectfully and with humility. Identifying appropriate gatekeepers and building trust through rapport are essential for sustaining long lasting relationships and gathering reliable emic insight. Awareness of expectations and implications of roles and relationships is essential particularly within certain cultural and social contexts. Moreover, ongoing roles and relationships, impression management, termination issues, and relationship responsibilities beyond the inquiry process should be aptly identified and managed (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Asking questions that are irrelevant to the participants' experiences should also be avoided; it is the researcher's onus to ask only pertinent and meaningful questions. Adherence to theoretical sensitivity also requires the researcher to be aware of the surrounding politics and potential impacts the findings may have on various constituents (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The

researcher must also ensure that the voice of the participant is rightfully and accurately expressed. The participant owns his/her own story, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to verify and redress narratives with their rightful owners.

A responsible researcher will offer participants full disclosure and transparency by providing details about the study's purpose and clarifying how the findings will be used (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The participants should be informed that they are able to willfully withdraw from participation at any time. A discussion of implications, risks, benefits, confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality, anonymity, involvement, ownership, and proprietorship (guardianship) should occur prior to participation and agreed upon in informed consent, often verified through written and signed documentation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The researcher should make all efforts to avoid deception, and if deemed absolutely necessary, he/she must decide to what extent deception will be used.

Additionally, it is the researcher's responsibility to constantly be reviewing data collection methods, hypotheses, the study's purpose, investment needs, and analytic approaches to ensure a precise, accurate, and rigorous study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The researcher adheres to an ethical duty to produce the highest quality of work in service to the field, the audience, and the participants. The researcher must also carefully determine if various findings should be presented or withheld in order to best serve the participants and stakeholders. The potential consequences from the final write-up's release must be judiciously examined. The researcher therefore must consider who has interpretive authority, whose perspectives are narrated, and how will these findings will be utilized (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Purposive Sampling and Bounding of the Study

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method used in qualitative inquiries to determine study participants (Glesne, 2016). The term purposive is a derivation of the word *purpose*, indicating the underlying characteristics of intentionality and meaningfulness that encompass this approach. This technique gives the researcher authority to use his/her personal opinions and judgments to subjectively choose participants that will aptly contribute and to the study's objective (Glesne, 2016). Purposive sampling is particularly effective in qualitative research because it opens pathways that can lead to greater depth and insight into the phenomenon. While quantitative research seeks to understand the world through normative patterns and generalizations, qualitative study looks for information and meaning by examining the particularities and nuances of a phenomenon that will broaden and deepen extant theories (Glesne, 2016). Purposive sampling allows for the selection of information-rich cases, therein by creating an opportunity for wisdom, revelations, and novel discoveries to manifest (Glesne, 2016). As a result, purposive sampling provides a better fit for a qualitative approach than random selection of large populations frequently utilized by quantitative methods.

Utilizing extreme or deviant case sampling would provide the best fit for understanding the phenomenon of therapeutic presence. In this approach, cases would be selected by sampling participants that are identifiably unique or distinguishable in the context of aspects related to *mind*, *body*, or *spirit* (Glesne, 2016). The objective of the study is to understand how relationships are impacted by the level of presence that an individual manifests within an encounter. Therefore, selecting participants that have a notable reputation for effectively holding space or being present for another individual would add significant depth and understanding to

the meaning, essence, and effects of presence. Individuals with strong presence power in one-on-one interactions would help identify the key constructs of presence and potentially assist in creating a training model or working theory of therapeutic presence. As a result, my goal is to sample individuals who often work in dyads and exemplify therapeutic presence in their work or are known to possess high efficacy in holding space for others. The selection process will utilize snowballing and critical case or reputational sampling by relying on recommendations from friends and colleagues for individual's with strong presence power. I may also contact individuals with whom I know in my community, utilizing a "backyard research" approach—that is, involving participants with whom the researcher already has an established relationship. If this method is employed, as the principal researcher, I will take all necessary precautions to protect the participant's identity and confidentiality to the best of my ability. I will reiterate the participant's right to redact and change parts of their narratives and abstain from answering questions. I will also remind the participant that I will make no mention of their participation in the study and ensure that a chosen pseudonym is used.

Data Collection and Analysis

Pre-entry

Pre-entry refers to the strategies used to gain access into the field. Pre-entry involves preparation and planning; the researcher must think about how he or she is going to receive permission to enter the desired setting and be granted access to people's lived experiences (Glesne, 2016). Pre-entry frequently involves identifying and collaborating with key constituents, such as informants and gatekeepers. Fluid entry into the field is dependent upon the

relationship between the researcher and gatekeepers/informants. These relationships must be firmly grounded in feelings of trust and respect (Glesne, 2016).

Pre-entry requires heightened awareness and sensitivity to social and cultural dynamics and often necessitates approaching the setting with an attitude of humility and reverence. Cultural protocols should be followed to the best of the researcher's ability and homework about the setting and customs should be done both through dialogue with gatekeepers/informants as well as personal study and information gathering (Glesne, 2016).

My study is attempting to identify individuals that are exemplars for being present with others. Purposive sampling will be utilized through snowballing and reputational or critical case sampling methods. Since I am looking to interview three individuals, with each participant representing one of three categories (*body*, *mind*, or *spirit*), it is important to become familiar with the social, spiritual, and cultural paradigms within each context (e.g., particular religious or spiritual practices related to *mind*, specific types of yoga or massage therapist practices related to *body*, and psychotherapeutic orientations or scientific underpinnings related to *mind*).

I will need to rely on knowledge from gatekeepers and informants, in addition to conducting personal research on the various cultural contexts, to guide building relational rapport in a respectful and conscientious way. When using the snowball technique, the participant serves a dual role of informant and participant. Thus, relational rapport and trust will hopefully be built and reiterated through the course of interviewing and data collection processes. I may have some difficulties with entry due to my ethnic background, religious affiliation, and gender. I hope to counter these potential roadblocks through a strong relationship with my informants and gatekeepers.

Review of Biases. Prior to entering the field, a qualitative researcher begins to identify potential theoretical, methodological, and personal biases that may impact the study (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher attempts to anticipate how these biases may specifically impact the study and begins to identify potential strategies for minimizing the negative impacts of these biases (Shenton, 2004).

Theoretical/professional biases involve careful discernment of role management; the researcher must be conscientious of which hat fits within each particular situation. For example, qualitative interviewing utilizes skill sets and questions that may share common ground with but are distinctive from the clinical environment. Thus, it is important for the researcher to reflect and evaluate his or her biases shaped by previous education or training. Theoretical biases refer to raising awareness of the researchers' personal preferences for working within certain theoretical frameworks or orientations. Particularly in the field of psychology, it is tempting to pathologize the participants' experiences instead of remaining open and curious about their worldview and the phenomenological paradigms from which they operate. As a result, researchers must diligently observe their personal thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that arise throughout the inquiry process.

Methodological biases are often linked to previous training and exposure to methodological approaches. Academic settings typically emphasize logical positivism and quantitative approaches that value correlations, cause and effect relationships, and the notion of a fixed, objective reality. In a qualitative inquiry, it is important that the researcher stay true to the ideology and framework of qualitative theory and avoid the pitfalls of methodological drift—that is, utilizing quantitative assumptions and agendas that are incongruent with an interpretivist

paradigm. The researcher should also be aware of methodological biases related to role management, such as assuming the role of a detached expert and selectively choosing information that supports the researcher's hypothesis. Qualitative inquiry instead asks the researcher to suspend any preconceived judgments or assumptions in order to holistically capture the true essence of the phenomenon.

Personal biases are concerned with reflectively examining personal histories and how social and cultural factors influence our worldview. The researcher must be aware that differences exist between social and cultural groups, setting aside dichotomous thinking of a "right" and "wrong" way to exist. The study arises out of an intention to understand and learn rather than judge and criticize.

Theoretical/Professional Biases. My training as a mental health clinician will likely influence my approach to qualitative interviewing. For example, it may be difficult to quiet the part of me that psychoanalytically interprets responses or views my role as a change agent. This may affect my ability to openly listen and attune to the participant's experience rather than guiding them towards personal discovery. My personal beliefs regarding the nature of human beings as creative, competent, and resilient and the importance of focusing on emotional components within experiences may impact how and what aspects of the narrative that I hear and follow. I may want to focus on these specific characteristics rather than tuning into what is important for the participant. I also value the framework of experiential processing and may tend to narrow in on experiential facets of the participant's story as opposed to more cognitive or logical explanations of the phenomenon.

Theoretical and professional biases can be addressed through attentive examination and reflection of the schemas and concepts of what constitutes change within my preferred theoretical framework. For example, I personally lean towards a more process experiential/humanistic approach to psychotherapy. However, as a researcher, I must be attuned to my role as a researcher who is curious about the participant's experience as opposed to a therapist who often uses process direction and reframing techniques to elicit insight. It is important that I mentally distinguish my role as a participant-observer rather than as a change agent. This can be accomplished through a careful examination of the theoretical assumptions about roles, problems, and core beliefs from the frameworks I utilize. During peer debriefings, I can examine my transcripts more closely in order to note if there are areas I may want to revisit in order to challenge the impact of my biases on the participant's responses. My peer debriefers can suggest ways in which I can explore what my theoretical framework might not capture.

Methodological Biases. I may encounter difficulties with accepting others' version of reality and setting aside the concept that I hold superlative expertise of the phenomenon in my role as researcher, scholar, and human being.

I have my own understanding and experience of presence; in a sense, I possess personal and implicit hypotheses about what presence means and how it is experienced. This may influence how I phrase questions, what I choose to ask, and what parts of the narrative I inherently follow that may in truth not be salient for the participant. It is my responsibility to diligently question my own way of knowing as the best or correct way and to strive for understanding and acceptance of others' viewpoints. In utilizing purposive sampling, I may also

be tempted to overtly focus on and use participants that share my own worldview of the phenomenon.

Utilizing a peer debriefer to review and debias the research design elements such as interview questions, sampling methods, and data collection, will safeguard the research from drifting into a quantitative framework. Iterative analyses of emergent findings, hypotheses, and data collection processes by means of constant comparative methods can also be used to limit the interference of methodological biases.

Personal Biases. I live my life primarily from a Buddhist paradigm, placing high value on concepts of non-duality and interconnectedness. My views of suffering, the true nature of all beings and reality will invariably shape the way that I relate to participants and the diction I use to organize themes and codes from the narratives. I may be tempted to use terminology from Buddhist or humanistic lexicons.

I may have a difficult time relating to participants from different social and cultural backgrounds, which may in turn effect the ebb and flow of questioning as well as cloud my ability to hear what is valuable and salient for the participant. Furthermore, if I have a pre-existing relationship with any of the participants, it may impact what I ask or how I address follow-up questions. I may not be as thorough in extracting meaning or details from their narratives if it is a story or concept I am already familiar with or have heard before. I will utilize my peer debriefing team after each interview to ensure that I am being as thorough and subjective as possible within any pre-existing relationship, making every effort to approach each interview with a “beginner’s mind.”

Furthermore, a detailed reflection of my own personal beliefs, history, and cultural experiences will be helpful in identifying and addressing personal biases. The peer debriefer or peer examiner can also serve to reiterate these issues and assist in devising a plan to address these biases when they arise in the field. Having a peer debriefer to assist with debiasing interview questions will also ensure that the language used is not overtly vague, loaded, or embedded in familiar jargon. Posting personal reminders about these issues in the field journal and on the interview questions may also elicit constant reflection and evaluation of personal biases.

If biases or missteps take place during an interview or in the field, it is important to take note of the occurrence. Asking a loaded or biased question can be countered with a balancing question (What is good about it? What is bad about it?). Additionally, utilizing descriptive rather than interpretive questioning can also direct the interview away from subjective roadblocks, methodological drift, and challenges in role management. This plan allows for a continuation of discourse and information gathering. In between interviews, I can address biases either through reflective journaling or consulting with a peer debriefer about ways to address surfacing subjectivity.

Entry

Entry involves building relational alliances with participants and begins before field entry and data collection starts (Glesne, 2016). Entry is an ongoing process that increasingly becomes more complex as the inquiry evolves. Establishing rapport is a dynamic process that requires continual attention, examination, and engagement as new meaning is constantly emerging from each contact and interaction (Glesne, 2016).

Entry is concerned with relationship building, cultural immersion, role management, participant recruitment, and informed consent. Relationship building involves establishing trust and positive rapport with informants, gatekeepers, and participants. These relationships require constant maintenance and effort in ensuring that trust and strength in relational bonds are properly fortified. The inquiry places the relationship within a new context, thus the nature of the relationship becomes novel for both parties.

In the case of participant recruitment from a “backyard research” approach, skillful navigating and monitoring is still required, as is the researcher’s promise of fidelity to the anonymity and confidentiality of the participant. Pre-existing relationships can have adverse effects on building trust and honesty if the participant believes the researcher has a hidden agenda. Potential issues that may arise from interviewing friends, colleagues, or relatives include the participant feeling that he/she cannot authentically express himself/herself as desired for fear of repercussions that directly relate to the shared information. To address these concerns in this study, potential repercussions of participation will be thoroughly addressed throughout the data collection process, including during both reviews of the two-part informed consent and the member check. I will reinforce that the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process will be upheld. As the principal researcher, I will make it clear that the participant has every right to refuse or withdraw from the study, or to redact or change any parts of their narrative they have shared at their behest. These complexities within role management and rapport building demand reflexivity and active nurturance (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Furthermore, the researcher must also be mindful when approaching new cultural contexts, entering with an attitude of openness that is focused on learning and understanding.

Hypotheses and ideas that frame the study as an experimental analysis must be cast away in exchange for a beginner's mind that sees with fresh eyes and is unencumbered by agenda. Entry into a new setting rooted in humility and respect will make space for trust to emerge. Exclusive access of deep and broad knowledge of lived experiences can only be gained with trust and respect; without it, the researcher is likely to obtain only a superficial or shallow glimpse of the phenomenon. Finally, entry also involves a two-part informed consent that informs the participants of their rights and addresses accuracy and ownership of the narrative (theirs) and findings of the study (shared between researcher and participants). Because of the limited time and scope of this methodological study, immersion will not fully be achieved (Glesne, 2016).

Two-part Informed Consent. This methodological study will use a two-part informed consent to uphold a commitment to covenantal ethics, as it empowers the participant to play an active role in decision-making regarding the study. The two-part consent consists of the initial consent protocol and the final consent and release of information protocol. The initial consent protocol informs participants of the constructs of the study, how their participation contributes to the study, what they are being asked to do, risks and benefits of participation, as well as their rights. The final consent and release of information informs participants that they will have the opportunity to review, edit, add, remove, or modify any sensitive or pertinent information at their discretion. Participants are empowered to review transcripts, analysis, exemplar quotes, and write ups of their narratives to maintain accuracy and authenticity. The final consent ensures that they are comfortable with what and how their truths will be shared.

At the early phase of entry, the researcher will review the initial informed consent and the final consent and release of information. Once these issues have been fully discussed and agreed

upon, the participant will only sign the initial informed consent. The final consent is signed at the post-interview and data collection phase of entry, once the participant has been given the opportunity to review and make any addendums or edits to their story. This form can only be signed after the participant has approved the accuracy of the researcher's interpretative portrayal.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Constant comparative analysis refers to the iterative processes of data collection and analysis that help the researcher continuously evaluate and revise hypotheses about a phenomenon through emergent knowledge gathered from interviews and observations in the field (Glesne, 2016). Constant comparative method consists of the following components: semi-structured interviewing, data management, transcription, auditing, peer debriefing, coding, peer examination, generating the narrative, and member checking. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and work synergistically to guide each other in better understanding the phenomenon (Glesne, 2016). Constant analysis of newly collected data enables the researcher to compare his or her initial assumptions with what is actually being uncovered. Constant comparative analysis also allows the researcher to evaluate and refine his or her field methodology so that it captures more of what is meaningful to the participant. For example, each cycle can help the researcher address his or her issues of intersubjectivity and impacts of subjective biases. Additionally, reflection of emergent findings can create new meaning and inform instinctual hunches or intuitions. These insights allow the researcher to appropriately adjust data collection methods (such as query questions) and hypotheses, which ensures greater emic accuracy throughout the inquiry process.

Semi-structured Interviews. In qualitative inquiry, a semi-structured interview involves utilizing preset open-ended questions that can be adjusted and changed by the interviewer over the course of query. This approach gives the researcher credence to explore themes or responses that may be particularly salient to the participant's experience.

Prior to entering the field, I have generated a list of grand tour questions that were reviewed and debiased by a peer debriefer. I intend to utilize these questions and generate follow-up questions off of the participant's responses. If I sense the interview is getting off track, I can use my set list of questions to re-focus the interview.

Data Management. Macroanalysis of data management is typically utilized when the researcher lacks adequate time to thoroughly transcribe, analyze, or code the interview. To address this limitation, the researcher will quickly write down perceived prominent themes from the narrative immediately following the interview. The researcher will then convene with the peer debriefer to discuss findings and prepare for the next interview. This is referred to as *coding by document*.

Running code is a form of coding by document that involves listening to the audio recording and jotting down significant themes and phrases. Listening to the interview allows for follow up or new ground tour or mini tour questions to be formulated. This approach is helpful when the researcher is unable to transcribe the interview before conducting more interviews. Macroanalysis allows the researcher to stay immersed in the field, however, the process misses careful examination of the nuances within the narrative. It therefore restricts a holistic understanding of what is emerging.

During the constant comparative analysis process, I will utilize both approaches to macroanalysis. I will begin by immediately jotting down salient themes or codes that emerged from the interview. I will then listen to the audio recording a second time and generate a more comprehensive list of themes that were uncovered during the interview. I intend to take both the coding by document and running code lists to my peer debriefer to examine.

Transcription and Auditing. Transcription typically involves an exact line-by-line write up of the interview. With the participant's permission, audio recordings will be made and used in the study to be able to more accurately gather data about and represent the participant's experiences in the narrative construction of his or her story. If the participant lives in another state or island, I will obtain the participant's permission to use audio recordings during online or phone interviews.

During face-to-face, online, or phone interviews, I will inform the participant when I am beginning to record and when I am turning the recorder off. I will elicit the participant's permission to record before I begin recording. I will then turn on the recorder, and ask for permission again and document permission by recording the participant's response

Some researchers will utilize a professional transcriptionist to ensure accuracy and enhance methodological rigor (auditing). However, for this project, I will personally transcribe and audit the interview and will include all "ums," "uh-huhs," and pauses in the conversation. If, due to other, competing training requirements, I decide that I need to retain the services of a transcriptionist so that I can more effectively inform each round of data collection with the emergent findings of earlier interviews, then I will seek to do so with the permission of the

participants. If a participant knows the transcriptionist I plan to use, then I will find another transcriptionist. I will still audit all transcriptions for accuracy.

Peer Debriefing. Peer debriefing describes consultation with a qualified colleague or peer who serves as a third set of eyes throughout the inquiry process. Although not required, the peer debriefer should be knowledgeable about qualitative methods and preferably the field of study. The researcher meets regularly with the researcher before, during, and after field entry to discuss various aspects of inquiry process, such as methodology, subjectivity, emergent findings, comparative analysis, and burgeoning hypotheses (Shenton, 2004). The peer debriefer can also serve as compassionate listener for any frustrations that may be arising, an idea generator, a devil's advocate, and a methodological consultant (Shenton, 2004).

The peer debriefer can assist with methodological debriefing. Utilizing a peer debriefer to review and de-bias research design elements such as interview questions, sampling methods, and data collection, will safeguard the research from drifting into a quantitative framework. Reiterative analyses of emergent findings, hypotheses, and data collection processes by means of constant comparative methods can also be used to limit the interference of methodological biases.

In my study, I will utilize my CRP Chair (Dr. Joy Tanji), CRP Committee Member (Dr. Robert Anderson), and the Family Therapy Director of Training at Argosy University, Hawai'i (Joy Quick, MFT) will serve as my peer debriefers. Dr. Tanji will review my work on a weekly basis to ensure methodological rigor.

Coding. From a transcendental phenomenological approach, coding involves three levels: phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological reduction is concerned with deconstructing the narrative into smaller meaning units, also referred to as open coding (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher engages in a line-by-line examination of the transcript and formulates themes or labels that he or she perceives to match the emic experience (Glesne, 2016). The researcher will typically stay close to the exact phrasing used, referred to as low inference coding. Emergent themes that replicate those found in extant grounded theories, though, will be used to identify and differentiate overlapping themes. Within my study, I plan to use grounded theory etic coding from Geller and Greenberg's (2002) study to identify what has already been recognized and what is emerging as new.

Imaginative variation involves utilizing the open coding list and grouping items that seem to correlate based on process or content (Glesne, 2016). This process requires reiterative comparative analysis in which the researcher is constantly analyzing meaning units into larger categories and examining how each parcel of data is similar or different from others. The researcher must determine if each meaning unit constitutes a new label or can be grouped with other data. Each category should be briefly described or defined, often referred to as *memos* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Process coding refers to identifying sequences or repetitive progressions within the narrative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process attempts to capture the true essence and specificity of the phenomenological paradigm through the coding process. Selective coding essentially creates greater clarity and meaning of the phenomenon, enhancing the coding structure's precision and efficacy. I will utilize *phenomenological reduction*, *imaginative variation*, and *process coding* methods in my methodological project.

The next phase of coding involves *synthesis*, that is, the researcher will create coding for each interview and then integrate the codes across interviews (Weiss, 1995). However, if the participant's stories are varied enough, the researcher may choose to keep the separate coding lists intact rather than integrate in order to ensure greater theoretical saturation (Weiss, 1995). If the participant's stories are varied enough, I may choose to keep the separate coding lists for each participant separate rather than integrating the codes across participants.

Peer Examination. Peer examination involves consultation with a qualified researcher or peer to review theoretical sensitivity, explore discrepancies between new and old findings to help refine understanding of the phenomenon, and examine potential biases in the coding process (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003). I will utilize both professionals and peers familiar with qualitative analysis as peer examiners: a qualitative researcher and professor at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (Dr. Katherine Ratliff), Marriage and former Family Therapy Director of Training at Argosy University, Hawai'i (Joy Quick, MFT), and my CRP Committee Chair (Dr. Joy Tanji). My peer examination team will check my analysis of the transcripts for fit with what the participants have tried to communicate.

Generating the Narrative. Generating a narrative often occurs after debriefing and then is cycled back into the debriefing process and member check. As the data collection and the coding process ensue, the researcher begins to create a narrative of the participant's story. Coding provides deep and rich themes of the phenomenon, which are then used to generate a narrative that captures the most salient aspects of the participant's experience. The researcher's interpretive narrative is typically used during the member checks to ensure that the story was accurately captured and understood. In this study, I will generate a narrative, which I will review

with the participant and request edits, addendums, and final approval. The narrative presentation will include exemplar quotes that bring life to the thematic findings and will allow participant to speak for himself or herself.

Member Checking. Member checking is one of the final phases of the constant comparative method. It involves meeting with the participant to review transcripts and verify accurate representation in the initial and final narrative write-ups. This process enhances emic accuracy and allows participants to exercise their rights to change or modify their stories. The researcher's interpretations are reviewed and discussed, and the participants are given the opportunity to participate in the research to the degree with which they are comfortable and to recognize that they are the rightful owners of their stories. Member checking can be utilized on a spectrum: some researchers will involve the participants just in the member check to ensure emic accuracy, while others will utilize participants throughout the data collection process and involve them in checking the coding, narratives, and final write up. I will invite all participants to be involved in reviewing transcripts, coding, and narrative write-ups to the extent that they are willing and able.

The process will start with an extensive review of the emergent findings throughout the data collection and simultaneous data analysis. Following interviews, I will meet with my peer debriefing team, which includes my CRP Chair and Committee Member. I will then begin coding and meet with my peer examination team. This will allow for further challenge of my biases. When I return to my next interview, I will then be able to conduct a brief member check with the participant to ensure that the themes I am starting to identify are compatible with the participant's interpretations of his or her experiences.

The final member check will involve meeting or check-in with the participant to verify the accuracy of the cumulative transcription material and narrative reconstruction of the participant's story with exemplar quotes. At this time, the participant may add, restate, or strike content from the final write-up. It also will allow for the provision of feedback by each participant and obtain their permission to use their narratives and quotes now that the participants know what they have shared. The intent of the member check is to grant the participant *interpretive authority*, the right to review the researcher's interpretations of what they have shared so that the final presentation fits with the participant's understanding of his or her own life experiences (Glesne, 2016). Finally, the member check will involve a final review of the initial consent protocol, a discussion of the participant's experiences as a participant in the study and signing of Final Consent and Release of Information Form.

Methods of Verification

Validity

Validity from a qualitative perspective is evaluated by a study's ability to be reliable, honest, and truthful. Post-modern qualitative theorists termed *validity* as synonymous with *trustworthiness* and places significant value on how well the participants' experiences and phenomena are captured through emic accuracy (Glesne, 2016). Trustworthiness consists of key measures, including: (1) credibility—how harmonious the study's findings are with the lived phenomenon, and (2) confirmability—how well the researcher acknowledges and handles implicit biases and subjectivity to ensure accurate representation of the participant's experiences (Glesne, 2016).

Creswell (2012, as cited in Glesne, 2016) identified eight assessment measures to determine a study's rigor and strength of validity and reliability. These markers include:

- (1) immersion—time and effort spent observing and engaging in the field; (2) diversification—utilizing three or more approaches in data collection and analysis (*triangulation*); (3) inclusion of peers in examination and consultation of applied processes—peer debriefing and peer examination; (4) constant comparative analysis of contrasting data and negative cases to enrich hypotheses and objectives; (5) epoché—addressing subjectivity and researcher bias; (6) member checking—reviewing transcripts, analysis, and final drafts with participants to ensure accurate representation; (7) generating a comprehensive narrative of the findings—descriptive, meaningful writing that captures the essence of the experiences and phenomenon; and (8) auditing—submitting notes, coding, journal to a third party auditor to assess for honesty, accuracy, and thoroughness.

Establishing and maintaining rapport through extensive fieldwork helps the researcher gain trust from participants, thereby creating safety for one's authentic truth to be shared and heard (Glesne, 2016). Additionally, *relational ethics*, or maintaining equilibrium in the relationship between researcher and participant, further strengthens trust within the researcher-participant alliance. *Role management* also enhances validity, as it creates transparency in the researcher's role and intentions, further clarifying necessary boundaries amongst the researcher and participant. It avoids employing deceptive approaches to *entry*, which can injure relationships and constrict access to pertinent phenomenological knowledge (Glesne, 2016).

Epoché. The suspension of judgments and biases, plays a significant role in ensuring validity. It is essential for the researcher to be aware of the lens through which he/she is

observing the information. The ability to acutely discern how biases and preconceived notions impact examination of the phenomenon and depiction of lived experiences aids in strengthening the study's accuracy and validity (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, good implementation of *purposive sampling* can increase validity, as it allows for a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences to be examined.

Triangulation. The utilization of three or more approaches to data collection and analysis, ensures that the multitudinous layers of a phenomenon are examined from as many dimensions and perspectives as possible (Glesne, 2016). *Triangulation by data source* enables the gathering of rich and thick information from various stakeholder groups. *Triangulation by data type* supports a more holistic understanding of narratives and experiences by collecting data through three or more different modalities, whereas *triangulation by theory* ensures that gaps and limitations amongst theories are adequately reviewed and addressed. Finally, *triangulation by site* enhances validity by enabling the researcher to understand the phenomenon in a variety of contexts, extending the depth and meaning of the inquiry (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003).

Immersion. Remaining in the field over an extended period of time helps the researcher know what questions are pertinent, which enhances emic understanding (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Reflexivity of information, relationships, and the phenomenon are constructs of *constant comparative analysis*, another important tool for measuring validity. Scrupulous documentation of methodology enhances validity by keeping the researcher honest and providing means of retracing steps and examining gaps or discovering pertinent information that initially may have been missed or appeared irrelevant. This also aids in research replication and reflexivity (Glesne,

2016). *Auditing* ensures reliability by keeping the researcher honest and verifying methodological transparency and accuracy of transcription.

Peer Debriefing. Methodological honesty and rigor often involve the inclusion of a third party like a peer debriefer to help the researcher see the study from a different etic perspective. The debriefer serves to collaborate and challenge the researcher in novel and stimulating ways. In comparison, the *peer examination* helps to capture the authentic voice of both the researcher and participant. The peer examiner assists the researcher in the coding process by offering constructive and critical feedback to the coding strategy utilized (Glesne, 2016).

Member Checking. Ultimately, the validity of a qualitative study is assessed by its ability to elicit greater inclusivity of the participant's perspective in the analytic process, which increases validity. This process empowers the participant to review the researcher's work and offer amendments to the transcription, themes, and findings derived throughout the process of inquiry. The *presentation of selective coding* is often reviewed in the *member check*, which further enhances validity by means of ensuring emic accuracy and generating greater rigor in the comparative analytical processes (Glesne, 2016).

Auditing. *Auditing* ensures validity by keeping the researcher honest and verifying methodological transparency and accuracy of transcription.

I would like to utilize as many of Creswell's (1998) procedures as possible. Due to time constraints, the first process of prolonged engagement and persistent observation will present the biggest challenge. It will be difficult to find situations where I would be given permission to observe the application of presence within a dyad. My sheer presence would invalidate the dyad. However, I can observe how present the participant is with me in the interview, which would

enhance emic understanding of the phenomenon. If I employ the use of transcendental phenomenological questioning, my approach or questions with each participant will also differ. These approaches will bring greater insight into the phenomenon and allow a more emic viewpoint to emerge, as the participant will help determine the flow and focus of experiential relevancy.

I will reflect on my own biases and ask for input from others about what assumptions and judgments I may be blind to and how they are impacting the validity of the study. The various roles I play in my life will impact my ability to balance emic understanding with etic insight. My role as a student of Zen, regular practitioner of mediation, and psychology student carry particular implicit beliefs, constructs of the world, and filters through which the information will be processed. As a result, it will be important to have a peer debriefer to help identify and process personal biases. I will also pragmatically review the information with my participants throughout the process. This method in particular will enhance emic accuracy because the participants will play an active role in helping me tell their story. Their input will ensure that their perspective is accurately being depicted and understood.

The most important way of ensuring validity, however, involves member checking. This is supported by rapport building, role management, and relational ethics.

Reliability

In postmodern qualitative inquiry, reliability refers to *transferability*, or the applicability of findings to other similar situations (Shenton, 2004). The primary constructs of transferability include generalizability and dependability. *Generalizability* highlights the study's efficacy in providing relevant insight and knowledge that can be utilized by others or prospective studies

within the field. This is evaluated by examining the study's rigor and utilization of purposive sampling, data collect methods, analysis, immersion, and the timelessness of findings (Shenton, 2004). *Dependability* refers to the replicability or comparability of the study's methodology to that of future studies other studies. The strength of dependability relies upon the researcher's precision in tracking and documenting processes throughout the course of inquiry. Both broad methodological steps and the minutia of data gathering and analyses should be recorded in equal measure to aid in research replication (Shenton, 2004).

Reliability is often determined by the quality of *theoretical saturation* achieved within the findings. *Theoretical saturation* conveys the amount of overlap or cross-referencing of themes, schemas, and concepts uncovered in the data collection process. Information is gathered until *theoretical saturation* is attained. Reliability can also be assessed through Creswell's (1998) aforementioned eight measures. *Entry* into the field by means of receiving permission and acceptance from informants enhances emic accuracy (Glesne, 2016). The closer the researcher can get to the participant's lived experience through rapport building and respecting ethical principles, the more likely that richer and deeper themes will emerge (Moustakas, 1994). *Role management* bolsters transferability by creating safety and transparency in the researcher's role. This safety—predicated on honesty and trust—helps the participant feel more comfortable in sharing his/her story therein by enhancing the study's accuracy (Glesne, 2016).

Epoché. The researcher's ability to challenge and manage his or her biases enhances reliability of a qualitative inquiry by creating awareness of how biases and filters negate emic accuracy by means of denied access and immersion into participant's lived experiences. To the degree that the researcher can successfully manage the impact of his or her biases on data

collection and analysis, the researcher will be able to enhance the thickness and richness of the study's findings (Moustakas, 1994).

Purposive Sampling. The selection of cases in a qualitative inquiry determine the degree to which the study can refine understanding of the nuances of a phenomenon. Purposive sampling gives the researcher permission to selectively choose participants with relevant and meaningful experiences. This enhances the discoverability of rich themes and insights, adding robustness to the study's reliability (Shenton, 2004).

Triangulation. Triangulation of data in a qualitative inquiry helps provide a three-dimensional view of a phenomenon (Glesne, 2016). *Triangulation by data source* allows for a richer emic understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of multiple stakeholders who may experience the phenomenon differently in their context. *Triangulation by data type* enhances reliability by addressing differences in lived experiences through three or more different modalities, particularly as they relate to social constructs and positions. *Triangulation by theory* enables the impartment of new knowledge to help fortify existing theories or shape new ones. Finally, *triangulation by site* broadens the application of findings across multiple environments and contexts. This study intends to triangulate sources of data by methods of interviewing, observation, field notes, and journals.

Immersion. The researcher's prolonged time and efforts in the field increases reliability by ensuring contact with multiple informants and increased access to various perspectives. It also helps the researcher begin to figure out what is typical of the phenomenon in a particular context and what might be a historical artifact of current events (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Constant Comparative Analysis. The engagement of the qualitative researcher in simultaneous data collection and analysis helps the researcher to monitor how each successive entry into the field adds to the breadth and depth of understanding the phenomenon of interest. With each pass, the researcher is able to question and confront assumptions, methods, design, subjectivity, and approaches so that the study captures more and more nuances of participants' experiences (Glesne, 2017). This method of verification includes the *peer debriefing* and *peer examination* processes, which encourages the researcher to remain honest, transparent, and thorough by turning over his/her work to a third party for review and verification.

Documentation of Emergent Field Method. Field documentation compels researchers to maintain accuracy and diligence in their methodological approaches; this allows for greater insight into how the researcher has made decisions about how to best capture the participants' stories throughout the inquiry process. Field documentation also enhances the generation of thick and rich understanding of a phenomenon across studies by detailing field decision making so others may conduct comparable studies (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Shenton, 2004).

Peer Debriefing. Reliability is further enhanced by peer debriefing, which elicits greater rigor through the provision of a second pair of eyes to monitor the negative impacts on reliability due to researcher biases and methodological problems (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Peer Examination. In addition to the peer debriefer, the peer examiner reviews the researcher's coding scheme. The peer examiner's charge is to aid the researcher in strategizing ways to enrich the analysis and bring forth the most robust and accurate understanding of the phenomenon. The peer examiner may assist in generating an alternative coding strategy, whereas the peer debriefer can be utilized to check methodological rigor (Glesne, 2016).

Member Checking. Allowing the participant to review emergent findings is a further way to bolster reliability by pushing the researcher to capture the rich nuances of the thematic findings of the study. Member checking prevents the researcher from oversimplifying certain distinctions in the participant's story (Glesne, 2016).

Presentation of Selective Coding. The involvement of the peer debriefer, peer examiner, and participant in the review of the analysis or examination of the thematic coding list enhances reliability by bringing greater awareness to gaps in coding. It enables the researcher and participant to identify where the data is rich and saturated with meaning and where it is too thin and narrow, perhaps due to researcher bias and oversight (Glesne, 2016).

Purposive Sampling. For my study, utilization of case selection strategy also will enhance reliability. Utilizing representational or critical case sampling would provide the best fit for understanding the phenomenon of therapeutic presence. In this approach, cases would be selected by sampling participants that are identifiably unique or distinguishable (Glesne, 2016). My goal is to sample individuals who often work in dyads and are exemplars with respect to presence or have a high efficacy for holding space for others. The selection process will be determined by a combination of factors. Using the snowball approach, I will ask friends and colleagues for recommendations of individuals that have a reputation for being strongly attuned with others in their work and that may fit into one of the three categories of *mind*, *body*, and *spirit*.

I may also reach out to individuals that I currently know that I have experienced as highly present and that work in one of the aforementioned thematic categories (*mind*, *body*, *spirit*). While selecting a participant with whom I have a pre-existing relationship may provide the

participant with an established sense of safety and ability to open up, it also may present challenges to the study. Therefore, the researcher's fidelity to confidentiality and the participant's right to withdraw, redact, and refuse to answer questions must be emphasized. A pre-existing relationship may have adverse effects on building trust and honesty if the participant believes the researcher has a hidden agenda. Potential issues that may arise from interviewing a friend include the participant feeling that he/she cannot authentically express his/herself as desired for fear of repercussions that directly relate to the shared information. To address these concerns, potential repercussions of participation will be thoroughly addressed during both reviews of the two-part informed consent by reinforcing that the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process will be upheld. The researcher will make it clear that the participant has every right to refuse or withdraw from the study, or to redact or change any parts of their narrative they have shared if they feel uncomfortable.

Establishing a relationship with participants is predicated on safety and trust will be paramount to ensuring reliability. Due to potentially already having close relationships with some of the prospective participants, this may provide some significant opportunities to discover deep insights and meanings of the phenomenon. Based on the interview responses, I hope to investigate the various understandings of what presence means in the contexts of *mind*, *body*, and *spirit*.

Utility

Utility in qualitative research focuses on how knowledge can be directly used to improve and satisfy needs within the field. Although utility may be inferred to be synonymous with "effectiveness," it describes something that reaches beyond empirical efficacy. Utility goes more

deeply into assessing the study's rigor and use of critical and covenantal ethics by examining issues of *fairness*, *ontological authenticity*, *educative authenticity*, *catalytic authenticity*, and *tactical authenticity* (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Fairness is demonstrated by how evenhandedly and balanced the researcher presents each perspective and experience. A fair study will not only deftly examine multiple angles and aspects of the phenomenon at large; it will also identify the distinctiveness and nuances of each perspective (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Ontological authenticity refers to the study's ability to produce novel or enlightened information that enhances deeper understanding of the phenomenon (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). It evaluates a study's efficacy in adding complexity and richness to existing paradigms and social milieu.

Educative authenticity examines how the research aids in generating knowledge of what key issues are impacting participants and stakeholders. Deeper understanding of the phenomenon generates greater clarity and symbolic insights into existing theories and belief systems (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Catalytic authenticity refers to the study's ability to generate momentum for change and innovation (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The study's findings motivate individuals and systems to mobilize and construct new interventions that enhance existing models or generate fresh approaches.

Tactical authenticity is concerned with the empowerment of multiple stakeholder groups. The impacts of the emerging findings are not limited to the participants; *tactical authenticity*

refers to the study's far-reaching ability to influence and galvanize change within various systems and paradigms (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

I am striving to enhance *fairness*, *ontological authenticity*, *educative authenticity*, and possibly *catalytic* and *tactical authenticity*. My goal is to accurately portray multiple perspectives on the experience and meaning of presence. I hope to use an array of participants from various work backgrounds and belief systems in order to gain a nuanced and distinct view of the phenomenon. I anticipate presenting each perspective in a balanced and meaningful way. A deeper and richer understanding of presence will also serve to enhance ontological authenticity. While the term may have implicit meanings attached to it, I hope to uncover more precision and accuracy regarding how the phenomenon is defined and experienced. Additionally, this inquiry will augment Geller and Greenberg's (2002) current findings and research related to therapeutic presence. Educative authenticity will be demonstrated by expanding upon their existing theoretical model of therapeutic presence. Although it is less likely, it is possible that this study will utilize catalytic and tactical authenticity. Perhaps better understanding of presence will enhance the theory of therapeutic presence and elicit more utilization of the model to better serve clients. This may have far-reaching benefits not just to mental health professionals, but to clients or individuals within the general public that are looking to engage with their environment and others in a more meaningful and connected way.

Chapter III. Emergent Field Method

[While Chapter II presents the field methodology as proposed, Chapter III which follows, documents the emergent field methodology and what was learned during the unfolding process. Both documents are provided here in order to provide methodological transparency for the reader.]

Pre-Entry *Review of Biases*

Qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to skillfully attend to biases that may significantly impact the study's validity and reliability. Examining both conscious and unconscious worldviews invites the researcher to engage in processes of deep reflexivity, awareness, and expanding of imagination and perspective. Qualitative inquiry necessitates identification of subjectivity and acknowledgment of implicit beliefs about the world and others. Novel angles and dimensions that challenge personal core concepts are discovered through processes of personal introspection and collaboration with a peer debriefing team. Reflecting upon biases allows the researcher to monitor whether the phenomenological experience of the participant is authentically being captured as opposed to merely corroborating the researcher's own biases. I humbly offer the following disclosures as biases that were exposed over the course of this study.

Theoretical Biases. My theoretical orientation leans towards a humanistic, process-experiential, systemic approach and is further rooted in eastern spiritual philosophies. I deeply believe in the power of bringing awareness to what is happening precisely in the moment, both with one's own internal cognitive, emotional, and physiological experience as well as bringing skillful attention to one's immediate external environment. I take a de-pathologizing stance within the therapeutic context and believe that all human beings innately possess the tools and

gifts to find belonging and equanimity in this world. Through connection with each other and simply by paying attention to our experiences in this very moment, we can see our true nature more clearly, which I believe is completely at ease.

This orientation helped me to refocus my attention to the here and now during the interview process and attune to the participant. However, I often found myself engaged in an inner battle between being spontaneous and listening openly versus thinking about the next question or trying to remember or track certain aspects of the participant's narrative, that I would become mis-attuned or not hear the full breadth and meaning of the experience being shared. I found myself being critical of the moments when I failed to be fully present with the participant. In these moments, my thoughts would drift, I would struggle with my agendas, or ask loaded questions. In these moments, I questioned whether my loyalty to my own theoretical orientation might be corrupting the study.

In other moments, I found myself trying to listen for the underlying emotional process rather than the content being offered. The humanistic, process-experiential theories in which I have been trained and often utilize, such as Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT), emphasize the role that emotion plays in organizing experience (Geller & Greenberg, 2012). At times, I recognized an urge to ask questions that focused on the participant's emotional schema. In other instances, I felt pulled to emotionally process shared narratives. Finding a way to listen openly, full of curiosity, without an agenda, or utilizing techniques of validation, reflection, heightening, or empathic conjecture was a challenge at times. I counterbalanced this compulsion by reminding myself of my role as a researcher—not a therapist. I also sought help and guidance from my

debriefing team, who reviewed my transcripts and helped identify these biases, offering new perspectives and more neutral ways to frame questions.

My theoretical bias also impacted my ability to stay on topic. I was so interested in the participants' phenomenological experiences that I sometimes veered astray from the research topic of therapeutic presence, following anecdotes or asking questions unrelated to the topic. I attempted to mitigate these challenges by reflecting with my peer debriefing team as well as becoming more aware of this issue through the process of transcribing my interviews. In subsequent interviews, I reminded myself to ask follow-up questions that anchored the conversation around the topic of presence. In effect, I needed to better align my strategic mind with my "felt-sense."

Methodological Biases. As a result of having previously established personal relationships with two of the participants, my role as participant-observer was a potential hazard for biases and required acknowledgment and tending to. I was very mindful of delicately walking the thin line between researcher and friend. Particularly in the first interview with each of these known participants, I noticed a tendency to be overly formal and professional, which created some confusion, nervousness, and awkward moments in the interviews. This unfamiliar exchange was reinforced by the necessity of going over issues of confidentiality, participant rights, and the audio recording of the interviews. However, the awkward rapport was ameliorated by eliciting feedback from the participants after the initial interviews and having frank conversations about how this particular dynamic was an opportunity to experience something novel together and for a new kind of relationship to emerge. Together, we discussed the unexpected novelty and the unfamiliar aspects of moving together in these new roles. As we each

became more comfortable in this new and unfamiliar territory, we were able to draw on the trust and warmth previously established in our friendship and move forward in more relaxed and familiar fashion. This member checking, coupled with peer debriefing, helped me better orient my position on the participant-observer spectrum.

Personal Biases. I was acutely aware of potential biases emerging from my own belief systems and ways of conceptualizing and relating to the world. I identify as a Zen Buddhist, holding the same spiritual philosophies of one of my participants. This provided me with a more *emic*, insider's perspective of the participant's phenomenology. This position helped heightened my awareness of what might be important to investigate. Yet at times it posed a challenge in my ability to remain objective and curious about the participant's experience. I noticed myself "going native," slipping asunder from the equally essential *etic* perspective. There were moments when I recognized that I was not asking deeper or more meaningful questions because of being familiar with the language the participant used. I noticed that at times I made assumptions about the participant's understanding of Buddhist terms and definitions rather than asking him to clarify how he personally understood the terminology. I moderated these biases through use of my peer debriefing team and reflexivity in the process of transcription.

Entry

The Participant

This phenomenological study investigated the experience of therapeutic presence in varying contextual dyads (psychology, spiritual teaching, and body work). It intended to grasp a more global understanding of the phenomenon of therapeutic presence and how it is experienced

and understood in the lives of individuals who work one-to-one in a therapeutic or numinous setting with various populations.

A qualitative method was employed to accomplish this objective. A purposive sample of three individuals, each representing one aspect of the *mind* (psychologist), *body* (massage therapist), and *spirit* (Buddhist teacher) triad, were asked to participate in a series of three separate, one-hour long interviews. The participants were chosen based on their reputation in the community as being highly attuned and present with others in their field of work. Snowballing, representational case sampling, and backyard research methods were employed in the purposive sampling process. The participants representing both *body* and *spirit* aspects of the phenomenon were selected through the recommendation of other community members as well as personal, first-hand experience from the researcher of the power of their presence. The psychologist, or *mind* participant, was contacted based on the recommendation of a trusted mentor.

The participants consisted of two men and one female, each practicing in their particular field of work for over a decade. After careful consideration and discussion with my advisor/debriefer, it was decided to maintain a global examination of therapeutic presence by investigating the phenomenon from the cross-culturally ubiquitous categories of *mind*, *body*, and *spirit*. All of the participants were practitioners in the state of Hawai‘i, working one-on-one with individuals in a therapeutic or collaborative setting at the time of participation.

Michael is a 70-year-old male of Caucasian decent who serves as a Zen Buddhist teacher. He has been a practitioner in the tradition of Zen for nearly 50 years and has led hundreds of intensive Zen retreats. In 2004, he received *dharma transition*—being named as a successor in a lineage of teachers. Presently, he meets students one-on-one almost daily, both in person and

over the phone, providing guidance for those seeking clarity on what has been described as the “great matter of life and death.”

Jared Yurow, PsyD, is a practicing psychologist at the State of Hawai‘i Department of Health and practitioner of both Kabbalah Judaism and spiritual Hawaiian traditions. Dr. Yurow has been practicing as a psychologist for nearly three decades and is intimately familiar with family and systemic therapeutic orientations. He is also highly engaged with both his Jewish spiritual practice and Hawaiian traditions, working closely with local elders and *kumu* or teachers. Dr. Yurow frequently acknowledges and incorporates spiritual or numinous practices in his counseling work.

Katie is a female in her 30s and is a practitioner of Shiatsu massage therapy. She has been a massage therapist for approximately 10 years and has worked privately, in a retreat setting, and at a medical clinic with workman’s compensation cases. She values eastern approaches to conceptualizing the body.

Gatekeepers

Participants with an established relationship with the researcher were invited to participate in person. The *mind* participant’s contact information was obtained by the researcher’s gatekeeper and was contacted by phone. The gatekeeper was identified in the phone call and the participant graciously offered to participate in the study, expressing his respect and trust of the identified gatekeeper.

Informed Consent

All participants agreed to participate in the study. Each participant was told that they would participate in three separate interviews related to the topic of therapeutic presence,

estimated to last approximately one hour long. They were also informed that they would be asked to review transcripts and write-ups to ensure accuracy and fidelity to their stories. They were informed that all efforts would be made to ensure their participation and identity remained confidential, if they wished, and that they could terminate their participation at any time, without fear of negative repercussions. Potential risks and benefits were explained with a full informed consent. They were also given a list of resource materials. Permission was granted and obtained from the participants for their involvement in the study, including awareness of confidentiality, privacy rights, co-ownership, and member checking opportunities. This process shifted the tone from a relaxed conversation to establishing a more formal and professional relationship with each of the participants. This energetic shift within the researcher-participant dynamic was more prominent with the participants I already knew. It was a pivotal moment that marked us taking on new and unfamiliar roles within our relationship.

Immersion

The immersion process in this study was greatly facilitated by utilizing backyard research methods of interviewing participants with whom I already knew and considered friends. Immersion was also enhanced by the help of a knowledgeable gatekeeper who is well respected by the community I was attempting to engage. Trust and positive rapport with the two known participants had been gradually built for many months and years beyond the time and scope of this particular project. Because of the care that I held for each of these participants, it was difficult approaching them with the question of participation and involvement in this project. I was aware of the potential ethical pitfalls of walking the line between friend and

researcher/participant and did not want to jeopardize the hard-earned trust we had worked together to establish.

It was of notable concern that critical ethics related to power differentials, specifically participants feeling pressured to participate or reveal information that they may typically withhold as an act of loyalty to our friendship. As a result, it was very important for me to continuously emphasize their rights throughout the course of inquiry. I frequently checked in with them, both before and after the interviews, to ensure that they felt comfortable and willing to continue with participation. Both individuals expressed their consent to continue with participation and added feeling gratitude in being able to talk and reflect on the topic.

With the participant with whom I did not previously know, rapport was quickly and easily established as a result of the participant's respect and admiration of the gatekeeper who offered the recommendation and provided me with the participant's contact information. This participant's information was slightly more difficult to obtain, as he admitted in one of our interviews that he does not make his contact information easily accessible to the public—he trusts that the people that need to find him will. The challenge of making contact was quickly overcome through the aid of my gatekeeper. Once I was able to get in touch with him, he was extremely generous with his time and whole-heartedly committed to participation in the study demonstrated by the depth he offered in his stories and level of responsiveness and engagement throughout the inquiry process. He participated with unabated enthusiasm and rapport was very quickly and easily established.

In qualitative research, entry is a continuous process that is constantly emerging both formally and informally. As outlined in Chapter II, formal entry was fortified through

methodological processes of purposive sampling, backyard research methods, utilizing a gatekeeper, and informed consent. Informal entry was established and maintained over the course of the study by methods of member checking over the course of each session. Participants were continuously reminded that they were the experts of their own experiences with regard to the phenomenon. Respect, gratitude, and curiosity was often expressed by the researcher in an effort to provide a safe space for the topic to be authentically, openly, and assuredly explored by the participants. It was acknowledged that both the participant and researcher had to trust that that which is most salient would naturally emerge in the interview process. Each participant expressed their surprise and gratitude regarding the positive impact resulting from participation in the interview process.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews with Michael and Jared were conducted in person, at the site of their practice. One interview with Katie was conducted in person in a private setting and the remaining two took place over the phone. All participants volunteered to use their real names and identifying information in this project. Interviews were semi-structured, using open ended questions and guided by the researcher. In an effort to elicit rich and generous descriptions from the participants, interviews commenced with general, grand tour questions, which were further elaborated utilizing mini-tour questions precipitated by the participants' responses.

Interviewing presented significant challenges and learning opportunities. In the process of both being in the moment of asking questions as well as listening to the audio recordings and transcribing the interviews, I discovered that I had a very difficult time formulating questions in

a direct and descriptive manner. I frequently found myself in a position of wanting to follow up on something that was said but struggling with how to frame the question or ask it in a way that was not loaded or full of biases and assumptions. I noticed that I would verbally fumble through variations of words and phrases before arriving to a coherent question, and even then, the question would not be explicitly clear or neutral. I also observed that I would drift into a more therapeutically-oriented role at moments by reframing what the participant said or reflecting their comments back in my own words.

These hazards were addressed through the process of transcribing and more clearly identifying where I would go adrift, as well as meeting with my debriefing team, who further helped identify loaded questions and offered suggestions for avoiding these pitfalls in future interviews. These meetings helped generate some of the more powerful grand tour and min-tour questions that were posed, such as more process-oriented questions about preparation for presence and narrative questions regarding specific examples of being present for another or others being present for the individual.

Audio Recording

Use of the audio recording elicited a notable shift in tone and energy within the conversation. I observed that when the audio recorder was off and not in sight, the conversation flowed with more ease and openness. There were several instances when the interview formally ended, and the recording device was explicitly turned off, but participants continued to speak and share intimate and personal stories that naturally and sincerely poured out of them. It felt as if the absence of the device allowed us to return to our roles as friends, and the pressure and nervousness tied to being “on record” dissipated, creating space for a more organic sharing of

experience. I attempted to ameliorate this issue by placing the recording device in a less conspicuous place and consulting with my debriefing team about the matter.

With one participant who appeared more affected by the presence of the recorder, I explicitly addressed the issue of the recording device with the participant before we commenced in our second interview and asked if there was any way I could make the individual feel more at ease with it. Through this conversation we were both able to acknowledge the newness that we were each encountering in these unfamiliar roles. Directly addressing our discomfort enabled us to acknowledge and normalize our experiences, which subsequently lead to a more comfortable and fluid interview.

Transcription and Auditing

A voice recorder was used to capture each interview and then immediately transcribed and given to the peer debriefing team prior to the next scheduled interview. The process of auditing and transcribing provided me with invaluable information and insight, as the process of reviewing the interviews in a slow, methodical, and detailed manner offered an opportunity to be more reflexive, attentive, and attuned both to my role as a researcher and the experiences of the participants. It allowed me to more deeply analyze what I was asking, how I was framing questions, and what salient themes I wanted to further explore in subsequent interviews. It also enabled me to listen more deeply to the participant's narrative and identify emergent, salient themes that were missed or not followed up on during the interview.

The transcription and auditing process also made my meetings with my debriefing team more robust, as they were able to better dissect and understand the emerging dynamic between myself and the participant. The transcripts helped the debriefing team clarify and recognize

emerging themes that I was unable to see. Transcribing and auditing the transcripts prior to meeting for the next interview with each participant was one of the most helpful processes of the constant comparative method.

Field Notes

Field notes were written after each interview, documenting impressions, experiences, strengths, weakness, and future opportunities for subsequent sessions. These notes were reviewed prior to meeting with the debriefing team and utilized for constant comparative method. Emergent themes and codes were also noted and referenced in the coding process. Immediately recording and reflecting upon my experiences in the field allowed a space for more raw and visceral reflections to be recorded. It helped keep certain reactions, thoughts, and feelings fresh. I also reviewed the field notes prior to meeting with the debriefing team, which enhanced the reflexive rigor of this study. New meaning and insights emerged over time, and the process of recording these perspectives and reflecting upon my initial notes only served to enhance the study's methodological rigor.

Role Management

As the researcher, I attempted to be persistently mindful of my position on the participant-observer spectrum. Initially, within the previously established relationships, this role required some practice and fine-tuning. However, following member checks after these first sessions, the role became more manageable and the movements on the scale became more fluid and natural. I concentrated on positioning myself closer to the observer role and grasping an *emic* perspective of the participant based on the collected data. However, in my role as a participant

and friend to two of the participants, I was aware that there was relevant information related to the participant's experience that was not uncovered in the interviews.

In some situations, salient information or deep narratives would be expressed after the voice recorder was turned off and the interview had formally concluded. Following debriefing appointments with my advisor, I returned to the field equipped with questions and topics that would elicit greater exploration into these particular aspects of their stories. I also made efforts to minimize the presence and visibility of the voice recorder to reduce nerves or self-consciousness around being recorded.

Upon reflection, I believe that hidden biases in my methodology manifested as a result of attempting to overly situate myself on the observer end of the scale. In other moments, I found that with my familiarity of the participant's stories and perspectives, I was too far on the participant end of the spectrum and perhaps made assumptions about language and experiences that could have been further explored or clarified. When I noticed this happening, I would immediately take steps to return more towards the middle by remaining curious, open, and non-judgmental. These issues were also ameliorated through debriefing sessions and reviewing of transcripts with my advisor.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first meetings primarily involved formal discussion of processes, reviewing and signing informed consent, responding to questions, scheduling of interviews, and working out the logistics. The first interviews utilized the use of descriptive, grand tour questions, as well as some more difficult and cognitive research questions with some of the participants. Commencing one of the interviews with a concrete meaning question was identified in the debriefing session

and this error was corrected for subsequent interviews. In all the cases, salient themes and rich and thick descriptions emerged, as each participant appeared genuine, curious and willing to share their personal experiences related to the phenomenon. After opening up interviews with grand-tour questions, natural themes materialized and were followed with the participants sharing his/her own stories. The interviews maintained a semi-structured, conversational approach that was less directive and intended to follow the participant's lead. In all interviews, meaningful stories developed and deepened quickly.

Theoretical saturation was attained by the conclusion of the third and final interviews. As a result of the unique qualities of each participant, saturation occurred at various intervals of the data collection process. Each participant was interviewed three times, with interviews lasting fifty-five minutes to an hour and twenty minutes. Participants were also met with on other occasions, such discussion of participation, reviewing informed consent, and member checking. Although these conversations are not included in the number of interviews, they are significant because they impacted building an alliance, entry, maintaining trust, establishing a participant-observer role, and information was being brought forward at each stage of the data collection phase.

Peer Debriefing and Peer Examination

In the process of peer debriefing, I met before and after each of the interviews conducted (nine in total) with my advisor, Dr. Joy Tanji. Additionally, I met with another peer debriefer, Joy Quick, LMFT, following each of my interviews with the *spirit* participant. I also passed along transcripts to my third debriefer, Dr. Robert Anderson. I spent the most amount of time in the debriefing process with Dr. Tanji. In our debriefing sessions, we reviewed transcripts and

discussed emerging themes, meanings, psychological processes, identified areas of bias, collaborated on follow up grand tour questions, coding, and possible related areas of literature. She aided in enhancing the methodological rigor by discussing the qualitative inquiry's emerging process of data collection with regard to specific methodology. Additionally, in my meetings with Joy Quick, we examined relationship building, reviewed the transcripts, and brainstormed potential areas of exploration that might deepen and enrich the study. Joy Tanji also served as my peer examiner. She reviewed each participant's transcript to help identify potential axial codes and facilitated me in brainstorming what might be the emerging core code. Over the course of debriefing and examination, information regarding the participant's identity remained confidential and private.

Coding

Constant comparative method was employed. The coding process ensued through analogic processes of identifying individual themes, concepts, and processes. Next, these findings were clarified, refined, synthesized and integrated with precision into more accurate themes. As themes and concepts were systematically discovered and labeled, more coherent codes emerged. Sorting then occurred in which all themes from the participants' narratives were categorized according to overlap so that similarities and differences were more clearly exposed. Finally, these themes were analyzed, and shared meaning of the phenomenon was compared with findings from the existing literature. Additionally, methodological rigor was enhanced by sharing the emerging themes with participants so ensure that their story was being accurately captured.

Coding provided some challenges, as it was difficult to succinctly capture the essence of such rich and deep narratives. This phenomenon is notably ineffable—it touches on something

large, familiar, and known but that can easily become restricted or misunderstood when using language to describe it. There was overlap and saturation within the various narratives, but due to the difficulty of describing this phenomenon, it was challenging to recognize if something new was arising from a particular story or phrasing of experience, or if it was a reiteration of something previously identified. Therefore, being concise, succinct, and direct in process of coding proved challenging. Identifying themes that were process oriented or involved explicit behaviors or steps, such as ceremonial and ritualistic processes, were more easily coded.

Ethical Considerations

This study raised the issue of several ethical considerations that required attention. The protection of the participants' identity was of central concern. This was addressed over the course of the research through informed consent, conducting interviews in a private, agreed upon location, sanitization of transcripts, and offering constant reminders and reassurance of rights and confidentiality.

Furthermore, recruiting participants that were close friends required skillful navigation and deft awareness of ethical implications. This was perhaps the greatest ethical consideration in this study. I managed this by ensuring these participants understood the meaning of participation by giving them clear information about the study and any potential consequences of participation during review of informed consent, particularly with regard to having a pre-existing relationship. I acknowledged that this could assist them in considering what information they want to share ahead of time. I explicitly clarified that there would be not negative consequences if they choose at any time to withdraw from the study or redact or change any parts of their narrative. I further reminded them of their rights both during the member check and the final consent review. I also

reiterated throughout the process that they had the right to redact, change, or edit any parts of their narrative, and they had the right to abstain from answering questions.

With regard to security of data, all notes, audio tape recordings, transcripts, and drafts for the study's final write-up were secured in a locked box to which only I had access. Interview transcripts were printed out and handed off in person to my research support team, who securely maintained the data when in their possession. Team members were not permitted to save any files or documents to their own personal computers. For the participants who requested copies of the audio interviews, a USB device was provided and handed off in person. For participants who did not request possession of their audio recordings, these files were destroyed by the researcher. For identification purposes, participants were each given a pseudonym.

Member Check

Member checking occurred throughout the course of inquiry. Each participant was given a thorough and full review of the initial informed consent forms, with opportunities to ask questions and clarify information. A check-in was conducted with participants at the outset and conclusion of each meeting and interview. Participants were asked about how they were feeling about the experience, if there were any reflections on previous communications, and reminded of their rights as participants. After the interviews, participants were provided with hard copies of the interview transcripts. Participants were contacted after the interviews and asked to provide feedback on the transcripts, the interview experience, and any current reflections on the phenomena. Participants were then provided with hard copies of the coding and narrative write-ups and asked to review these documents to ensure accuracy and fidelity to their stories. Once this feedback was integrated into the write-up, the revision was provided to the

participants. This process continued until the participant's provided their final informed consent indicating they were comfortable with the final coding and write-up. Participants also agreed to the use of their own names or selected pseudonyms. The final consent form was then reviewed and signed by each participant.

Chapter IV. Narrative Findings

Results from this qualitative inquiry revealed rich and thick narrative descriptions about the meaning and experience of therapeutic presence in dyadic relationships within various contexts. Coding is gleaned in phenomenological research through methods of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. From these processes, open and axial coding materializes. Next, process coding emerges, providing deeper insight and clarification into the developmental process. In this chapter, findings of each of the participant's narrative descriptions and open and thematic (axial) coding will be explored. The researcher's findings of collective and individual (selective) coding will be provided, and core (process level) coding will also be outlined.

Jared

Dr. Jared Yurow is a clinical psychologist who has practiced in the field for over 26 years. He currently serves as a supervisor and clinician for the Hawai'i Department of Health Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division. Jared and I met three times in person to discuss therapeutic presence in his work as a psychologist, which Jared reframed as "serving God...as a healer." He described the role of a healer as:

bringing something to a relationship where you're allowing a higher power to come into you and have your presence reach out to the other person. And I describe it as a connection of soul to soul, and that both of you are surrendering yourself to divinity. And through prayer, through invoking presence, you're asking for healing to take place.

In his work, Jared fluidly integrates the trifacta of *mind*, *body*, and *spirit*. Although he was chosen to represent the *mind* aspects of presence due to his role as a psychologist, the focal point of our conversations gravitated toward the role of the numinous or *spirit* in therapeutic presence. Over the course of his career, Jared has purposefully blended his western

psychological training with spiritual healing embedded in Kabbalah Judaism and Kanaka Maoli cosmology.

The Academic Journey

As a graduate student at Columbia University, Jared enrolled in a course on Marriage and Family Therapy taught by a professor from the Ackerman Institute for the Family. It was a pivotal moment in his professional journey as it stirred a calling to put his gifts as a healer into practice. He went on to pursue his doctorate in psychology with a specialization in marriage and family therapy at the United State International (now Alliant) University in San Diego, where James Framo and others served as influential mentors.

When I went through my doctoral program, I originally started off in a very traditional clinical track. I started, well originally, at Columbia. I took one marriage and family therapy course with a professor from the Ackerman Institute, which is one of the big marriage and family therapy centers. So I got a taste, and I thought, “Hmm, there’s something to it.” Got accepted into my doctoral program at California School of Professional Psychology. Then it was because of my advisor who was a marriage and family therapist, who said, go to United States International, which is now Alliant, you need to be doing marriage and family. So I had to kind of weave a little bit, and on the one hand, stay true to my quote “clinical psychology” but I also had to be in a place where I could grow.

[In the doctorate program] I had what they call a personal growth requirement. So one of the things that was expected was, I think it was either as a first or second year student, you participated in a year of psychotherapy. You needed to, if nothing else it would make you humble because you had realized when you were working with people you have some understanding of what it’s like to go through the process. And then later, James Framo, my mentor, believed how important it was for you to go through your own family of origin work in order to be able to understand that...Western psychotherapy has taken me so far, but I need context, I need an explanation. I will tell you that psychotherapy can answer some questions. I’m not sure it can answer all questions.

Identifying His Divine Purpose

Although he formalized his role as a professional psychologist through educational means, Jared’s path as a healer began at a much earlier age. As a youth, he emanated a powerful

penchant for therapeutic healing and spiritual awareness. His father, observing the attentive way Jared interacted with others, intuited that these natural gifts would lead him down the path of psychology.

I can look back, and I would say there were instances of where my father would just see the way I would talk with people. And he was like, you're meant to be a psychologist, this is what you need to do.

At the age of nine, Jared's own awareness of his capacity as a spiritual conduit surfaced during a transformative experience when he nearly drowned in a flash flood while fishing with his father. He recalled,

I almost drown when I was 9 years old. I remember fishing in northeastern Maryland with my dad....And all of the sudden I look up and I see this huge tidal wave of water... there was this one place we had to cross that was deep, and the current was rising. I went under water and felt an incredible sense of calm. All I could think of was "I'm going to push my dad's head up, I want him to breathe." I'm not worried about me. Completely calm. And we were able to walk, but that's all I could think of. And there were fishermen who were on this little narrow peninsula. We were somehow able to make it there, and they pulled us up. And by the time we pulled up, all of the sudden it was a raging current again. That's when I know God saved my life. But I remember the calmness. I was going to be okay.

He attributed his survival and that impenetrable inner peace to God.

It was God. You look back and go, yeah, that was God, no other explanation. Otherwise, I should be dead. I was only 9 years old. And I don't think I knew enough but you remember. And I think because I remembered years later, you begin to add elements that help give you some understanding of, you know, was that a baptism? Maybe. Was it a test of faith? Maybe. Was it God saving me because there was something that was expected of me? Maybe.

Whatever the reason, the near fatal accident had a significant impact on his life that further enhanced his close connection with God.

Wisdom of the Elders. Jared's maternal grandmother also served as an important figure in his development as a soulful listener and spiritual healer. He described his grandmother's remarkable ability to recognize worthiness and love in all ("loving the stranger"), and her keen ability to see the hurt in others. When describing her influence on his development, he recounted:

There's nothing I think that anyone could ever do that wasn't repairable in my grandmother's eyes. That's what I'm really feeling from her. Everyone was worthy of forgiveness. She had a way of just really looking inside someone and seeing the hurt. And identifying it but then loving it. Loving that and helping to remove the hurt.

My grandmother must have been Hawaiian in her previous life because in the book "Change We Must," by Nana Veary, one of the words I learned recently in Hebrew, *Ahavat Ger*, loving the stranger. That is such an important act because you recognize, yes the person's a stranger, but they are your brother and sister. They are a father, mother, aunt, uncle, whoever cousin. Each one has the spirit of God inside.

He described her as someone who nourished people not just physically, but spiritually through kindness, generosity of spirit, and wisdom.

Called by Name. Names bequeathed to him by respected elders and spiritual teachers also point to a personal calling of divine purpose. As a boy, he was given the Hebrew name Jacob, a symbol of patriarchy, responsibility, and one who "wrestles with God."

In Judaism, there's the expectation that we wrestle with God. My Hebrew name is Jacob, so it's kind of an expectation. I may wrestle with God, but I don't ignore God. Because I want answers.

Later in his life, under the tutelage of spiritual Hawaiian *kumu* or teachers, he was given the name Pukana O Ke Akua, meaning a source through which Creator flows. These names serve as a reminder of Jared's purpose and responsibilities to the world: to heal by allowing God to flow through him.

My Hawaiian name is Pukana O Ke Akua. Pukana means a source or outlet. So Pukana wai means an outlet through which water flows. Ke Akua refers to Creator, the Almighty. So I'm a source through which the Almighty flows, that is my Hawaiian name gifted to

me by Auntie Malia Craver, as well as Auntie Myra Kolani Chartrand of Hawai'i Island. My Hebrew name is Jacob. So Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel are the patriarchs and matriarchs. So I recognize that I have *kuleana*, I have responsibility. And that what I am doing is when I recognize that this is my Hawaiian name, that the way I heal others is by allowing Creator to flow through me to those whom I meet.

Mind and Beyond: Therapy as an Integrative Practice

When examining the age-old question: “what is the nature of mind?” Jared’s responses implied a non-dualistic worldview, arguing that one can neither separate spirit from consciousness nor from the physical world.

Gandhi used to say, “Life is an indivisible whole.” You can’t do right in one part of life while doing wrong in another part. Life is an indivisible whole. Can I act a certain way which is a *‘ole pono* (dishonest), which is not *pono* (upright), in the rest of my life and then suddenly enter the healing session with someone? I would say spiritually, therapeutically, you can’t do that.

We talk about the holy and the profane and yet, in the midst of all of that, still carving out that time that’s sacred.

Transformation as a process is dialectical and holistic, and his integrative approach attempts to fill gaps within western models of healing that neglect the spiritual aspects of life. He suggested that the phenomenon of *mind* extends beyond traditional boundaries of western psychological training that typically emphasizes literal and empirical knowledge, often to the exclusion of intuition, ancient wisdom practices, and phenomenological knowledge.

In all cultures there are symbols, and so I suddenly realized that you are looking for a place of nurturing, and it can be a challenge within a Western psychology training program. So how do I keep my identity as a psychologist and yet at the same time reach out for the divine, the spiritual?

It is at a level that I find, I don’t know if I want to say, it goes beyond psychotherapy. It is both embedded in psychotherapy but really transcends it.

Am I normal? Am I abnormal? Am I schizophrenic? If you study other cultures [they] will tell you that many of these experiences within this context is normal. I don’t know if

I could've learned this if I hadn't come to Hawai'i and studied with people who really are spiritual masters and for whom spirituality is kind of second nature. And [in] western psychotherapy, it's not second nature. Although I think it's moving towards that. We're moving more towards wellness paradigms. The fact that we're beginning to include acupuncture, massage, other things. I see a harmonization that's starting to happen at this point. And I will also tell you it took me 20 years to get to a point where I even felt that I was ready to practice. I had to get to point where I learned to trust God in that way, but I had to trust myself.

Jared's narrative suggests that psychotherapy should be careful not to bypass the numinous and existential aspects of the human experience that are crucial to healing and wellbeing.

A Belief and Trust in a Higher Power

A Divine, Loving Presence through which All Is Connected. Jared explained that presence is fundamentally anchored in a belief in a higher power, which connects the individual to something greater than the egoic self. This vast numinous greatness, which he noted is paradoxically both "unknowable and known," is communicated in a myriad of ways by various cultures and traditions.

I think ultimately [presence] comes back to a belief in higher power. Whatever title you might use for what a higher power is.

I think to understand there are different manifestations of that which is some ways, is the unknowable. And yet which is known. So in Judaism we will say, *Hashem*, which means literally "The Name" because there is no word that can accurately capture all of what God is.

He debunks the notion that there is a one-size-fits-all expression of this numinous entity and fluidly danced between multiple terms, using descriptors like "The Divine," "*Ke Akua*," "Creator," "Almighty," or "Higher Power." He most frequently referenced this phenomenon as "God."

At a very simple level, I could say God. I could say *Ke Akua*. A recognition that there is, in the universe but really is the universe, a divine, loving presence that through which all is connected.

Prayer becomes important. Spiritual exercises, meditation, there are many religions, cultures. There are many ways of doing it. I don't think there's one right way. But I will tell you accessing higher power, if you're doing this type of work, is step number one.

He wove a variety of spiritual traditions and practices into the framing of his stories, but most often rooted his phenomenological experience in language and metaphor connected to Kabbalah Judaism and Hawaiian culture.

An Act of Faith and Doubt. Jared professed that presence is an act of faith that involves both trust and doubt. Faith is a byproduct of not knowing, wanting answers, and having the courage to seek out those answers.

There is a saying that goes, if you start with certainty, you will end with doubt. If you start with doubt, you will end with certainty. Doubt is part of the process. The trust comes from the questioning, from the doubt, from the seeking. When we seek God, we are filled with doubt.

He argued that when one can steadfastly engage with discomforts aroused by doubt and fear, those pains can transform into humility, compassion, and empathy.

I think if it were easy, I don't think we would value and appreciate it. Knowing the struggles, I think humanize us, I think they humble us. When I look at others, I see where I have been and the struggles I still have. It does teach you a level of humility and compassion that are so important to have. That's why I think there's struggle.

When we can acknowledge our fears and doubts and respond by asking for help from both God and beloved friends and mentors, trust in the divine loving presence deepens.

It is also by being mentored by people or affiliated with people who believe in the same way. So for me, getting to know *kumu*, who were then able to *malama* (to protect, watch over) and ultimately give me the trust to love what I have to believe in it and to use it.

[Surrendering to God] is total trust. Total love and total trust. I love you God. I trust you God. Help me God. Peace.

Acknowledgement and awareness of God is the first act of faith, which he calls “the beginning of wisdom,” requiring patience, practice, and time.

God is One. So that acknowledgment, I tell people, love and fear of God for me is what I’ve been told is the essence or beginning of wisdom. That’s the active faith that you start with. And once you know you have that anchor in God, you kind of go from there.

Faith is an act that transcends duality and extends beyond the literal or empirical. It is both seeking answers and surrendering to not knowing.

There is something I learned through Kabbalah, which talked about, when you grasp something, in the attempt to know it, you stumble. And that’s the paradox of it. Is there a way I can just grasp it but know it but not have to go through so much? So the answer is, it’s yin and yang. The two need each other, trust and doubt. Trust and un-trust. And that’s really what faith is. Faith is the ability to transcend that duality. To say, God, I know you can help me blend it, move forward. It’s really about surrendering and asking for help. That’s the real key. And to say, God, I’m not sure. I don’t know. Can you help me?

Presence, therefore, is a dialectical process of waxing and waning between knowing God’s love in our lives and struggling to find that love amid doubt and darkness.

Presence as Connecting to a Greater Whole

We Are Part of a Greater Whole. Presence is a process of unifying with God. Through this process, we become aware that we are part of a greater whole, which involves both surrendering our egoic identity and anchoring in God. He embraced a belief that all creatures hunger for connection and inherently seek to return to an original state of sacred wholeness.

You could say there’s presence that comes from the spark within me that is unique to me. But I’m also a part of something that is much greater. And that’s what I’m trying to do, in some ways, is when I heal, connect soul to soul, so that ultimately, we become all enveloped in the love and blessing of Creator.

I call God the big universal anchor.

But ultimately that’s really what we all hunger for is that connection. Connection with the divine and asking, I think of one prayer that says, God show me your face.

He shared an origin story from Kabbalah that describes how each form of life is part of a greater, divine whole.

There is the belief in Kabbalah that initially, if you go back to the time of maybe the Big Bang, that God's essence was contained within a vessel. And in fact, the vessel exploded because it couldn't contain all of God's essence. And that there were shards that scattered throughout the universe. And that each shard had a piece of the Almighty. And that ultimately, our job, in each lifetime, is to be able to collectively bring the shards of glass back together. And we do that through what are called good deeds or *mitzvot*, translated literally means commandments. But we're supposed to do through deeds of love and kindness, things that ultimately bring Creator into our lives. So healing is not only healing with the person, but it's about how you conduct yourself on a day to day basis in your interactions with people.

This process of enacting good deeds to rejoin into original wholeness is often described in the Jewish faith as *Tikkun Olam* or repairing of the world.

The Divine Spark Within. A keystone of *Tikkun Olam* is that every being carries a shard of God's essence within. Jared noted that "there is a spark of the divine in each of us," and that it is our responsibility and duty to the Creator to recognize and connect with that spark both intra- and inter-personally. He compared a person's soul to light, and presence as a process of letting one's light, or true essence, shine through.

The Jewish belief is that each of us has a spark of the divine within us. And all together, collectively, all of those sparks make up a part of a greater whole. I do believe that there is something within us that is part of something that is greater.

There's an obligation to repair the world through those good deeds. So by continuing to do those good deeds, I would say paradoxically enhances our presence but is really enhancing God's presence—or maybe our bringing our presence closer to God's.

Gandhi talked about in the midst of darkness, light persists. In the midst of untruth, truth persists. Auntie Kehau reminded me the other day of how important it is to be the carrier of light. No matter what's going on. And yes, it is a struggle. So when there is so much darkness even more so we are required to kindle others. There's a *midrash* story that says one candle lights the other without diminishing itself. So if maybe I light your candle and you light a candle of someone else and that's how we grow the divine spark.

When two people come into contact, they are meeting another part of the whole, another spark, another piece of the essence of divine presence.

So anytime you meet someone, you are meeting another part of the whole, another spark, another bit of essence of the divine presence.

This point was further illustrated by his explanation of the Hawaiian word *aloha*, which means both “breath of life” as well as “bosom of the universe.” When two people connect in the spirit of aloha, they are not only engaging with another breath of life, but they are also honoring the heart of the universe.

Aloha, not only does it mean breath of life, but it also means bosom of the universe. When one is greeting someone with aloha, it is honoring the bosom of the universe that is within that particular person. It is honoring the breath of life, the soul, the spirit, all that is for that person. When we do that, an I-Thou sense as Buber talks about, that is both enhancing our presence, but ultimately, it is bringing us closer to God.

This wisdom reaches to the core of what he learned at an early age from his grandmother, which was further reiterated in adulthood from a Hawaiian *kumu*: to love the stranger, as loving the stranger is loving a piece of your own innate wholeness.

I was thinking about a book written by Nana Veary, *Change We Must*, which is, I’d say a Hawaiian book, but it’s more than that. It’s about the spiritual journey of Auntie Nana Veary. And one day, she’s in front of a window working with I believe a teacher of metaphysics. And she says, I want you to look out the window, and what do you see? And she basically said something to the effect of the presence of God walking by in so many people.

Three Become One. Presence is synergistic, healing, and interconnected with all of life.

It manifests as a soul-to-soul connection where there is no separation between self, other, and God. As Jared described, it is like “Three become one.”

So at some level I feel myself dissolving, but it’s not that I would say I don’t have a sense of my not being there, but there’s something that is metaphysically different is how I would describe it. That person and I are one. We are one because of the connection with God, so it’s, I don’t know if one could say it’s the three of us. Or I don’t know if that’s

really the best language or words for it. But that's kind of how I see it. It's almost like three become one or three are one.

When two people are wholly present—unified both in and with the Divine—the egoic self dissolves and an experience of interconnection and interdependence with all of life arises. This synergistic connection respects the integrity of self and other, which Jared likened to polishing a gem, a process that "brings out one's brilliance without removing the essence of what it is."

I remember a colleague of mine in my graduate school days said this, and she was very spiritual. [She] talked about when you first dig up a gemstone, how rough it is. And the process of bringing out its luster. And I think there's an art to knowing how much to polish and how much not to polish. Because on the one hand, someone who is a master gem stone expert or crafts person can polish it in such a way to bring out the brilliance without necessarily removing the natural essence of what it is. And I think that's how we are in the hands of God. That's what we're trying to do is take something that's very natural and, like that craftsperson, we want to bring out the luster, but we don't want to take away too much. And that's kind of the art of healing.

The Synergy of Healing. Jared described healing as learning to love and accept oneself:

So much of healing I think is about finding and learning to love and accept oneself....A lot of the great master therapists talk about learning to love all the parts of oneself.

Healing is not a unilateral process but occurs as a reciprocal exchange. In this synergistic joining with the sacred, both parts of the dyad experience healing.

That's what I see myself doing is allowing Creator to enter both of us, so not only is the person who I'm working with healing, but on some level, I'm also healing something within myself. And I'm allowing both of us to be released to allow that which is not needed to return to the void.

That what you are looking for is for the other person to be healed but to understand too that you have been brought into this because there's something God wanted you to get out of it. So clearly there's some growth here.

Presence as a process of healing requires the healer to listen beyond what is being said and attune to what is being expressed from the heart. It entails connecting with one's intuition or "felt-sense."

My grandma used to always say, “I listen to the heart, not the mouth.” Which I think is the essence. So when I meet with people, it’s not that I don’t listen to them, but I go for the heart. I listen to the heart, I listen to the *na‘au* (gut, heart). That’s where I try to connect and so that is my gift.

And there’s still a certain amount of magic in knowing God is going to heal this person. You’re creating the conditions whereby it happens. As healers, we’re doing it spiritually.... It’s almost like using you as a meter or a sensor or gauge.... So what we’re trying to do is attune ourselves really to what that is.

Eternal and Limitless

Presence Is Being a Vessel through which the Divine Can Flow. Presence was also likened to becoming a container or vessel from which scared love, blessings, and healing can flow. He shared a Hawaiian metaphor that described each person as a bowl of light and healing as a process of removing rocks or blockages within the bowl that interfere with the shining of one’s light.

The Hawaiian belief of course is that there are often blockages, so, when healing is done, it is really to remove the blockages. There’s the idea of the bowl of light, with the stones in it. And the bowl of light is us and that over time there can be *pilikia* (trouble, problem), or other things that fill the bowl. But the bowl can always be tipped over, the stones can be removed, so that the light, which is our essence, can ultimately come forth. People are essentially made in the image of the Almighty and so when symptoms develop, when disorders develop, one could say from a Hawaiian perspective, it’s because there are too many rocks in the bowl. And that ultimately, what we’re trying to do is remove those rocks so that the essential essence, the presence of that person, is really able to come forth. So therapy is a process where a person’s true nature, his or her true nature, his or her presence is blocked. And you’re asking for divine spirit to help in order to do that.

Jared shared that in his process of connecting with God in the context of dyadic healing, he becomes as an open vessel or conduit through which the Almighty’s presence flows.

I look at the healer’s role as being more a vessel and a facilitator. When I meet with people to do healings, what I am trying to do, in essence, is surrender myself. To the point where I would say it both is and is not my presence. That I’m really allowing to fill myself up.

If I'm doing my job, in some ways I'm not doing my job at all. I'm totally letting go, I'm totally surrendering with that person and allowing God just to enter us. And I think that's really the goal. I think most spiritual healers would tell you that. That's really how I would look at it. I would make it very clear that I'm not doing, that I'm a medium, I'm a vessel, I'm a facilitator. And I always tell people it's not me. I just try to set myself up.

Presence is allowing the bowl of light to shine fully, honestly, and without infringement.

Presence is 24/7. Presence is infinite, always on call, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

I'm going to argue that our presence is 24/7....We extend our presence and it's not only our presence. We're really extending the Almighty's presence.

It is learning to trust and knowing that God is there 24/7. That the ancestors are there 24/7.

It's 24/7. It's just what it—it's on God's timetable. When it happens, it happens.

When someone comes to me and says, I need healing. I drop everything I'm doing because I've learned, from my *kumu*, as a healer, healing is a 24-hour calling. And that when God brings someone to you, that you have been honored, that there is an obligation then to do as God asks you to do.

In short, it is everything, all the time. Jared asserted that we are an extension of the Almighty's presence, which exists in everything. Presence is a loving act of reciprocity that not only enhances our connection to God but also allows us to enhance God's presence. Within each of us, he argued, is a still, small voice that is always there, that transcends the confines of space and time. Attuning to that sacred voice often requires us to slow down, to listen closely, and find the eternal stillness that is always there.

I look at God within everything. So I would say we both draw upon it, but it is also within us. It is the still small voice.

Walking Your Path

Honoring One's Gift. Presence as a process of transformation runs deeper than reducing the phenomenon to a technique; it is a commitment, a responsibility, and an honoring of a God-

given gift. Jared believed that each person has been blessed with a unique set of abilities, and it is each person's responsibility to offer these gifts to the world.

Hawaiians also talk about each of our having a gift. And I believe that. And ultimately each of us has the responsibility to understand what that gift is so that we can glorify God. And so that's also part of the healing process, and my living who God ultimately meant me to be.

Each one of us is meant to glorify God in some way. And some people could be master canoe builders, some people are master's in business. You can tell those people who love doing what they do. You can see it. Recently, my wife and I, we have a mango tree in the backyard, and it needs to be pruned, and so we were referred to someone who is considered this world-renowned tree person. And you can tell, this guy loves trees. I mean he can look and tell you the way it's growing, and where the roots are, and just...and I'm like, this person found what God meant for him to do. How wonderful.

Glorification of one's gifts occurs by acknowledging one's unique inner spark, nourishing the spark or fanning the flame, so to speak, and generously offering one's light to the world.

Honoring one's gift in this way results in widespread healing, harkening the concept of Tikkun Olam, or repairing of the world.

The way we heal the world is, we take the flame that is within you, and then you use that, and then you light the flame within someone else. Their *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal Flame. And with loving breath, blow on it, build it up, maybe it's just a few sparks, that's okay. Feed it, we'll build it up into a fire.

The Responsibility of Sharing One's Gift. With each God-given gift comes a duty or responsibility to share such wealth with the world. Jared defined responsibility as being in righteous service to the Creator and to the world. Presence is being selfless for the glory and service of the Divine—a righteous act of humility. He asserted that there is an obligation to openly respond to God's gifts and callings and to do with your gift what God asks of you.

It really is about pledging yourself to service. And so, at one point in my life, I said to God, here I am, I accept. I know this is my *kuleana* (responsibility). This is what you have asked me to do. While I know that the path is arduous, and it will be challenging, I know this is what I'm supposed to do. *Koho 'ia*. Choice, no choice. The Hawaiian

meaning, when you come right down to it, ultimately, you're presented with your path. And you have to choose to walk it. You can choose not to walk it, but the path is the path.

If you ask, are some of us chosen? Yes. In spite of all of the darkness, in spite of what people may be doing to others more so God implores who amongst you will be righteous? And that's why you've been called. To demonstrate that. In Hebrew we say *Tzedakah*, righteousness. Some people interpret it as charity, but it's much bigger than that. A *Tzadik* is one who is, righteous, so *tzedakah*—it's righteousness.

Grounded in Day-to-Day Living. Presence also requires being committed to practicing deeds of loving kindness, particularly while being grounded in the daily routines of life. It involves intuitively dancing between the physical and the metaphysical and existing in the mundane of day-to-day life. Jared highlighted the salience of living life practically—not every moment is a flurry of spiritual ecstasy.

You have to trust at some level it's happening but being grounded in the day to day is also important. Auntie Malia Craver, there's this wonderful story that was told when she passed, and I attended her wake or viewing. Someone went to Auntie Malia and said, "I think I'm planning on going to the top of the mountain and finding God." And she kind of looked at him and said, "You can walk into your closet and find God." And I loved it because she was very practical too. It wasn't so much about the spiritual, but it's the day-to-day that really matters. How you treat people from day to day really matters. How you take care of yourself really matters.

It's people who are grounded and who have lived life and really understand the day to day, that's so important. Because I would say that if you're not grounded, I don't know if you can be a really good therapist. You're keeping it at this very mystical, esoteric level, but there's still the (knocks on table), this table in front of us. You have to be grounded. And it's the interplay between the two. When you think of what I-Thou is in some ways, you could say it's the sometimes, the dance between the metaphysical and the physical.

Comments don't always need to be mystical or spiritual. Sometimes they're real common sense...so I learn to go back and forth....I would argue that [the holy and the profane] are ultimately one in the same.

He noted that presence elicits acts of loving kindness embedded in humility and compassion, and these acts frequently manifest very ordinarily. Acts as simple as washing one's dishes.

I believe that so much of spirituality is the day to day. It's knowing to wash the dishes. It's preparing dinner. It's all of those things that are important. So insight doesn't happen from being in this state of constant spiritual awareness.

Being grounded in ordinary acts of living requires practice and self-discipline.

Healing and Presence Require Discipline. Jared acknowledged that healing and presence is not always easy, requiring discipline and making the right choices. He noted:

A *kumu* I met many years ago, and this is an excellent way of looking at it, said building your spirituality is very much like exercising and building your muscles. And when we first begin that process of exercise, oh my gosh, our muscles hurt. It's not easy. Or if we're used to doing one form of exercise and then we switch to another form, it's not easy. And you go, gosh I was so good at this one form and now I'm trying something else. It is the same with spirituality. It's amazing how many people you need to come into your life, how many things, you really have to work at it. It's like building those muscles. And I remember once, when I was at the point when my *kumu* felt like I was ready, Auntie Kehau, who works with Uncle Bruce said, how long do you think it took for you to reach this point of awareness? And I said, I think about 20 years. So it does take time. It's more than just the going through your bachelor's and then going into your master's and Doctorate and all of that. But there is a certain amount of spiritual growth work that I guess I would say you have to do in order to get that.

In effect, the Divine offers each of us a unique path to travel, but it is our choice to walk it or not. If one chooses to ignore the Creator's gifts and calling, internal knots or entanglements form. These knots left unexamined can lead to anger and an insatiable hunger for love or approval. He stated that those who hide from God and hurt in the dark are not healed. Presence, however, is the undoing of such knots or entanglements within our self.

In some ways, when the gift isn't nurtured, what's inside becomes mean and angry and hungry. And so when you talk about [societal] atrocities, one way of looking at it is because what is within inside each person hasn't been fed.

Those who hide themselves from God, those who look to hurt and not heal...[People carry darkness because of] hurt, pain, anger, a rejection of God if that person even believes in God. It's the anger. They have filled their bowl with lots of rocks. And because they have been hurt, they decide I am going to hurt others because of what has been done to me.

God is open to everyone. I'm not sure everyone is going to choose God.

Ultimately, it's about undoing the *hihia*, which are the knots or entanglements.... So it's not, I'd say, the focus on the entanglements among people, but it's really the entanglements in one's self.

This undoing, however, involves struggle, doubt, and sacrifice. Jared professed that nothing worthwhile is achieved without having to search or struggle for the truth.

At times it can be overwhelming, but nothing great comes without the struggle or comes without the search.

Discernment and Boundaries. Working in a dyadic relationship also involves discernment of goodness of fit and setting healthy boundaries that respects the integrity of both members of the relationship. Disclosure—knowing what to share and when to share information—is part of the process of establishing appropriate boundaries.

You have to know your boundaries and you have to know your stuff. I remember one of my professors telling me, knowing when to share and when not to share, knowing how to share. And that is as much art as it is technique. I don't believe everyone needs to know everything about you. There's an art when you can say, here are the things that fit this particular person at this particular time that I can share about myself....They say boundaries are like cell walls, semipermeable. The art is letting the good stuff flow out or letting the good stuff flow in. Regulating that to maintain your integrity.

I-Thou to me is respecting the integrity of that person. It's also respecting the integrity of yourself. And saying can I engage in that relationship with the integrity of both of us? And that integrity is not only maintained, but in fact, is enhanced. And it's that balance. If I'm trying to existentially obliterate the other person or allow myself to be obliterated.... When you are so needy, that you are looking at the person, that you've objectified them. That's not the point. To me those are questionable boundaries.

He noted that some individuals want something from you that you are unable to give. It is important for the healer to recognize when it is right to work with another and when it is right to refer someone out.

There are times when I feel like if they're asking for something that is more than I can give, I will very gently tell them, "I think you're asking for something that ultimately,

I'm not sure is going [to] help you." Because I'll tell them, "I trust that God has placed within you, really all the tools that you need to help yourself." And I really believe that. So I'm going to say, "I'm simply here to offer maybe some guidance, some ideas to allow spirit to work through us. But that ultimately, God rests within you. And because I know God rests within you, that's it's just a question of making you aware that God's there. Open God up from inside of you. And then what needs to be revealed, will be revealed."

In Yiddish, we say sometimes it's a *shidduch*, it's a match, and sometimes it's not a *shidduch*. Sometimes it fits and sometimes it doesn't fit. That's just the way it is.

Healing is because you truly seek it and want to know....I don't think you can force this [path of healing] on everyone.

Through felt sense or intuition, the healer can assess if there is balance within the relationship, if the match is a good fit, and if both parties within the dyad are ready to engage in the healing process.

The Process of Presence

Prayer. Prayer, or reaching out to the Divine, is an integral process to invoking presence. While every prayer is uniquely suited to the given context, several components to the ritual remain consistent. Prayer is an act of acknowledging a higher power and renouncing egoic control. It is an invitation of joining with the numinous, surrendering one's being to the power of the Divine. This echoes back to Jared's description of presence as being a vessel through which God's essence flows. In his prayers, Jared asks God for help, guidance, protection, and permission to enact the Divine's will. He also requests wisdom and love.

So when I do a ritual of prayer, I'll often ask for people from what their faith is so that there are things that I might incorporate. But it might be something like, Heavenly Father, Earthly Mother, Creator. I'll go with something that at least acknowledges the presence. And I'll say, "We come here today because this person has asked for your help. Creator's help healing something that's going on. I ask that you provide your love and guidance and protection in this process. Please allow me to act as your median and vessel in order to be able to help this person. Please guide us, please send us your divine wisdom and love and please provide us with an answer. And may I be of service to you in this, as I do this." So I make it very clear that it is not for my glory. I always make it clear this is for

your glory God, that I do this, that it is in your service, that I do this. I will say each healing is very different. And then I really go from there and so as I hold on to the person, I really trust, and I let the person who I'm working with guide me. Because I feel that God will speak through that person.

Prayer fans the inner spark when the ember feels cool and faint. It provides a path in the darkest hours—when the urge to give up is strongest, that is the most important time to pray. Prayer is a process of surrendering the egoic self to the greater divine presence that envelops all of us. It is an act of reaching out, asking for help, and seeking peace amidst difficult concerns or questions.

Pule, pray. There always is an answer for whatever you may have concerns about, whatever is bothering you. So that's what I will do. I will pray on it. Sometimes the answer will come, there will be certain images. Sometimes it takes a while and I know I have to be patient. But I have to trust that once you put it out to the universe, it will be answered.

Creating a Safe Space. Rituals in preparing for therapeutic healing are integral to invoking presence. Jared shared that creating a safe, sacred space where the Creator can enter and be honored helps establish safety and trust within the dyad. Jared cultivates spatial safety and sacredness by ensuring privacy (choosing a quiet, private area) and saying a prayer before meeting the other.

And usually I'm going to pick a place that is quiet...I carve out the sacred place. I find the place and I make it sacred. So it could be really anywhere. It's not something I would want observed because I feel it's a very private moment, but I will try and make that space sacred and then pray on it. So I guess if there's a process involved, I would say so much of it is about creating the environment where God can just kind of take over.

And that it's very important to have that environment that is very safe, so I do it through prayer. I mean I really ask God's help for making the environment safe and loving, so that a person can feel comfortable enough to open up and to be able to talk. I think that is so important because if you're going to ask God for help in the healing process, how you as a healer come and approach is important, and so I want to build that safe environment first.

Contact. The process of healing through presence involves awareness, intentionality, and readiness within the dyad. Upon meeting the other, Jared will ask permission to collectively anchor in God. In our conversation, he made the distinction between prayer and worship: prayer is singular, whereas worship is plural. If he senses readiness from the other, he will initiate an energized linking by joining hands with the other. Through this joining, he will often offer prayer, sharing of visuals or symbols that appear to him, or energetic currents through hand squeezing or diaphragmatic breathing.

I'll say, I'm going hold your hands. It's going to be a connecting of energy. It's a very personal experience. Are you comfortable with it? And if at any time you're not comfortable with it, let me know. Because I've also done healing culturally. Some cultures are not comfortable, so I've still done it, where I'll sit, and I'll still try to connect energy to energy. I find with human touch, it facilitates [the connection], but it's not always critical, and so you have to be sensitive to that too.

Jared relies heavily on nonverbal communication as a healer, using his senses, noticing internal sensations and felt sense to intuit what is needed. He stated that he is observant of signs, images, and impressions that come to him.

Once I feel like I've built that safe environment, then I will ask that person to say, "You know, here are some of the images that come to mind." I will go with impression. Hawaiians call them *ho'ailona*, or signs. But I will look for signs and try to be observant, and I will go with images. I would say more often than not the images tend to be accurate. I ask people about those in their life present and those who may have passed on. And so sometimes I'll feel the presence of not only the person in front of me but maybe other presences around them.

And I might say, I'm really sensing a lot of pain. And I'll even say, this is where I feel it. I will begin to feel somatically where that person's in pain. I'll say, I feel a knot in my stomach. I can feel your knot. And they'll say, yeah, it's been there for a long time. And I'll say, okay, tell me about it. And then I'll begin to go with it. And then I'll go, okay, that's gone. When I have become so connected with the person, it's almost like physiologically I'm feeling what they're feeling. I'm seeing what they're seeing. Then I know that's God's work.

Ho'ailona. Signs, as the Hawaiians would say. When people come into your life, being alert.

Of utmost importance is being attuned to the readiness of both self and other, noting that the healer's own agenda or blockages can create an impasse in the therapeutic relationship.

Sometimes our stuff gets in the way. Maybe we're not at the point of readiness where we're ready because of our stuff. And so then maybe that's something we have to pray on. Maybe God brought that person in our lives because there was something that was supposed to be awakened within us.

He is clear to recognize that you can never impose yourself or force healing on others. Acutely mindful of boundaries, he never pushes an agenda, allowing both God and the other to determine where the process should go.

So two things [in discerning the readiness of other to engage in the process of healing]: One, always asking God. God help me, here's my sense. But always ask someone, here's my sense. But tell me. So as we go along, I ask, is this okay? Here's what I'm going to do. Are you seeing the same images? I'm always going to do a check in. So it's kind of like, if we're going to go in this space, we're going to fly together, you know, pilot, co-pilot. Okay, is this alright? If at any point along the way, someone gets a little overwhelmed or is not ready, it's alright, I'm going to back off. Because there's really no right or wrong to this. I don't go in with where the person needs to be, it's really God's call. And it's the person's call who I'm working with.

He ensures the safety of others through means of continuous member checking (e.g., how are you doing/feeling?), asking for permission before engaging in a practice (e.g., prayer, hand holding, sharing of symbols), and observation of nonverbal cues.

Self-care. Work in this field can require a tremendous amount of focus, energy, and empathy. He likens it to having a car: when a car is regularly used, to ensure it lasts a long time, you make a conscious effort to take care of it. This involves keeping it clean and taking it in for regular tune-ups. We too must take care of ourselves through ritualistic acts of cleansing.

I went for a ritual immersion, my *mikveh* experience, because you do have to cleanse yourself when you're in service. You're going to pick up stuff. You wouldn't use your

car without changing the oil filter every once and while. You got to clean. Constantly. I think of our cat. They do it constantly. It's always been with the paws and they're cleaning their heads. But we really have to do the same thing spiritually. So that would be the other piece of advice I would have is, when you work with people, spiritually, you pick up a lot. And there are some people who really have a lot of stuff. And so you're going to want to make sure that you have time to cleanse, spiritually. Whether that means going to the ocean, meditation, prayer, relaxation, anything like that, you want to be able to cleanse. So that you can begin the work anew, because you can't do it constantly.

So there are places I go that are spiritually very important to me that I ask God, I will say, please clean me. There are things that I can't see right now. Ultimately, I believe if a person is *pono*, is clean, then there is some level of peace.

He noted the importance of acts such as running, swimming, relaxation, or prayer, to release or cleanse ourselves from the energetic buildup of work. Cleansing through self-care serves to wash away any accumulated debris so that we can continue to honor our God-given gifts.

Summary

Jared's narrative suggests that presence, in the context of *mind*, extends beyond the realm of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Jared's connection to the phenomenon of *spirit* is an integral part of his work as a psychologist, which broadens and deepens the channels of presence through which therapeutic healing can occur. His narrative implies that mind and spirit are interconnected phenomena; in some moments we may be human beings having a spiritual experience, while in others we are spiritual beings having a human experience. While we wax and wane between the sacred and profane as living beings, we are always enveloped in the divine presence through which all is connected. He believes that there is inherent good and sacredness in all that he encounters, and with compassion and grace he strives to help others connect with the God-given light he sees clearly within them. For Jared, presence is joining with God to be an open vessel through which Divine energy flows, unifying with all other forms of life; returning home to the original source of all things, which is numinous, sacred, and ineffable.

Katie

Katie is a grounded and gracious woman in her late 30s who has been practicing the art of massage therapy for over 10 years. Her interest in bodywork burgeoned when she met a massage therapist shortly after moving to Hawai'i at the age of 19. In describing the nature of massage therapy, this new acquaintance highlighted the significant impacts that physical touch had on the emotional and spiritual aspects of well-being. This conversation profoundly impacted Katie, arousing her curiosity around the practices of bodywork and holistic healing.

It felt like [bodywork] lacked a ceiling in the ways that it could impact and transform people. My conversation with [the other massage therapist] introduced me to the idea that bodywork had a spiritual and emotional side to it. There was this new awareness about how massage therapy was a linking of the mind, body, and spirit connection.

This viewpoint elicited something visceral and innate inside of her, inspiring a new pursuit of knowledge. She noted that a holistic framework of massage therapy naturally aligned with her own personal strengths and intentions, rooted in promoting individual and collective health, harmony, and balance.

Finding a Framework: Zen Shiatsu Massage Therapy

During her training at massage school, Katie enrolled in a Zen Shiatsu massage class. She said she immediately connected to the Japanese form of bodywork adapted from Traditional Chinese Medicine philosophies and practices. She was pulled toward Shiatsu's use of metaphor and embrace of the natural world in understanding the human body. She also appreciated that the tool of Zen Shiatsu incorporated the spiritual and emotional aspects of a person into the scope of its practice and understanding. Hungry to pursue the practice beyond the scope of a single course, Katie supplemented her Shiatsu training through self-taught measures of reading and research.

I took that course [on shiatsu] and then I got some books and it became a lens through which...it actually changed the way I look at life. Lots of things go through this shiatsu filter. And it's ripe with metaphor and it links to nature, which I also really like. And it's just something that I think about. Not just in my massage practice but in my personal life. A lot of things get filtered through that shiatsu lens. And that shift in my perspective all stemmed from that person teaching at my massage school and then being interested in it. I've always been interested in bodywork, I have strived to know anatomy well, to be able to do good bodywork. But then also I have learned that bodywork influences the other aspects of how we are made up to be as humans. Our spiritual, emotional, mental faculties, which often times are directly linked to the physical body—the muscles, the tissues, and kind of what gets caught up in that], it's like energy from any of those sources can get stored and felt in the physical body. And shiatsu tapped into providing a good framework that brought all that together. I didn't even know that was available when I went into massage school, but when I did find that I was incredibly intrigued by it.

She asserts that learning such ancient practices can take a lifetime, but she aspires to further deepen and develop her knowledge.

Personal Life Transitions

At the time of our initial interview, she recently transitioned from a spiritual retreat center to a chiropractic organization that served no-fault auto injuries and worker's compensation cases. The transition happened unexpectedly—it was one of many lifechanging outcomes catalyzed by a volcanic eruption that resulted in the closing of the retreat center. Katie was also personally affected by the eruption as she, along with hundreds of fellow community members, was forced to abruptly evacuate her home. Although her house was salvaged, the experience collectively traumatized the land, community, and her internal sense of wellbeing. She and her husband were evacuated from their home for the entirety of the eruption, which lasted three and a half months. They eventually made the difficult decision to permanently relocate.

Following the closure of the retreat center, a fellow massage therapist helped her secure regular work at a chiropractor's office. Katie reflects on the challenges of transitioning from a

spiritual retreat setting focused on holistic healing to a clinic that more heavily prioritized a medical model of treatment. During one of our interviews she shared:

My job, which is still relatively new, I got it pretty quickly after the eruption happened. And I lost my old job and then got this job. I lost my old job because the place closed down after the road to it was closed off during the eruption. And it went from basically one side of the spectrum of massage clientele at a very New Age kind of resort where a lot of people take either spiritual retreats or wellness retreats. So working with that clientele and now I'm working in a chiropractors office with just workman's comp and no fault insurance clients, which is the other end of the spectrum. And the adjustment happened so rapidly and so unintentionally of going between those two places. The last place closed down very unexpectedly and then I got this job just through word of mouth very quickly because I needed a new job. So it's been difficult switching between those two things because they are so, so different. And with the new job, I have some frustrations with both the work and setting at this place.

Katie and I met three times, once in person and twice over the phone, to discuss the meaning of therapeutic presence.

Presence Is Everything

Synergistic Joining. Presence, Katie shared, is akin to joining synergistically with another. This synergistic joining entails providing space both for self and other to connect, moving and flowing together in unison. She reflected:

There's a moment in almost every massage where you can tell, like, oh it's working. They are relaxing. They are enjoying this. Because they tell you or because you can just tell that their breath really stabilizes and you're just kind of connecting. And you're in the flow.... And then you're off and you're running. And you're in this current together. Like the river's kind of flowing. Like your tributaries both contributed and now you're kind of in the same river, it feels like. You're lending your energy to it. Paying attention, but then you kind of get that back when you realize this goal of what we are here for. That we've joined together for, in the room. Like it's working. And that's incredibly rewarding. That gives energy back to you.

It is working with another in a way that is connective, where two distinct forms of energy combine to create something larger than the sum of its parts. As the individual tributaries merge

into the larger flow of the river, energy is exchanged in a reciprocal manner, moving collaboratively and dynamically towards harmony and balance. She explained

It's like being totally absorbed in the moment. Being totally connected [with the client]. Two people come together in the room to do what they're meant to do. There are so many factors that lead up to that moment. But when these two people come together, allowing for things to happen and paying attention, it's like a whole other energy starts to happen.

Katie also pointed to a falling away of self-consciousness and instrumentality as her presence and connection to the immediate experience deepens.

I would feel self-conscious about if I was doing a good job or not in the beginning of the massage...But usually I could tell when the massage was working...because you're connecting, and you're in the flow together.

She described this synergistic connection as powerfully therapeutic, nourishing, nurturing, rewarding, and energizing.

Giving someone your attention and your presence, that in and of itself, I think can be very, words I like to use are nurturing or nourishing.

Just having somebody really pay attention to you and being heard and noticed and felt and understood is energizing. That has an energy, that has a therapeutic effect, and I think especially with those that are in pain and hurting, that is often what they need.

Intention. Intention promotes presence. Keeping intentions for health and well-being at the forefront of the interaction allows for greater therapeutic presence to emerge. When one member of the dyad is thoroughly rooted in this intention of compassion and betterment for the other, presence and healing power is strengthened. Katie shared that she will often recite a mantra she discovered in massage school that accurately embodies her foundational intention with every client:

Perfect state of health, perfect state of function. That's an intention that I always go back to and repeat silently over the course of the massage. But I will sometimes refine it depending on the client's specific needs. Sometimes I'll make it more focused.

She will silently return to her intention throughout the massage to invoke presence and synergistically connect with the client.

Katie said that intention can be intuitively sensed or felt by the other. She recalled conversations where people have told her that she has “good energy.” She senses what the other is describing is the actual energy of the intention being channeled through her.

People have said to me, you have good energy. What I think they are pointing to and what they are actually feeling is my intention. It’s my intention to be present and promote well-being and balance.

I think paying attention is energy. Intention, attention, and presence are all forms of energy. And energy is life itself. Energy is everything, the universe and beyond and all the forms that come from it.

By offering your attention, your life, your energy to an intention, the intention is energized, taking on a life of its own.

This connection to life through paying attention is enlivening and opens a space where healing and energy can flow. In eliciting presence by simultaneously staying connected to intentions of well-being and paying attention to the other, one can offer tremendous therapeutic energy. Bringing forth this connective experience necessitates being grounded in your own body energetically in order to connect with the other. It also involves utilizing intuition or connecting with your inner felt sense.

It’s also just paying attention to what you feel and the knowledge that you have in how to try and help...It’s [paying attention to your] feeling of the person and using your intuition.

Giving somebody the honor of your undivided attention for an hour or an hour and half or whatever. Really trying to pay attention and stay connected with that person about what’s going on is therapeutic presence in massage.

Presence Moves Blockages. The ability to evoke presence is not contingent upon a preconditioned state and does not require the interaction to be free of challenges or energetic blockages. Katie argues that “presence is everything,” and a collaborative flow of energy can occur even amidst feelings of “stuck-ness” or blockages. Katie observed that people’s pain is often a byproduct of energy not moving fluidly throughout internal and external systems. Acknowledging and respecting energetic blocks can help move the system or “soften” the blockage.

Stuck-ness is often a boundary or blockage that needs to be recognized. Recognizing stagnation is part of a larger process that can be respected. Just acknowledging it can create movement. Moving blockages, not staying in that spot for too long, and respecting the stuck-ness or boundary can soften it. Simply bringing awareness to it can transform it.

Release isn’t required for healing. Movement can happen simply by having someone pay attention or care.

This respectful acknowledgement offers a kind of internal wisdom and acceptance that the blockage is what needs to be encountered in the process of transformation. Presence is acknowledging all parts of the whole, without judgement or efforts to deny what is there. Just allowing what is there to exist can be transformative in and of itself.

A Holistic Approach. Katie noted the importance of approaching people in a holistic manner. She views healing as bringing balance to the entirety of one’s life—not just the physical aspects addressed in bodywork—but the emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects as well.

And then often times there is the emotional and spiritual aspects of our being, components that can come up in the massage and can be addressed in the massage and sometimes that becomes apparent when I first kind of talk with someone about how they’re feeling....And so through bodywork you can access that sort of stuff. So depending on the person, and the day, and what’s going on with them, I do tend to blend all those things together.

In hearing the client's narrative, she is attuning to both the internal and external systems at play—diet, exercise, work-life balance, coping skills, and self-care. She understands healing as bringing presence and balance to all aspects of one's being: mind, body, and spirit. When this holistic approach is utilized in bodywork, transformational healing can occur.

Often times people would have really, really positive changes in their body. As well as realizations that they had, again, a more integrated experience. Of kind of mind, body, spirit. And it had an effect on lots of those different levels and people would tell me that at the end of the massage.

Processes of Synergistic Joining

Safety and Trust: Creating the Groundwork for Something New to Emerge. In order for healing to transpire, trust and safety must first be established within the relationship. Katie builds trust by listening to the client in a non-judgmental way, attuning to their needs, checking in, and exploring touch in a safe way.

I'm listening to whatever, wherever they're at, and I'll check in to make sure they feel okay, that they're safe. Are you okay? Should we keep going?...Just letting them be in a safe environment, nonjudgmental environment, where they get to be witnessed and you're there for them in that time. And that whatever needs to come up can come up.

Katie believed that the potential for transformative healing is impacted by the energy and intention each member of the dyad brings to the relationship. The more open, receptive, and trustworthy each member feels, the greater the potential for therapeutic transformation. Safety and trust are foundational to opening energetic pathways that allow for experiences to deepen. In this liminal space, new and spontaneous experiences can emerge, and pain and stagnant energy can be released.

Katie illustrated a moment with a client in which a powerful release unexpectedly occurred. This intimate energetic dialogue prioritized trust, caring, safety, and a mutual willingness to explore the newness of the emerging experience.

The experience that comes to mind is there was a woman I was working on her glutes, pretty deeply, therapeutically, like stripping along her glutes and getting in there pretty deep....She surprised me, it surprised both of us because she so spontaneously and so fully started sobbing. Like deep, deep tears. Kind of wracking the body. Convulsive body of deep sobs coming out. And my first thing was: "Are you okay?" My first feeling was concern. I'm wondering if there's any sexual trauma. I want to make sure she feels safe. The glutes are incredibly important to work with structural bodywork but it's also a very personal area. And trust is really important at that time. And again, if any boundary needs to be claimed, that's really important at that time. So I checked in with her. "Are you okay?" And she picked her head up from the face cradle because she was face down and looked at me, and she's like "I'm so surprised." And she said, "Yes, I'm okay!" And she exclaimed it, and she was sobbing but she was also almost, she was happy. I never want to cross a boundary or make somebody feel unsafe. But then with the affirmation from her that like, "Oh no, we're good." I'm a fan of letting go of grief. I have a belief system that grief can get stored in the body, and I think it's really good to let it out. Whether you recognize it or not sometimes just letting those tears come out is beneficial, again in a safe place, like go ahead and let that pressure out. Let's not keep it in your body. I think it's a really good thing, as long as somebody feels safe. And sometimes that's the recognition in my field of work that needs to happen. Like she told me, it feels really good to get this out....so we kept working in that area in the glutes and soothing and moving that energy. Again, through shiatsu it's okay, if there is a blockage, if there was emotion in there, we can work with that, sooth it down. But most importantly she felt safe and so I thought let's keep going with this.

Each person possesses personal energetic boundaries and when two people's boundaries make contact in a safe and respectful way, the blending of that energy can result in something new and transformative.

Bearing Witness and Holding Space. Presence is an act of bearing witness to another through acknowledgment of the other's phenomenological experience. She described witnessing as:

Being neutral, listening without making any judgements.

Having someone reflect back what they are witnessing in the other—free of agenda or judgement—can be therapeutic in and of itself.

And sometimes even the suggestion of “have you been dealing with grief? Have you been dealing with hardship?”—having somebody acknowledge those emotions in their body, that you can tell what’s kind of going on in their life through the [massage], sometimes creates a huge relief because their experience is being witnessed. And sometimes they’re fascinated that just through the body that you can feel that.

The act of bearing witness works in tandem with the act of “holding space” for another, which she described as offering her attention, allowing and accepting whatever arises within the relationship to come forward and be met with respect and kindness. The full spectrum of the human experience is given permission to come forward and expand. Presence expands the space where possibilities exist, creating room for energy to move and grow. She acknowledged that listening is filtered through one’s own personal experiences and perspectives, which is part of the energetic exchange.

Holding space is an invitation for things to expand as needed. Whatever it is, joy or pain. It is helping someone feel comfortable to have the experience they need to have. Allowing people to express who and what they are is important and deserving of recognition and attention.

I think therapeutic presence, for me, has a lot to do with just providing space. And what’s providing space, right? It’s giving that person your attention. You can’t completely remove yourself or your own experiences because everything goes through the lens of your own listening but trying to give that person your attention for the time that you are with them. And listen really well and hold space for whatever needs to come up for them.

Or sometimes you trigger something through the bodywork, and somebody needs to tell you a story because it just came up. So allowing that to be without [judgment]....Paying attention to that is therapeutic presence. Giving them permission to go ahead and communicate with you about any experiences they are having, whether it is an emotion that pops up or things just need to lighten up or things need to be deeper but encouraging them to go ahead and share their experience.

It is giving permission for both verbal (e.g., sharing of personal history) and non-verbal (e.g., tears, convulsions) communications to be expressed without fear of rejection, criticism, or judgment. Presence, through acts of bearing witnessing and holding space for another, provides a pathway for overloaded or stagnant energy to move or be released.

Breathing. Synergistic joining occurs through various processes. Of significant value is observation of the breath. Breathing is an innate process that is incredibly powerful in its simplicity and accessibility.

That's why so many people come back to the breath because there's something so simple about focusing into the breath. It has a concentrating and opening quality. So it really is a good and effective and simple tool, it's not too heady.

Katie notes that she pays particular attention to the other's breathing patterns and makes a concerted effort to synchronize her breath with the clients throughout the massage.

Often times in massage there is a synchronizing that can happen. And sometimes I'll take extra breaths, like exaggerated breaths just as a form of encouraging the other person to breath and to connect with their breath. But the rhythm of massage and getting them to breath, often times you're breathing in a similar pattern. Because that kind of connects with your movements and the way you approach a stroke or body part to coordinate that with their inhale and exhale. So I definitely concentrate on my breath too. [It's a] really powerful way to connect up and create synchronicity, a feeling of synchronicity.

Observation of the breath is a useful tool in decoding what another is feeling and experiencing, as the breath serves as a tangible energy gradient, or marker of health.

Sometimes someone will start to hold their breath, or their breathing pattern will change. It's a way to understand what they're experiencing by paying attention to the breath. It's a way of not speaking but really [hearing] them. And they don't even know that they're communicating it, but you can tell kind of what they're feeling. And you can usually tell if there's pain in a spot because their breathing will change. So it's a huge indicator of what they're feeling.

Being mindful both of one's own breath and that of the other can create stability and relaxation within the relationship. She noted when the dyad begins to breath in unison, the synergy is deepened, opening up a rhythmic pathway that allows the dyad to merge as one.

The breath provides a segue for things to go to another level...Connecting through the breath often times is what makes a good massage, a good massage. There's something about that that seems to relax a person, open a person up.

Deep, Attentive Listening. Presence involves giving your undivided attention to the relationship and listening not just to the words, but to the underlying intentionality, tone, and emotionality of what is being communicated. It is listening not just to the physical concerns, but also listening more deeply for emotional and spiritual issues.

In the beginning [it's] listening to their story. Whether it just stays physical, this is what hurts, this is what happened...or to the point where people are saying, there's been a lot of trauma and I'm trying to actually explore touch in a safe way...Paying attention to both the tissues in the physical body, the injury how it happened, their lifestyle leading up to the injury. And then how they are relating to it? How it's going....Some people talk quite personally about what's going on in their life and how that factors into their body.

Listening to what they have to say. The words but also the inflection, where the sighs are. Where the pauses are.

Katie noted that she begins the listening process from the moment the client steps into the door, utilizing "all of her senses" to better understand the other's phenomenological experience. She is keen to read the implicit messages conveyed through the person's posture, gait, eye contact, cadence of speech, and personal odors.

In bodywork listening definitely shows up as watching. The first thing that you're taking them in, of the way they move, posture. Kind of taking that in first thing when you're seeing them. Sense of smell actually plays a big factor. It's more vague, but in this setting I can smell people that have been on a lot of pain relievers. To feeling. The feeling of the person and intuition. So paying attention is using all of that in trying to take in information from this person. Vibe, definitely. You know, you can feel vibe of how open somebody is or how closed somebody is to there being an exchange. So it's paying attention to all of that.

Reading between the lines can reveal salient pieces of information that may not readily be verbalized. Deep, attentive listening can be elicited by sitting face to face, making good eye contact, and inviting the other to share his/her story before physical contact is made.

Communicating with the Body. Katie maintained that attentive listening can also be communicated through touch.

I try keeping it in the framework of bodywork. Not to rely too much on the word. Like let the bodywork speak for itself.

In allowing the bodywork to speak for itself, Katie prefers to minimize conversation during the massage, although she acknowledged that some clients prefer steady conversational flow. She noted that a more loquacious massage experience can also be healing and therapeutic.

Staying focused on that person. Sometimes people like to talk in massage. And sometimes I try and stop that because I think it does get a little easier if you can get to the point of focusing on the breathing because it does seem to open people up more. But sometimes I think people need to talk. And I'm not going to force them to stop talking and just breath. And sometimes I think that the talking during a massage is a little bit of a protection measure because not everybody wants to go all the way in deep and that's okay. That's their experience they want to have.

Regardless of the other's conversational preferences, Katie is clear to establish an open line of communication with the client by regularly checking in, eliciting feedback, and encouraging the client to share real-time needs.

The verbal narrative given by the client may not always coincide with the information she extracts from the body through touch. She shared an example of clients that insist upon a painful, deep tissue massage.

It's often the case with those people that say, "No pain, no gain." Usually they don't like very deep massage. Which is interesting to me. Where I'll be like, okay, I'll give you deep massage, and they're like, could you back off a little bit. And then I often find what

they really need to do is relax. They need to relax, and they actually need a super nourishing massage.

In the field of bodywork, listening is quite literally a hands-on experience that entails paying attention to the messages expressed by the body's faculties, including muscles, joints, and tissues. Katie offers support and encouragement by inviting the client to pay attention to his/her body and breath. This facilitates presence within the dyad—being grounded in the body provides important information about where therapeutic attention needs to be directed, which results in a more powerful healing experience.

Offering Guidance. Katie highlighted the value of using her knowledge and expertise to reflect back to the client what she notices from the bodywork. At the end of the session, she will offer suggestions or referrals from her observations and expertise to empower self-care and healing.

It is nice to have a little bit of a reflection. Like in therapeutic presence if you are listening or in my case touching and having an impression that sometimes people want to know that at the end, what did you feel? I feel like people often want guidance whether it is just the physical body or a little bit of a witness of what you felt, and some input. Some outside input. And maybe a little bit of help of where they can go with that. Some extra information, some helpful information.

This act of offering reflections about what she felt during the massage reaffirms to the client that Katie was listening, paying attention, and cares about the client's health and well-being.

Katie touched upon power dynamics within the relationship by distinguishing between telling someone what to do and offering suggestions. She emphasized that her intention is to be helpful and supportive rather than authoritarian. The framing of offering a different perspective embraces a collaborative rather than an expert approach to healing.

Therapeutic presence is just trying to pay attention to all that and run it through my system of how can I help? What can I do to your tissues, but what other ways can I share

with you and talk with you about things you might be doing that might just help you. And offer it, just offer it. Not saying this is what you need to do because that's not really my style but offering it as a suggestion. By offering a different perspective to see that they can maybe look at it [differently] and garner a little bit more awareness or understanding.

Respecting Boundaries. The ability to recognize and respect the energetic boundaries of both participants is critical to invoking presence. Boundaries provide the foundation for presence to emerge, establishing a sense of stability, comfort, and receptivity. Katie observed that boundaries are in a state of flux and will shift in response to one's own energetic state and flow.

Everybody's boundaries are different...I can respect people's boundaries, because again, to go back to shiatsu, there are things called the pericardium meridian and the triple warmer meridian that have everything to do with those outer energetic boundaries of a person. I think those boundaries are so important to respect when meeting and in bodywork, in recognizing and respecting where they are. And usually just doing that allows them to come down for more connection and intimacy and into other aspects of our being. But if you blast through those outer energetic boundaries in another person, and they're different for everybody, then sometimes you never get in.

Certain boundaries can definitely cultivate and support the presence. It creates a foundation for presence. I think as the practitioner, having your own boundaries, wherever they need to be, to allow you to be grounded in your presence, to allow you to be comfortable, to be open, that whatever boundaries need to be made for whatever practitioner are what allows for the presence to happen.

The concept of boundaries is a very ethereal thing. And in therapeutic presence, boundaries are important. Your own and the clients are something that I think should take constant reexamination.

However, it is important that certain boundaries are consistent and reliable, particularly boundaries related to ethics and professionalism. Maintaining these boundaries, such as always draping the client during the massage, ensures that safety and trust is explicitly supported and valued within the relationship.

[Boundaries are] very alive, but I think in the working environment there are certain boundaries that should be rigid. And depending on the profession. A simple example in massage is a person always being draped. I think that's a very healthy clear boundary that

should always be in place...It just helps to more safely establish that therapeutic context. That's a firm one that I think is very beneficial to the relationship and to the massage.

Katie argues that when personal or ethical boundaries are crossed, the therapeutic aspect of presence is "shattered."

Presence can evoke intimacy, cultivating an emotionally open and vulnerable space. The act of being vulnerable often means treading through new, unfamiliar landscapes from within, which can trigger protective mechanisms that warrant acknowledgement and respect.

Some people don't want to be seen. Some people don't want all of that energy coming, coming their way. It's too much.

Katie notes that when defense mechanisms arise, it is important to initiate a process of member checking by reading implicit and explicit cues. This includes pausing to make sure that both members of the dyad are on the same page.

If there's obviously something really intense going on I'll check in to make sure they feel okay, that they're safe. Are you okay? Should we keep going? Because people can be pretty shocked [by what can come up during the massage].

If somebody's boundary gets crossed, sometimes all you need to do is to communicate to establish a boundary does need to be there. So that the presence can be there. But if boundaries are getting crossed in something as intimate as massage or any sort of human exchange, if boundaries are getting crossed, I think it shatters the presence.

The practitioner must also be aware of professional limitations and utilize referrals when the situation extends beyond his/her expertise.

It's always good to know when to advise somebody to check in with another professional. You need to see a physical therapist or maybe you should check in with a counselor about this situation. And having people to recommend is really useful.

This aligns with maintaining critical ethical and professional boundaries. She contends that you cannot force your agenda on the other, reiterating previous assertions of the salience of being aware of the other's energetic boundaries.

Presence Is Systemic, Existing Beyond the Dyad

Environmental Impacts. Katie's narrative revealed that certain conditions allow for presence to be invoked more fluidly and with ease, while other conditions demand greater focus and discipline for therapeutic presence to flow. This observation argues that presence extends beyond the dyadic relationship—it exists on a continuum, within larger systems.

We are impacted by everything that happens in life. We're impacted by everything we do. There are always residual effects and that can be both positive and negative...It extends beyond the work-related relationship or therapeutic relationship; it extends into every relationship.

The influences from the setting to go ahead and start doing a lot of the work to even allow what's in that room to just be that much more focused and juicier and more supported to create insight. Presence can be supported a lot by environment, and it can make the work a lot more powerful—or weaker.

She noted that therapeutic presence is influenced not only by the professional organization to which one belongs, but also includes the larger social, cultural, political and economic systems at play. These systems can either offer supportive energy that enhances presence or energy that “distracts from the intention” of collective well-being.

What I really like at the old job was the physical and the mental, and the emotional, and the spiritual, often times was recognized and actively worked with as being an influencing factor for the body. And often times in massage we were working on all that or multiple varieties of that or kind of accessing all that. And often times here in the new setting it is a lot more about, the focus and awareness is just on the physical. And part of that is because the way the system is set up, part of it is the client's coming in. I guess part of it is cultural in what you normally talk about with a massage therapist. What is considered normal. Socio economic stuff factors into it. In this new setting I have frustrations because sometimes I feel like I have a belief system that it could be more. Or often times I feel like people need access to more help and they need to branch out into those other things. And in that setting, that would be like somebody needing counseling, or needing physical therapy, or some people need to connect with spirit, or whatever way that is for you—of religion. It's more piecemealed. It's more recognized in a piecemeal sort of a way in this setting. So that's frustrating because it just feels disconnected, more disjointed.

A lot of people [clients at the clinic] are frustrated because the process seems to be so slow about getting to those higher levels of care, whether its therapy or getting the MRI they need for the appropriate imaging and being that it has to bounce back and forth between these doctors and often times it doesn't get communicated.

When expectations that global systems will support holistic care and therapeutic healing are not met, connecting therapeutically on a micro level (e.g., dyadically) can be adversely impacted.

[Creating a clean, welcoming, and professional setting] can be done really well or it can be done poorly. But that does actually impact the openness and trust that you have with the client. So that's all a big factor. As well as trust with who you can refer to with other people you're working with. Because we're all working together on a team. Frustration and negativity is influencing this person's journey with their health. And you're connected to that in some ways, and it comes into the room and is a factor in the information that you gather from that feeling. And what they're dealing with when that's fraught with a lot of frustration. It does affect the vibe in the room. I will try and listen to all that and help guide [the person]. Or whatever knowledge I have even about the setting, see if I can add anything or contribute in a positive way to allow people to know what to do next and where to go. And just have better understanding about the situation. And then get on the table and try and just refocus on the massage and the breath and the healing and the positivity. But it's just a lot harder when there's so much frustration involved along the way. It's a lot harder to create the space for good healing to happen. So the presence can be there, but it's really, it's just heavily influenced by setting. It's harder to create a really strong, I guess it's still therapeutic presence, but I don't know that the whole setting is made for healing at that point. Because there's frustration, frustration, anger, and fear.

[At the clinic] it's less of that [experience of] two people totally working on it together. And it's more me taking responsibility for my end of the therapeutic presence.

Therapeutic presence is therefore heavily influenced by the setting or system in which it is contained; you cannot separate yourself from the surrounding energy flow.

Characteristics of Spaces Conducive to Therapeutic Healing. Katie notes that certain environments are intentional and deliberate in cultivating a space where holistic healing and synergism can flow. These environments foster a sense of personal empowerment, encouraging individuals to focus on their well-being. She observes that characteristics of such spaces include

a clientele that inherently trusts the healing process and are making personal and intentional choices to pursue health and well-being.

In the older [retreat] setting I felt like I had a lot more people coming into the massage room that were there because they were already doing a lot. They were already focused on empowering their own wellbeing.

At the [retreat setting], that's one of the things that was so nice about it. Trust was given, coming through the door, often times.

That yes, sometimes, two people being open, coming together with that sense of that therapeutic presence can be super powerful! Like so powerful. And that happened a lot at [at the retreat setting]. And then that awareness thing, I don't feel that as much in this new setting. That feeling from the clients of being open to the healing, to the work, to the possibilities. Sometimes people are open, sometimes people are totally closed off.

The physical space also reflects an intentional devotion to personal betterment through cleanliness, lighting, and décor. The care given to the surrounding space establishes safety and trust and promotes the bodyworker's credibility before the massage has even begun.

There's you as a practitioner and what you can bring in, but also, for that setting where you see somebody to have good presence, so much factors into it. Creating everything from lighting to cleanliness. Professionalism of the whole process, of who the client is going to interact with even before getting to you. So office staff, stuff like that. All that stuff factors into therapeutic presence.

Characteristics of Spaces Not Conducive to Therapeutic Healing. In describing systemic impacts on therapeutic presence within the dyad, Katie notes that there are characteristics of a larger organizational system that can block the flow of therapeutic energy. Such characteristics include spaces that are loud and full of distractions, such as playing televisions, background conversations, interruptions during the massage, babies crying, etc. It is characterized by an overall lack of awareness and respect for the sacred or spiritual aspects of healing.

My ability to be present is a little bit more frustrating at this place [medical clinic] only because there's a lot more distractions within the office itself. Instead of a door there's a curtain so I can hear a lot of the other office activity...like listening to Barney or somebody listening to politics on their computer and that going through the walls....When you are dealing with a massage and trying to be present and have them be the focus it can be quite distracting. It's a lot of external influence that I don't necessarily think is always the best environment for what I'm trying to do in a massage and in focusing on that person.

She also notes that presence is impacted by the intentions and values that the larger system prioritizes. When certain modalities of treatment lack reverence for the emotional and spiritual aspects of healing, she observed that progress towards betterment is forestalled. Attributes of such settings include adherence to a narrow definition of healing and settings that only value reaching quantifiable goals. Furthermore, when the cultural climate of an organization is infused with fear, uncertainty, lack of trust, and poor ethical conduct and values, presence is adversely affected.

Often times they need to improve literally in their range of motion to a certain degree. If they got like 30 percent lateral neck flexion, they need to get to 50 percent in the next months. The goal is to try to get them to heal and improve range of motion and reduce pain and muscle hypertonicity. So there is that goal that's driven by the insurance company. And relates specifically to a physical injury and a physical matter. But I think there's so many other contributing factors that make up our life. The reason we get injured, how we get better. And I'm interested in all of that because I think it's fascinating. And so usually most people are coming in because they want to get out of pain, they want to go back to work. They want their body back that they felt pre-injury. That's usually the goal that they have. But how they're going to get it is often times dictated by what insurance is going to allow, which can be very disempowering. So sometimes goals aren't necessarily aligned.

Especially [when clients] read or hear from the community that this doctor might be a little [unethical]. He has these lawsuits against him, and so there's that lack of trust. Which then, there's a lack of trust and fear and uncertainty that they're dealing with somebody who even cares about their well-being at all, is a part of the whole clinic and that's just not a supportive or conducive environment to healing. And part of it is the system.

The intentions and personal narratives of the clients within the system also impact presence. Katie notes that many of the clients she worked with at the medical clinic faced significant barriers within the larger health care system, including financial difficulties, fighting with insurance companies, and being denied access to various forms of treatment. Having sustained significant injuries that were frequently the result of negligence by a third party, many of these clients were emotionally traumatized and angry about needing treatment in the first place. Some individuals entered treatment with the intention of undermining the healing process in order to sustain financial payouts from the insurance company in lieu of returning to work.

Whereas in this setting it's all worker's comp, so somebody got injured on the job, or no-fault insurance, which means somebody else hit them in an auto accident. So the reason that they're injured was something that happened outside of themselves. So often times the blame can be put on the person that hit them or work being the reason they got injured. They're getting the massages sometimes paid for, but even in that there's frustration in getting insurance to pay sometimes. A lot of times what it comes down to is people have to get lawyers. They have to go into battle to get the treatment. Or there's the other side of it where sometimes people have been in treatment for so long and there's this mindset that gets switched over where in order for people to continue to not go to work and get some money, and get some treatment, it behooves them to not get better. Which is tricky, but it's something that happens sometimes, where people aren't necessarily invested in their healing. Or a lot of times the people who come through they got injured at work but then when you start to hear their story, they've been dealing with chronic pain or multiple injuries or multiple car accidents for a long time. And sometimes something switches over a little bit, it's like there's people who aren't really empowered to do what they can to work on their healing. It's all kind of like what they can get, what's being prescribed to them.

Katie notes that presence and the healing process is hindered when: (1) individuals are focused on sustaining imbalance by not investing in their healing, and (2) are not open to or ready for change.

Effects of Therapeutic Presence within an Unethical System

Therapeutic Presence Suffers. There are frustrating challenges and harmful consequences to therapeutic presence in an unethical and unsupportive working environment. Working within an unsafe system affects credibility, professionalism, and interrupts the client's journey with health. Expectations of more powerful healing get dashed and therapeutic presence suffers.

The therapeutic presence suffers. I still try and be really present. I feel loyalty to my clients in doing what I can do for them. But being that so many people in that setting that I see, they need more than what I can offer. They need to be in a system that is functioning to connect them to the right people, and that seems to be suffering there [at the clinic].

I guess sometimes expectations for me get a little bit dashed where it's like, this could be more powerful healing.

Maintaining Homeostasis. When aspects of one's phenomenological experience are neglected—either through denied access to holistic forms of care or the individual not being readily invested in their journey with health—the healing process is stymied. Katie noted that progressive movement towards greater balance in well-being slows, and the therapeutic relationship merely maintains rather than transforms blockages.

There's more of a redundancy of people coming in that are not experiencing much change. Not always. Some people really do get better. Some people, there's definitely an effect. But there's a lot more people not really having long lasting change. They'll feel better at the end of the massage, but then they'll come back and be in pain again, the same situation. And again, that's just the physical level. I'm dealing a lot more with serious frustrations, and the frustration traces back to the system they are in. The worker's comp system and insurance and so many factors that somebody is just kind of staying in the same place. Nothing's really giving. Nothing is really changing, nothing's really busting loose on any level for them. And that can get really frustrating. But that's their lives. That's them. You can only want to effect change.

And sometimes that's accepting the reality that someone's not going to get better and you're trying to manage pain. An example I was just talking to one of my colleagues

about somebody who got injured at work and has a lumbar disk issue. While she did get injured at work, but the other side of the coin is she's very overweight and doesn't want to see that as a contributing factor at all.

Katie highlighted the importance of individual agency within the client to want to engage in the process. While there are overarching systemic issues that contribute to stagnancy and maintaining homeostasis in the healing process, the client's own readiness and commitment to change play a significant factor in the treatment outcome.

Parallel Process. Working in a frustrating environment is especially problematic for a client whose issues energetically parallel the problems of the larger system.

There is a blockage in this person's life. And then there's blockage in this kind of system that seems to be the same. And it's hard to break through that. Because the environment surrounding the injury and the system, they're trying to heal the injury in seems to be really similar to the blockages that were already in the body. Kind of creating the injury.

For example, Katie shares a story of working with a man who appeared to be extremely distracted both prior to and during the massage, describing him as someone that was not particularly respectful of the staff or treatment process. His issues mirrored some of the problems within the medical clinic, a place full of noisy distractions that failed to honor healing as a sacred practice. She noted the challenges of establishing trust and safety within the session and the difficulties for both parties to join in presence.

I think in way he was outside of the room. In a way he was still on his phone in his mind. Are we here together? Are we doing this? Or are you still outside and then we aren't really giving attention to what's going on or even the awkwardness of what's going on right now, which probably needs to be addressed. And so bringing the focus back into trying to make sure we're understanding each other.

Katie argued that one can break through the parallel process if the treatment team can counterbalance the blockage.

It's hard to break through that [blockages in the larger system]. And I think you can. But [you need to] have that team set up kind of counterbalancing that with, okay, here's what you need to do. And providing confidence and providing trust and infusing more energy and life in it.

This can be done by bringing attention to the systemic obstacles that adversely impact presence and healing by means of staff meetings, written communications, individual conversations, or modeling moral behaviors. Bringing awareness to the patterns that are negatively impacting healing is of great import to the general well-being of those impacted by the system at large.

Presence Amidst Frustration

Identifying Things as They Are. Invoking presence amid frustration involves accepting the situation as is. It is the ability to compassionately connect with the other's phenomenological experience and meet the other exactly where they are.

It's recognizing the common goals and what the experience of massage can be for that person. I have to adjust to the person, their story, their injury, and adjust how I can be present with this person, and adjust my expectations of what someone can get out of this massage....And so staying present is actually staying with the reality of each individual that comes in.

That's just kind of about accepting where I'm at but then also trying to communicate [what I need] to create improvements

She also described it as identifying things, just as they are.

It's all presence. Because when there is frustration, anger, or fear, to have that presence with that, to have awareness of that, it doesn't have to look a certain way. It's just like, ah, presence, staying present. Identifying things as they are. Even in the [clinical] setting. I don't like the setting so much. And it seems like things get blocked but that is the reality of the situation. I don't want to get into being too idealistic because even identifying something that is not functioning well, it's just the way that it is. And then the presence, okay, how can we try and make it better that that's still presence. And even if you don't get to make leaps and bounds of improvement, even baby steps is kind of good. So, yeah, presence can happen anywhere.

Coming Back to Intention. One must keep coming back to the focused intention, particularly when the environment does not easily foster presence. Amidst frustrating moments, it is important to keep returning to the fundamental intention in the here-and-now. It is a willful act of reconnecting, re-grounding, and a remembering of intention. When intention is re-anchored in compassion, Katie can reevaluate her role in ensuring that an atmosphere of trust, care, respect, and upright morality and ethics has been established.

Can we get on the same page with our intention in the massage and what we're working on and why?

So how do I have compassion for that [what the other person is going through] and try and bring the presence back into the room and into the body and into the injury and what's going on? And so it makes it easier for me, even though there was that annoyance in the beginning, to see that there's just an imbalance going on in this person and we're all trying. To have compassion for that and take that in...it helps me to focus on okay, what is my role and how can I help?

Katie finds that sharing her intention with the other can bring greater clarity, understanding, and kindness to the relationship, which helps regulate the system. Also, "gently encouraging well-being" in an open, non-judgmental, and non-threatening manner can re-establish therapeutic presence when it has been lost.

Goodness of Fit. It is important for the practitioner to accept the reality of the situation, trusting the process and accepting that the client is exactly where he/she needs to be. Of equal importance, the practitioner must also recognize goodness-of-fit by honestly evaluating the relationship's impact on treatment progress. She views it as her ethical responsibility to make referral recommendations if the relationship is not symbiotic or if she senses the client would be better matched with another practitioner.

You aren't going to be the right therapist for everybody. So you try and be professional and do what you can but I think [this client] had worked with another therapist in there

and he worked with her which was okay because I felt in the beginning with him we got off on the wrong foot and that's okay. He can go work with somebody else.

Presence as Ritual

Preparation. Before meeting with a client, Katie engages in several rituals and processes to elicit therapeutic and healing presence. First, she intentionally grounds herself, through acts of connecting with her breath and centering her thoughts on her intentions of having the most positive influence on the client's well-being. She scans her body to evaluate her energy levels, making sure that she is sufficiently hydrated and satiated to sustain presence for the impending session. She engages in a ritualistically clearing of the space by cleaning the room, putting on fresh sheets and preparing her massage oils. These preparatory rituals are enacted in solitude—quieting the internal and external noises—before meeting with the other.

Eating is really, really important, that I have enough energy. And I do like to try and show up early enough. The process of even just going into the room. For me, putting sheets on the bed and getting out my oils. I guess it's not a super ritual, but there's something about just preparing myself and [getting] in the role. In normal life there's so much engagement and if you are going to pay attention to somebody you have to stop somewhat of your own background chatter. So [I like] that ritual, being in the room by myself and setting things up.

Letting Go. Presence is a process of surrendering yourself to the experience, letting go of your own judgments, agenda, and head chatter. Katie asserts that “when you are too much in your head, you get in your own way.” Moving away from the energetic point of contact with others when the session or workday ends is part of the work as a massage therapist. This involves letting go of another's energy by disengaging in ruminative thoughts about a situation or person.

And then practices of letting stuff go. kind of getting out of that role of being the practitioner. Not being in that role all the time and swimming and letting go of whatever does happen with other people, that is their thing that you connected with but it's them. And you help in what way you can but staying in your role then letting it go and not taking it on, that's really important.

Acknowledging the transition from work into personal time is also an act of letting go.

She also noted the importance of cleansing—an energetic release—such as getting into nature, physically moving, or relaxing after a workday. Katie highlights the importance of spending time in nature, noting that the natural world offers endless knowledge about the nature of healing, presence, metaphor, and balance. Paying attention to Mother Nature's lessons play a critical role in furthering her understanding of the body and her practice as a massage therapist.

And so that practice for me is usually getting in the ocean and being outside in some regard. Going for a walk. That's really important. Nature is so important. It teaches healthy balance. It provides me with a lot of metaphors that helps me with bodywork.

Summary

More than any other participant, Katie's narrative highlighted the systemic nature of presence. She argues that there are larger forces at play that extend beyond the dyad and embraces a dialectical approach to navigating these various systems. Presence includes:

the positive, the negative, whatever setting you happen to be in, there are forces that align to bring you in that moment with somebody.

From her recent experience of transitioning into a working environment that presented many challenges in cultivating therapeutic presence, Katie demonstrated that when spiritual aspects of presence are ignored, the healing process is stymied. However, even amid an imbalanced larger system, synergistic joining can still occur through a disciplined practice of returning to intention predicated on compassion and holistic well-being.

Katie described presence as a synergistic connection where both members of the dyad join in a unifying flow tethered by trust and safety and an acknowledgement and acceptance of things as they are. This connection is impacted not only by the energy offered and exchanged by

each member of the dyad but is heavily influenced by the energy present within the larger systems and environments that envelop the dyad.

Michael

Michael is a man in his 70s who has been studying and practicing Zen Buddhism for nearly 50 years. His spiritual and existential journey began as a young man experimenting with empathogenic substances, such as mescaline. This brief encounter with psychedelics “gave him a sense of a whole other world,” invoking a desire to further explore these experiences through the study of eastern spiritual literature and practices like yoga and meditation. In a college philosophy course, Michael was introduced to the works of Mazu Daoyi, a Chinese Chan Buddhist teacher who lived during the Tang dynasty. He recalls being “blown away” by Mazu’s words, thinking, “This is it! I want to know more about this.”

Immersing in the Tradition

With his curiosity ignited, Michael focused his attention on studying the teachings and practices of Zen Buddhism. At the recommendation of his undergraduate Chinese philosophy teacher, Michael enrolled in a graduate program at the University of Hawai‘i on O‘ahu. He recalls:

I went and asked [my Chinese philosophy teacher], when I was going to graduate, about schools and where I might learn more about this thing called Chan. And he said, well you can either go to Austin, Texas or Hawai‘i. Hawai‘i was an easy choice. Keep going west. In my first semester at the University of Hawai‘i, I had a class on Zen Buddhism, and somebody told me about the Koko An Zendo. And I went there, and it just fit for me. And I stayed with it. I like the particulars...I love the Chan way of expressing it and practicing it and all that. So that’s sort of how I got into it.

The Zen Center offered Michael the opportunity to live and breathe the teachings he found so inspirational. The center had been founded by a respected western teacher during a time when

Zen was gaining traction in the western hemisphere. Michael eventually made the Zen Center his home as a student in residence.

Michael's daily commitments at the Zendo included sitting practice (*zazen*), work practice (*samu*), as well as serving as a leader for the intensive retreats (*sesshin*). He described his experiences of sitting intensively over a 10-year period, during which he attended school, got married, had a child, and was asked by the head teacher to start working with students one-on-one (*dokusan*).

Attending to Personal Needs

As his commitments as a father and husband demanded more attention, he realized that he needed to step back from his teaching role at the Zendo in order to develop his career and support his family. He recalls the circumstances of his decision to step away:

I'm down to my last thousand dollars of savings, I've got my own business, but I haven't had a paycheck in three months because there's no business, there's no work. And I'm charging off to the Zendo. I gulp down a peanut butter sandwich and some black tea and head off to the Zendo, and I'm driving over there, and it hit me, "This isn't working." And so not long after that I told *Roshi* (head teacher), I can't do this anymore. I need to give more energy to my work and to my family, and I thought I would just sort of gradually step back. But I completely stepped back for about 10 years and didn't come to sit. Didn't do *sesshin*. Still sat every day. My wife and I sat together and that's how it went.

During this 10-year hiatus, he successfully developed a private business that he enjoyed, and that business provided his family with opportunities for growth and health that accompany financial stability.

Return to Collective Practice

Approximately 10 years after stepping away from the Zendo, Michael learned that his teacher, the center's founder, would be leading his final retreat before retiring. Michael

instinctively knew that he needed to participate and signed up for the *sesshin*. He recalled that after reuniting with his teacher and fellow students in collective practice, it was clear that it was time for him to return.

He began resuming his role as a leader with authorization to work one-on-one with students and eventually sold his business. In 2004, Michael received Dharma Transmission—that is, being named as a successor in a continuous lineage of Zen teachers going back to the Tang period of China—and has continued his work with students in investigating what is frequently described in Zen tradition as “the great matter of life and death.” When asked about his transition in becoming the primary teacher at the Zendo, he highlighted the similarities of the student-teacher roles within the dyad.

It’s not two people there [student and teacher]. We’re just working on the same *koans* [dialogues, stories, and questions used in practice] with people. Trying to find some light, some movement.

Upon further reflection, he shared how over time he has become more comfortable with the doubt and not knowing that accompanies Way-finding.

When I think back about being a student, that was different. I was often not comfortable as a student, with the territory, with not knowing. Some idea of having to present something [to the teacher] with confidence in it. Having to be wrong or not accepted. I don’t get to have that so much anymore.

He described his teaching role as being a *kalyanamitra*, or “wise friend in the Way,” and spiritual awakening as a process of mutual engagement and discovery. Because of his role as a teacher within this branch of spiritual practice, Michael was chosen to represent the nominal voice of *spirit* in the *mind*, *body*, and *spirit* framework of this research project. I spoke with Michael three times in person to discuss his understanding of what has been framed by this

research project and the psychological literature as *therapeutic presence*, and how this phenomena interfaces with Zen Buddhism.

Beyond Limits

Undefinable. Michael's narrative points to the undefinable and non-enduring qualities of presence. It is difficult to capture all that presence is with words; it is experiential in nature and aspects of the phenomenon cannot be articulated or defined. In our first interview, Michael expressed cautious discernment in our conversations about the phenomenon:

We discover what there is to discover in the course of that kind of emergence of meeting and engaging. And that's not very definable. I want to be careful about defining it because I don't want to limit it in some way.

He cautioned against the dangers of over-thinking and over-conceptualizing something that transcends the limits of language and thought.

Clarifying Terms and Examining Incongruencies in Meaning Systems. While there are linguistic limitations in portraying the ineffable, I attempted to explore and capture what he shared with fidelity. It was important to address incongruencies between meaning systems and epistemologies of Western Psychology and Zen Buddhist teachings. For example, *therapeutic presence* was differentiated as mutual engagement or co-investigation into one's true nature, and healing was described as a byproduct of this investigative process.

Michael felt that neither the terms *therapeutic presence* nor *presence* accurately capture the experience, asserting that the concept of *presence* was too laden with western connotations of a "present moment" and "healing." From his viewpoint, the term carried too much of an agenda. It turned presence into an external object or means to an end, a conditional state that one is trying to attain. He noted:

You're not trying for a goal out there—but somehow, without making it an external object, to live your aspiration for awakening—to have that be what you're doing. Not trying to get yourself into some kind of condition, but that you share the Buddha's aspiration to be awake.

Through an efforted striving to “be present,” one loses the very thing that he/she is seeking.

Michael asserted that inherently we are not separate, therefore there is no fixed thing there that is present. As we explored the term *presence* further, he said:

It seems that part of presence is not just that it's ineffable but that there isn't anything present, so it's not existing, not enduring.

It's not necessarily what's trying to be conveyed there, but it may not be the best way to convey it. Depends on what people take away from that. ‘I really need to be present all the time.’ Relax. You don't have to be so present. This is present! This is it. This is my mind. So we can get out of the way a little bit there. And I wonder if presence sort of gets us in the way sometimes. If we think that there's something that's being referred to there rather than allowing [what's there to be there]...If I bring in some other entity into that, with some purpose, it feels like I've ruined it.

He also noted that the term *therapeutic* implied a process of healing and noted that the dyadic interactions he had with students did not have the agenda of healing. Healing may be a byproduct of honest and sincere engagement, but it is not the focus or nature of the interaction.

I'm not sure even healing is a context for me in the work. And yet, I see that happening — noticing that people do change and improve and find deeper contentment in their life and satisfaction and witnessing that happening. That's very real. So, it's not like I'm unaware of that but I don't hold that as a goal. That just seems to happen as part of us practicing together.

Instead, the interaction is rooted in mutual exploration and investigation of our true nature.

When asked if there was a term that felt more precise in describing the experience, he mentioned “mutual engagement,” but also granted that the word *presence* could be fitting, as long as the term was clarified and mutually explored by those using it.

Sometimes it's just a matter of explaining a little bit of what you don't mean [by the term]. But maybe the way to investigate that is to see what does that convey?

He further pointed to the Chinese word *ji* (機), which is extensively used in Zen literature, to more fully encapsulate what he described as mutual engagement. He defined *ji* as,

Ji is a trigger mechanism of a crossbow, catch, trip, latch; the moving power of—as of the universe, Heaven's workings; natural spontaneity; key, turning point, crux, pivot; motive, stimulus, impulse; dexterity, skill, ingenuity; loom and shuttle, weaving.

Since reality is interactive, efficacy is not a matter of enforcing one's will on a situation, but rather being able to work with it without losing one's bearings and aspirations. This is the meaning of *ji* in the Zen context. As Dōgen [founder of Soto Zen in Japan] says: To turn and be turned—if this is not done, the power of the Way is not realized.

Ji is creative interaction, a participation in and co-creating of experience.

It Transcends Form, Concepts, and Frameworks. Michael described this indefinable, non-enduring quality as existing within all life forms as a guiding force, as an expression of life itself.

There's something to stay with that is a guide in us. It has no form. I can't formulate it and say what it is. But it's me.

It can neither be conceptualized nor reduced to an abstract set of principles. Rather it is a process of breaking out of roles, concepts, and frameworks, particularly with regards to the concept of one's own identity or *self*.

He examined the importance of not letting certain ideas, such as the concept of presence or the duality of student-teacher or client-therapist roles, be a limiting factor in the process of engagement and discovery. At some point the framework has to be transcended so that the exploratory process is not constrained by it.

In terms of this kind of mutual engagement in an investigation of what life is, part of what it does seem like I'm often doing is trying to get there with people—to get through that framework of teacher and student. I know you're working on your degree in psychology, and I would think part of what's needed in that context is somehow to transcend the context, in order to actually have that experience with someone of being

there with them. As long as they feel like they're there to get fixed, the context is therapeutic or that their condition is a disease of something that needs to be healed in some way, that limits the potential of the interaction. So I feel like a lot of times my work is to get through that therapeutic context. Having said that, I'm acknowledging that that's often the context I'm working in and trying to break out of in some way. You be the teacher; I'll be the student. That's fine. That's just as good in terms of investigation here. We don't have to be bound by our roles. And yet that takes years, it feels like, often, to find that kind of relationship with people.

We're in the usual framework of our being, of our life. We're either present or we're not present. And so that's a framework. It's being or non-being. And so what I'm trying to talk about is what isn't helpful is that framework.

Michael voiced support for a non-dualistic epistemology that embraces reality as a dialectical both/and rather than a binary either/or.

An Absence of Something: Forgetting the Self. Within this process of breaking free of concepts, forms, and frameworks, our identification with a separate *self* gradually falls away. *Self*, in this context, would be understood as a confabulation, a construction, or identification with delusional ideas and mental formulations about who we think we are. Michael explained that our true nature transcends an iconic module of an "I," "me," or "you." The notion that there is no *self* that is inherently separate from other forms of life runs counterintuitively with how human beings have collectively constructed our perception of reality. *Presence* within the context of Zen practice may be considered a practice of seeing through this delusion—a process of forgetting being separate.

In contemplating the idea of *therapeutic presence*, Michael said:

Part of what feels therapeutic to me is absence...Absence of some identity of myself other than what's happening...Liberation from delusion about who we are seems like the greatest therapy.

He postulated that when there is no separate *self* to lean on, there is not a separate awareness of being present.

I feel concerned when people tell me their practice is being present. I want to tell them Zen practice is about forgetting yourself. You don't know whether you're present or not because there's not some separate thing to be present...It sounds like there's a loss there and yet there isn't. There's something extremely intimate that is being expressed in that.

There is no separation of body, mind, or spirit; no space, no time; no presence and no "thing" to be present. When we lose that separate identity, then the right precepts, morality, and course of action can arise naturally. He noted:

There's a forgetting [of the *self*] and so there's a freshness that can't be a matter of being present, because it is me.

He describes reality as things being just the way they are, nothing extra added.

There is something deeply moving and novel being expressed in letting one's concept of *self* as separate fall away. However, the process can be painfully difficult and demanding, dashing away commercial depictions of "Zen" and "mindfulness" as achieving a ubiquitous state of serenity. The practice of forgetting the western individualistic or egoic *self* involves walking through uncharted territory, and the process of thinking and trying to make sense of it with our minds can get in the way of seeing clearly. It can present the seemingly paradoxical problem of using the separate *self* as a means of forgetting it.

Michael noted that we get lost in stories that we tell ourselves about others or our own lives, eliciting a widespread belief that we must protect and defend ourselves from the world around us. He referenced the delusional nature of gossip, observing that when people talk about others, they are often talking about themselves in some way. He noted that delusional judgements about others are often created as a way of trying to understand our worlds together.

If you tell me about [another person], what I'm hearing about is you. And that's important to me. I want to hear about you. But I don't confuse that with [the other person]. I see it as part of what humans do. It's not bad, it's just delusional in some way. One of the 10,000 delusions we all fall into because we're trying to understand our

worlds together. And particularly our relationships and people that are hard to understand.

However, the more we begin to discover our own true nature as intrinsically connected rather than divided, the clearer it becomes that there is nothing there to protect.

Recollection. Presence as a process of forgetting the *self* paradoxically entails a kind of recollection. Michael described it as a process involving remembering who we are, what we are here for, and what is important.

Sati is translated usually as mindfulness. And etymologically it also means recollection. People I find, and this gets confused in the *dharma* [teachings], they think if they're just with whatever is happening that's enough. But there's no recollection in that necessarily. The recollection part is, what am I here for? What's important to me? In traditional Buddhist teachings recollection is in part [the knowledge] that I'm going to die. And you're going to die. This is precious time. Let's use it for what we want to use it for. That's a kind of recollection.

This points to a sense of urgency and imperative to awakening—to living one's aspiration and showing up in our own lives. He noted that it does not necessarily happen on a conscious level. There is an experience of letting go of control and allowing for life to unfold organically; being guided by one's innate curiosity without agenda or judgment.

There's some way of allowing something to come forth and being willing and wanting to do that, wanting to participate in some way—but without some pre-made formula...There's a remembering of my purpose in the natural unfolding of life.

The parallel processes of forgetting the separate *self* and the recalling of one's aspiration or purpose develop synergistically; both necessitate a certain level of trust in the process.

Trust. Engaging in the process and the practice of recollection and forgetting requires trust, an act of “giving yourself to it completely.” It is trusting your life, just the way it is. He expanded upon this point in differentiating the westernized concept of meditation with the practice of *zazen*.

In mediation there's some kind of a story around it, like it's gonna do this or that for me or you're doing it for this purpose and that. But fundamentally, that's not it. It's just that whole project just pales and what are we left with? Our life, just the way it is. And I trust that. I really trust that.

Trust can be manifested by bringing attention to whatever is happening, allowing for whatever arises to be just so; letting what comes, come, and letting what goes, go.

Trust involves embracing the pains of doubt, fear, and frustration—nothing is excluded.

Michael highlighted the wayfinding aspects of trust, commenting that even in difficult situations he has “a deep trust that whatever is happening is workable.”

Trust doesn't necessarily come naturally. It's not obvious. So you have to trust. You assume a posture that isn't initially very comfortable or natural and it becomes so. But you start to find out how it works and how your mind works by working with it. Not by forcing things but by persisting, by being flexible.

Trust is not just something we have or don't have. Trust is practiced and learned. It's something we do, really *how* we do what we do.

Trust, like any skill, must be sharpened and honed. It is a practice that entails renouncing control or attachment to a desired outcome. Trust is an act of continuing to put one foot in front of the other, even amidst total darkness—it is aligning our words, thoughts, and actions with how things really are.

Mutual Engagement

We Do It Together. Michael described presence as an emergence of meeting and engaging together. Rather than reducing it to an abstract set of principles, Michael asserted that it is better realized as a way of living and working together, as a shared experience. This underscored the significance of each member's contribution to the collective whole. He noted that what happens in a place of mutual engagement changes each participant.

Out of [mutual engagement] comes not some knowledge necessarily but like going through an experience together....We find ways to be with each other that aren't just back to our usual ways that somehow ignore this deep connection with one another. And that we are each other....What happens together changes the both of us.

He highlighted how the individual effort to engage impacts the collective whole by exploring the phenomenon of *sesshin* retreats.

In the beginning, people coming to *sesshin* often think, "I'm coming to get something for me." They don't usually realize that they are also coming to contribute. That's okay. But when you are in *sesshin*, and we're practicing together, contributing is part of it. And it's a huge part of it. And you know that because you feel what your neighbor is contributing to you when you just have this sense, it brings tears to my eyes, how hard they're working. And how hard it is sometimes. And that makes me work all the harder. Just be sober about it and try to drop my [delusions] and just practice. There's a dynamic in that which is really, really helpful.

It is not just a matter of our own will. We must give our all and when we do that, we find we have a lot of help. We do this together....It is dependent on a strong individual effort, but when we do that, we benefit others and that benefits us.

We Discover as We Go. Mutual engagement involves a process of looking at something together and exploring its constant unfolding. What comes forth in the act of engagement is particular to each interaction and the context in which it arises—a meeting of unique forms of life that are in constant flux, always impacting the world and being impacted by it. Together, questions about where we come from, where we belong, what gives us life, are mutually explored.

We discover what there is to discover in the course of that kind of emergence of meeting and engaging....It's something that is being discovered as we go. Our work, the mutual work that is happening, goes beyond [any conceptual framework].

There's a kind of greeting, you know we say, you see this expression in Zen: "Where have you come from?" And you might take it as what place you come from, what kind of psychological place you're coming from. And it also has this sense of "Who are your people?" Where do you come from? Who are those people that gave you life? And are still giving you life. Those are your people. And we're living, we're breathing together, in that life together. It doesn't feel exclusive to me.

It Is Dynamic and We Are Not Separate from It. Discovery without end is boundless, dynamic, and constantly arising. It is not fixed to chronological time nor can it be reduced to a fixed moment or a psychological insight. This phenomenon is a process of being flexible and not separating from what comes along. Within the ceaseless changes of life, it is finding an appropriate way to engage with what arises. He described it as a continuous process of change in which everything moves at once and thereby nothing moves at all.

If I can move with it, rather than opposing it, rather than affirming it, negating it, trying to change it, then that's the experience that I'm talking about of "being there with" because there's not another person there either as a fixed entity. It feels like part of what we get to realize is something much more dynamic. [What] I am and [what] the other person is. That it's life. And we're living this life. When we can somehow align with that it feels like now we don't have to control it anymore because we're not separate. So within that flow of life, it's time to [engage].

When you are in the "flow," there is no flow, you're not going anywhere.

He illustrated this process of mutual discovery by pointing out what was emerging in our conversation:

I'm talking to you. What I'm saying is coming out of you being here, it's not just this fixed thing here. I don't know what you're going to ask me about and I don't know what I'm going to say. It's not just a lens, it's a field for me to play in that you spread out.

Michael also likened it to feeding and giving sustenance to all organisms—being an active participant and co-creator of life itself.

Early Buddhist sutras say that the deed which has the highest merit is giving food to the *sangha*. And that has a very literal meaning of feeding the monks, giving them sustenance. But it also has this sense to me of offering your life to the grass, to the sky, and in some way, to nothing at all. To just live that way. To actually offer yourself in that way, where there's no keeping track.

Discovery elicits a sense of becoming, not just being.

Over and Over Again. Discovery is a recursive process. There is no final destination, just a process of practicing and learning something over and over again. Michael likened the process to learning jazz. He explained that beginners will listen to master musicians on repeat, diligently practicing what has already been created. You must learn what those before you spent their lives discovering before you can recognize what you can contribute to the emergent anthology.

Play it over and over again, just the way they played it. And then out of that, you'll be able to bring it forth in your own way, but in absolute accord with the tradition itself.

Your own story needs to be told. And it needs to keep being told... You know when you're just saying somebody else's words, and when you connect. And that's the work; it's not just a destination where you just arrive. You keep practicing with it.

Practicing it over and over again does not preclude nuances in the process. Michael noted that fresh takes on the music of one's life are limitless—even with songs you believe you have already mastered. He emphasized the importance of practice and the dynamic and reiterative nature of awakening.

[It's not] a steady state... We keep awakening, over and over and over. Just to remember our purpose in that way is awakening in a way. It puts things in perspective. There's no attainment. It just means that you keep going. It's attainment after attainment. Attainment beyond attainment.

Insights and realizations are boundless—every repeated journey of recollection and attainment reveals something new.

Living a Spirited Life

Aspiration: Sincere and Open Engagement. Michael postulated that a western view of the *self* as separate begins to fall away when this mutual investigation into what life is met with sincerity and openness. Sincere and open engagement involves bringing forth one's aspiration to

see with clarity, to realize the true nature of one's being. These characteristics serve as a kind of prerequisite to intimate engagement and presence.

[Mutual engagement] shows that we realize something together through our own sincerity of our interaction. Openness might be another word. That we enter an investigation of life, of what it is. It seems like part of that is there is some attitude or some way of living that is prerequisite in a way. When we come together with that kind of way of living, way of working, then this kind of thing is possible.

It's like showing up. It's straight. It's honest. So it has that kind of abandon to it. Let's do this. It's our life. We're here!

Sincere and aspirational engagement often results in an experience predicated in connectedness, curiosity, wonderment, and aliveness. The essence of this phenomenon was further illuminated in an experience he had following a brief but intimate interaction with one of his teachers.

I was blown away by it. I didn't know what I was. It is like the whole heavens is my mind, and that same kind of not knowing was there, but it wasn't a lack.

Furthermore, living one's aspiration elicits a willingness to make the journey, an excitement for exploration.

It feels like spirit in the sense of having a spirited life. You know, being willing. Let's go! Let's do this! This is it! And so there's something in that that I trust and that I want others to enjoy. Because it's theirs. It's not mine. It's all of ours.

There's the feeling of collectedness of just practicing whole heartedly, feeling that that's worth the price of admission in and of itself.

Michael again points to the indivisible nature of presence—each part invariably impacts the whole.

You Gotta Get Out of the Car. A spirited life demands getting dirty—taking risks, falling down, working up a sweat, and digging your hands in the mud, so to speak. It is not armchair living or watching the action from afar. Barricading oneself from potential threats of pain or danger is no life at all. Michael shared a story from Edward Abby's book, *Desert*

Solitaire, about a time when Abby was a national park ranger and frequently encountered tourists driving in their cars to find accessible vistas or points of interests.

You gotta get out of that Goddamn car! And walk! And when you can't walk, you gotta crawl. And maybe then you'll see something. But it doesn't show itself when you're in the car and all wrapped up in your next viewpoint or whatever.

He suggests that there is nothing spectator about living. You take it all in, without judgment, without turning it into a binary choice: good or bad. Engagement entails embracing both the extraordinary and ordinary; there is no picking or choosing. The banality of doing the dishes, taking out the trash, or repeating something over and over again is just as significant as reaching a magnificent vista or having a profound insight. It is simply allowing life itself to come forward just as it is.

A Companion on the Path

When discussing the process of working dyadically with others, Michael defined his role as a teacher as being a companion on the path. The term *companion* references the relational nature of the role—it requires collaboration and dedication from both student and teacher. Michael sees his role as a participant in the group—one part of the whole. He underscored the importance for the systemic structure of the community at large to support lateral engagement and egalitarian values.

I see myself as a companion on the path with people that are interested in the same path. The path being Zen, the practice of Zen Buddhism. Part of the ideal for me is what's called in Indian Buddhism *kalyanamitra*, a friend in The Way, a wise friend in The Way. Someone who doesn't just stand apart and give instruction but who walks with you through wherever the path takes us together. So, it seems integral to me in being a Zen teacher to be part of a group that's doing that. There has to be that element of where I'm not a leader, I'm one of all of us, one of a group that's doing this together. That seems important to me. Another part is the relationships between the other people so that it's not just like spokes in a wheel where the relationships are all going to the center, where the teacher is, but that the lateral relationships between the different spokes of the wheel, if

you will, are important and just as important. And so that there's a wholeness there of those things. That is how I conceptualize my role, how I think about it.

From his perspective, the student-teacher dichotomy is interchangeable; both members of the dyad fluidly move in and out of roles as teacher and student over the course of an interaction.

He acknowledges that the student-teacher framework offers pragmatic boundaries within the dyad, particularly at the onset of the relationship. However, at some point the student-teacher framework needs to be transcended in order to deepen the engagement. Michael acknowledged that the inherent power dynamics within the student-teacher framework can impede openness and sincerity.

The relationship shouldn't be too formal, like they've got me on a pedestal or something. I can appreciate a certain amount of respect for the tradition. And there's naturally a certain amount of self-consciousness, and the idea of being tested by the teacher—all that stuff is there for most people. It's not something that totally goes away or has to go away before there is a deep rapport. But there needs to be a certain kind of honesty about it.

Students may temper their expressions or feel uncomfortable challenging the teacher's perspective, becoming entrapped by self-consciousness or the sociocultural baggage embedded in these roles. Through dedicated practice and the process of forgetting the *self*, these ideas and frameworks slowly erode.

Discernment of Readiness. Discerning the goodness of fit and readiness of prospective students plays an important role in determining who Michael is willing to work with dyadically. He thoughtfully considers what he can offer the student, as well as the student's level of dedication to the work. Readiness and commitment to the practice are prerequisites to entering into a student-teacher relationship, as it is important that the student has the fire and stamina to keep moving forward, even when challenges arise. Rapport building is also a key ingredient in determining goodness of fit, ensuring that there is a high degree of mutuality within the

relationship for trust and growth to occur. He expanded on process of determining who to take on as a student:

In terms of establishing a teacher-student relationship, it needs to feel like there's a rapport there. It certainly takes the commitment in a sense that, for them, this way of Zen practice is really the way for them. That they really are invested in this particular way of practice. With that commitment there is a ground for us to work with. It's not a matter of 100% certainty and knowing. But they're pretty committed. And anyone will do a *sesshin*, that's generally a requirement for me. We have to at least do a *sesshin* together. And then in the course of that *sesshin* I see do they "get down to it?" kind of, you know, show their face? And can I do that, or do I have something going on?

Readiness therefore is mutually dependent on both the student and the teacher's ability to engage in the investigative process together.

Providing Space. Michael views his responsibility within the dyad as providing space for whatever needs to come forth to come forth. Working this way with others requires an agenda-free attitude. He notes that he does not subscribe to any explicit teaching technique nor try to elicit a specific response from his students. Part of his role as a teacher is to bear witness to that transformational process and provide a space for a person to live and breathe authentically, and to acknowledge that when it happens.

Let's work with this, whatever it is. Allowing it to be. It seems like a lot of times we have the idea that there are wrong thoughts or feelings. It's not that they're right versus wrong but that they have a place. They're okay to be, to be okay. And so in some ways I'm being a space for that to be okay.

It's relational. That you don't do this by yourself. And there's an understanding I think for the people who come that they can't do it by themselves—that we need someone there to interact with and to be, to have that, have a space as well to do that and have a practice. Some way, a kind of channel to work with that happens between us, or we happen in the course of that relating.

The Breath

Michael spoke extensively about the significance of the breath in Zen practice. Paying attention to the breath allows the mind and body to become the same thing.

Our mind is attention. When we attend to our breath, then we get our mind and our body together. We don't have a mind without a body, and there's no human body without a mind. It's just a body. So they are the same thing.

Thought becomes the breath and the breath becomes thought. Paying attention to the breath provides a gateway for new possibilities to emerge and can completely change one's immediate experience.

Interestingly, as we're [paying attention to the breath], we find the whole valley is sitting here. It's all sitting here. And so we lose the skin barrier and the whole inside-outside, me-you orientation to things. With this a different experience of one's self is possible. Breath is a gateway into this experience.

The mind alone cannot live life. Connecting with the breath is not just a technique but a path to recollection, a way of coming home. He elaborated:

[The breath] brings it all together. That's why it's important. It's a way home. It's a way back.

Staying with the breath can create more space for experiences of pain and discomfort to be acknowledged, felt, and transformed. When we forget our breath, we forget our body. An effortful striving to think our way through the pain can manifest. Clinging to the breath, obsessively paying attention to the breath, or conversely passively watching the breath can diminish its power, transforming it from an open path to a dead-end road.

If the breath becomes an end in itself, it's poison. And it just short circuits the practice. If it's over emphasized in the teaching, then students can get obsessed with it. And that's not good. On the other side of things, with, the Soto [Zen sect] side, if we're just too passive, just kind of watching our breath...People can get stuck there too. Rather than kind of forcing things, they become passive and move into kind of watchful place, and

often, unfortunately, whatever aspiration there might be for awakening, is squelched in a sterile practice of quietude.

Turning the breath into a means to an end is just another manifestation of delusion, and just watching or observing lacks crucial engagement through inquiry.

Tradition in Modernity

Michael acknowledged the challenges we face in our fast-paced modern world, which does little to encourage quietness, stillness, or treading lightly. Presence as mutual engagement, not just with another human being, but with the particulars of one's experience, requires a kind of slowing down and attending. He likened it to going on a stroll in the mountains, getting out of the car.

Michael expressed concern about the new wave of mindfulness surging in the marketplace, as various subcultures, including psychology, use the terms "Zen" and "mediation" as tools for marketing and consumerism.

You have a name of something, but you don't have the substance of it. There's a way in which American culture can just swallow things up and absorb the words and the language. You know how frequently the word Zen is used in different contexts? It doesn't have anything to do with anything. It's marketing. So the challenge for me is that voraciousness of American culture and consumerism. And mindfulness is swallowed up in it.

He described his love of the traditional metaphors, language, and ritual developed over centuries within the Zen lineage, concerned that the life of Zen teachings might be lost on most consumers or misunderstood by those appropriating Zen into psychological practices.

He expressed concern that Zen was becoming too entangled with psychological frameworks and epistemologies. In differentiating his brief experience in psychotherapy with

Zen practice, he concluded that the therapeutic experience did not rouse the same sense of spiritedness or dedication to awakening that he has received from Zen practices. He noted:

I'm very grateful for those [therapy sessions and gained insights] and having someone that I trusted. But it didn't feel like practicing every day, working with it, having to muster something of my own spirit.

Michael believes that psychological insight is not enough—it fails to touch upon the aspiration and relentless commitment to awakening. When spiritual practices, such as mindfulness, are utilized by psychologists as a technique or a means to an end, something inherent is lost. The wisdom and knowledge passed down over thousands of years by ancestors who dedicated their lives to the Way of awakening through particular disciplines and precepts of living is bypassed. He further elaborated his concern around the acculturation of Buddhist practices into western psychotherapeutic practices:

I think Zen is getting psychologized. And so instead of our metaphors and ways of understanding being tigers, and cliffs, and rivers, people are talking about ego, and stuff like that. Undeniably we have to deal with that territory, but it feels like a limiting of the Zen horizon. On the other hand, there is also such a thing as spiritual bypassing. People attain some kind of insight and get the idea that they're beyond their [delusions]. But they're not. They're still full of it.

He noted that a way of course correcting involves recognition of tradition and ancestral lineage. Honoring the work, dedication, and teaching of those who have come before is of critical importance. By studying the lives and ways of our ancestors, we protect the life of their teachings and practices from erasure by cultural appropriation, forgetting, or commodification.

Along with honoring tradition, though, he advocated for continued discovery and building upon the knowledge passed down by each generation. He asserted that it was important to find a way to make the traditional more relevant for newer generations so the lineage can continue to evolve.

Summary

Michael differentiated between *presence* and *therapeutic presence*. He challenged the western notion of a present moment. He refuted the idea of a separate *self*. He preferred to frame presence as mutual engagement—the experience of creatively meeting and connecting with various manifestations of life. He viewed reality as interactive, dynamic, and full of surprising discovery.

Mutual engagement is an act of working and living together that recognizes the connective and synergistic nature of our actual life. Investigating who, what, and how we are is an endless process of discovery and recollection in which conventional concepts and ideas begin to crumble. It is also a process in which we can realize our true nature, where we can see the wholeness and totality of life as it. As he shared,

Practice is awakening, and awakening is practice.

Michael highlighted the significance of living one's aspiration for awakening, rooted in sincerity and openness, free of agenda or willful striving. He described his role as a teacher as a companion or wise friend, who collaboratively explores and discovers the path along the way. He acknowledged that the practice and road can be difficult, particularly in our modern world, but also acknowledged that we might lean on the work and teachings discovered from those that came before to guide us.

Michael described what the psychological literature describes as *presence* as a process of mutual engagement in which conventional concepts of identity, roles, and frameworks fall away; it is a process of endless, iterative discovery that takes practice, dedication, gumption, and relational support. In sum:

Mutual engagement is *how* the mountains, rivers, plants and animals *are* mountains, rivers, plants and animals. We are no different. To realize this mutuality and live our life in accord with it is to continuously awaken.

Common and Divergent Themes

Each of the participants offered rich and descriptive responses to questions of how therapeutic presence is experienced and understood within dyadic relationships. While each story was as unique as the individual sharing it, common themes and perspectives emerged across the narratives. Through rigorous constant comparative analysis, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation, convergent and divergent themes were identified. Overall, the participants' narratives pointed to a universal touchstone of presence: it is more than a technique or strategy but an experiential process that allows our true nature to come alive.

COMMON THEMES	
Textural Theme	Verbatim Quotations from the Participants
Presence is the True Nature of Being	<p>In Presence, We Are Connected to an Inseparable, Greater Whole, which Has No Limits:</p> <p>“Totally connected. Totally connected. I have sense of self, but I also know that the two of us are one.”</p> <p>“We’re living this life. When we can somehow align with that it feels like now we don’t have to control it anymore because we’re not separate.”</p> <p>“Your tributaries both contributed and now you’re kind of in the same river it feels like.”</p> <p>“The Jewish belief is that each of us has a spark of the divine within us. And all together, collectively, all of those sparks make up a part of a greater whole. I do believe that there is something within us that is part of something that is greater.”</p> <p>“Life is an indivisible whole.”</p> <p>“Energy is life itself. Energy is everything, the universe and beyond and all the forms that come from it.”</p>

“When you think of what I-Thou is in some ways, you could say it’s the sometimes, the dance between the metaphysical and the physical.”

Presence Is Beyond Words, Beyond Knowing:

“That’s not very definable. I want to be careful about defining it because I don’t want to limit it in some way.”

“It is such an abstract concept.”

“[It] is the unknowable. And yet that which is known. So in Judaism we will say, *Hashem*, which means literally the name because there is no word that can accurately capture all of what God is.”

Presence Is Surrendering the Self:

“Part of what feels therapeutic to me is absence.... Absence of some identity of myself other than what’s happening.”

“Zen practice is about forgetting yourself. You don’t know whether you’re present or not because there’s not some separate thing to be present.... It sounds like there’s a loss there and yet there isn’t. There’s something extremely intimate that is being expressed in that.”

“I would feel self-conscious about if I was doing a good job or not in the beginning of the massage...But usually I could tell when the massage was working...because you’re connecting, and you’re in the flow together.

“On the one hand I would say, I totally surrender myself and by doing so, I’m totally aware of myself...I have both completely surrendered myself and yet I’m completely aware of who I am.”

Presence Is the Flow of Life, Just As It Is:

“If I can move with it, rather than opposing it, rather than affirming it, negating it, trying to change it, then that’s the experience that I’m talking about of being there with because there’s not another person there either as a fixed entity. It feels like part of what we get to realize is something much more dynamic.”

	<p>“You’re in the flow...And then you’re off and you’re running. And you’re in this current together...and the river’s kind of flowing.”</p> <p>“What are we left with? Our life, just the way it is.”</p> <p>“Simply bringing awareness to it can transform it.”</p> <p>“When there is frustration, anger, or fear, to have that presence with that, to have awareness of that, it doesn’t have to look a certain way. It’s just like, ah, presence, staying present. Identifying things as they are.”</p> <p>Blockages—Separation from our True Nature Obscures Presence:</p> <p>“Liberation from delusion about who we are seems like the greatest therapy.”</p> <p>“The Hawaiian belief of course is that there are often blockages, so, when healing is done, it is really to remove the blockages.”</p> <p>“There is a blockage in this person’s life. And then there’s blockage in this kind of system that seems to be the same. And it’s hard to break through that.”</p> <p>“[Symptoms] are usually linked to...imbalances.”</p> <p>“Ultimately, it’s about undoing the <i>hihia</i>, which are the knots or entanglements...So it’s not, I’d say, the focus on the entanglements among people, but it’s really the entanglements in one’s self.</p> <p>“If [the breath] becomes an end in itself, it’s poison.”</p> <p>“...trying to existentially obliterate the other person or allow myself to be obliterated.... When you are so needy, that you are looking at the person, that you’ve objectified them.”</p> <p>“You’re not trying for a goal out there—but somehow, without making it an external object, to live your aspiration for awakening—to have that be what you’re doing”</p>
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<p>Presence Can Be a Path Back to One's True Nature</p>	<p>Finding Your Path:</p> <p>“And then discovering Zen...I was blown away by it. I thought, this is it!”</p> <p>“I took that course [on shiatsu] and then I got some books and it became a lens through which it actually changed the way I look at life. Lots of things go through this shiatsu filter.”</p> <p>“I took one marriage and family therapy course with a professor from the Ackerman Institute, which is one of the big marriage and family therapy centers. So I got a taste, and I thought, ‘hmm, there’s something to it.’”</p> <p>“This is what you have asked me to do. While I know that the path is arduous, and it will be challenging, I know this is what I’m supposed to do. <i>Koho ‘ia</i>. Choice, no choice. The Hawaiian meaning, when you come right down to it, ultimately, you’re presented with your path. And you have to choose to walk it. You can choose not to walk it, but the path is the path.”</p> <p>“To have a tradition to be familiar and somehow those stories are your own stories in some way but in some ways, they’re not because your own story needs to be told.”</p> <p>“When I think of my lineage, something may have been passed down generation to generation, and I go, ok, my turn. So hopefully I honor my ancestors. I honor my lineage.”</p> <p>“It is also by being mentored by people or affiliated with people who believe in the same way. So for me, getting to know <i>kumu</i>, who were then able to <i>malama</i> (to protect, watch over) and ultimately give me the trust to love what I have to believe in it and to use it.”</p> <p>Knowing Your Purpose/Gifts/Intention on the Path:</p> <p>“The recollection part is, what am I here for? What’s important to me? In traditional Buddhist teachings recollection is in part [the knowledge] that I’m going to die. And you’re going to die. This is precious time. Let’s use it for what we want to use it for. That’s a kind of recollection.”</p>
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	<p>“‘Perfect state of health, perfect state of mind’. That’s an intention that I always go back to and repeat silently over the course of the massage.”</p> <p>“Hawaiians also talk about each of our having a gift. And I believe that. And ultimately each of us has the responsibility to understand what that gift is so that we can glorify God. And so that’s also part of the healing process, and my living who God ultimately meant me to be.”</p> <p>“People have said to me, you have good energy. What I think they are pointing to and what they are actually feeling is my intention. It’s my intention to be present and promote well-being and balance.”</p> <p>“I see myself as a companion on the path with people that are interested in the same path. Someone who doesn’t just stand apart and give instruction but who walks with you through wherever the path takes us together.”</p> <p>“I’m a source through which the Almighty flows, that is my Hawaiian name gifted to me...the way I heal others is by allowing Creator to flow through me to those who I meet.”</p> <p>The Breath as a Pathway to the Greater Whole:</p> <p>“Our mind is attention. When we attend to our breath, then we get our mind and our body together.”</p> <p>“[The breath] brings it all together. That’s why it’s important. It’s a way home. It’s a way back.”</p> <p>“That’s why so many people come back to the breath because there’s something so simple about focusing into the breath that it has a bit of like a concentrating and opening quality. So it really is a good and effective and simple too, it’s not too heady.”</p> <p>“The breath provides a segue for things to go to another level...Connecting through the breath often times is what makes a good massage, a good massage. There’s something about that that seems to relax a person, open a person up.”</p> <p>“<i>Aloha</i>—not only does it mean breath of life, but it also means bosom of the universe. When one is greeting someone with</p>
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	<p>aloha, it is honoring the bosom of the universe that is within that particular person. It is honoring the breath of life, the soul, the spirit, all that is for that person. When we do that, an I-Thou sense as Buber talks about, that is both enhancing our presence, but ultimately, it is bringing us closer to God.”</p> <p>“Often times in massage there is a bit of a synchronizing that can happen. And sometimes I’ll take extra breaths, like exaggerated breaths a little bit, just as a form of encouraging the other person to breath and to connect with their breath. But the rhythm of massage and getting them to breath, often times you’re breathing in a similar pattern...I definitely concentrate on my breath too. [It’s a] really powerful way to connect up and create synchronicity, a feeling of synchronicity.”</p> <p>The Ability to Commit, Be Vulnerable, and Trust the Path:</p> <p>“There’s some way of allowing something to come forth and being willing and wanting to do that, wanting to participate in some way.”</p> <p>“Healing is because you truly seek it and want to know.”</p> <p>“I was often not comfortable as a student, with the territory, with not knowing.”</p> <p>“A lot doesn’t necessarily come naturally. It’s not obvious. So you have to trust.”</p> <p>“We realize something together through our own sincerity of our interaction. Openness might be another word... It seems like part of that is there is some attitude or some way of living that is prerequisite in a way.”</p> <p>“I’m feeling a little bit of an energetic boundary. Usually in an experience you can open that up through trust and proper respect to be able to connect....Trying to find where somebody’s comfortable is really important in massage and is a really good starting point because trust is really important in massage and I think things open up from trust.”</p> <p>“I had to get to point where I learned to trust God in that way, but I had to trust myself.”</p>
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The Path Is Not Easy:

“[Zen practice] is really hard.”

“It brings tears to my eyes. How hard they’re working. And how hard it is sometimes. And that makes me work all the harder.”

“I think if it were easy, I don’t think we would value and appreciate it. Knowing the struggles, I think humanize us, I think they humble us. When I look at others, I see where I have been and the struggles I still have. It does teach you a level of humility and compassion that are so important to have. That’s why I think there’s struggle.”

Repetition Is the Work of Walking the Path:

“It’s not just a destination where you just arrive. You keep practicing with it.”

“We keep awakening, over and over and over. Just to remember our purpose in that way is awakening in a way. It puts things in perspective. There’s no attainment. It just means that you keep going. It’s attainment after attainment. Attainment beyond attainment.”

“Building your spirituality is very much like exercising and building your muscles. And when we first begin that process of exercise, oh my gosh, our muscles hurt. It’s not easy.... It is the same with spirituality.... You really have to work at it. It’s building those muscles.

Ordinary Living of Day to Day on the Path:

“Practicing every day, working with it, having to muster something of my own spirit. How I want to live...day to day.”

“So healing is not only healing with the person, but it’s about how you conduct yourself on a day to day basis in your interactions with people.”

“I believe that so much of spirituality is the day to day. It’s knowing to wash the dishes. It’s preparing dinner. It’s all of those things that are important. So insight doesn’t happen from being in this state of constant spiritual awareness.”

<p>Presence within the Dyad: The Meeting Between Self and Other</p>	<p>Presence Is Reciprocal/Mutual Engagement:</p> <p>“It’s relational. That you don’t do this by yourself. And there’s an understanding I think for the people who come that they can’t do it by themselves. That we need someone there to interact with.”</p> <p>“We find ways to be with each other that aren’t just back to our usual ways that somehow ignore this deep connection with one another.”</p> <p>“We are each other...What happens together changes the both of us.”</p> <p>“Two people being open, coming together with that sense of that therapeutic presence can be super powerful! Like so powerful.”</p> <p>“That’s what I see myself doing is allowing Creator to enter both of us, so not only is the person who I’m working with healing, but on some level, I’m also healing something within myself.”</p> <p>“Mutual engagement is <i>how</i> the mountains, rivers, plants and animals <i>are</i> mountains, rivers, plants and animals. We are no different.”</p> <p>Presence Is Listening by Using All of One’s Senses:</p> <p>“It’s [paying attention to your] feeling of the person and using your intuition... Paying attention and caring and using your knowledge as well as all of your senses to take in information.”</p> <p>“My grandma used to always say, ‘I listen to the heart, not the mouth.’ Which I think is the essence. So when I meet with people, it’s not that I don’t listen to them, but I go for the heart. I listen to the heart, I listen to the <i>na’au</i> (gut, heart). That’s where I try to connect and so that is my gift.”</p> <p>“When I have become so connected with the person, it’s almost like physiologically I’m feeling what they’re feeling. I’m seeing what they’re seeing. Then I know that’s God’s work.”</p> <p>“I stopped myself when I was going to say something and kept listening. Sometimes just in the midst of listening I would listen. I was listening, but I could listen even more.”</p>
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	<p>Presence Is Not Attached to an Agenda or Specific Outcome:</p> <p>“If I bring in some other entity into that, with some purpose, it feels like I’ve ruined it.”</p> <p>“Not everybody wants to go all the way in deep and that’s okay. That’s their experience they want to have.”</p> <p>“Being neutral, listening without making any judgements.”</p> <p>“I don’t go in with where the person needs to be, it’s really God’s call. And it’s the person’s call who I’m working with.”</p> <p>Presence Is Fresh and Spontaneous Discovery:</p> <p>“I don’t know what you’re going to ask me about and I don’t know what I’m going to say...it’s a field for me to play in that you spread out.”</p> <p>“There’s a freshness that can’t be a matter of being present, because it is me.”</p> <p>“She surprised me, it surprised both of us because she so spontaneously and so fully started sobbing.”</p> <p>“Or sometimes you trigger something through the bodywork and somebody needs to tell you a story because it just came up.”</p> <p>“We discover what there is to discover in the course of that kind of emergence of meeting and engaging...It’s something that is being discovered as we go.”</p> <p>“Nothing great comes without the search.”</p> <p>Presence Requires Creating and Checking Boundaries:</p> <p>“Certain boundaries can definitely support the presence. It creates a foundation for presence.”</p> <p>“The concept of boundaries is a very ethereal thing. And in therapeutic presence, boundaries are important. Your own and the clients are something that I think should take constant reexamination.”</p>
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	<p>“Okay, is this alright? If at any point along the way, someone gets a little overwhelmed or is not ready, it’s alright, I’m going to back off.”</p> <p>“I think in the working environment there are certain boundaries that should be rigid. And depending on the profession...if boundaries are getting crossed in something as intimate as massage or any sort of human exchange, I think it shatters the presence.”</p> <p>Goodness of Fit:</p> <p>“In terms of [establishing] a teacher-student relationship, it [needs to] feel like there’s a rapport there.”</p> <p>“It’s always good to know when to advise somebody to check in with another professional.”</p> <p>“You aren’t going to be the right therapist for everybody.”</p> <p>“In Yiddish, we say sometimes it’s a <i>shidduch</i>, it’s a match, and sometimes it’s not a <i>shidduch</i>. Sometimes it fits and sometimes it doesn’t fit. That’s just the way it is.”</p>
<p>The Impact of the Environment on Presence</p>	<p>Influences from Larger Systems:</p> <p>“The influences from the setting to go ahead and start doing a lot of the work.... Presence can be supported a lot by environment, and it can make the work a lot more powerful—or weaker.”</p> <p>“There’s you as a practitioner and what you can bring in, also for that setting where you see somebody to have good presence, so much factors into it. Creating everything from lighting to cleanliness. Professionalism of the whole process, of who the client is going to interact with even before getting to you. So office staff, stuff like that. All that stuff factors into therapeutic presence.”</p> <p>“What I really like at the old job was the physical and the mental, and the emotional, and the spiritual, often times was recognized and actively worked with as being an influencing factor for the body. And often times in massage we were working on all that or multiple varieties of that or kind of accessing all that.”</p>

	<p>“In some ways, when the gift isn’t nurtured, what’s inside becomes mean and angry and hungry. And so when you talk about [societal] atrocities, one way of looking at it is because what is within inside each person hasn’t been fed.”</p> <p>“So the challenge for me is that voraciousness of American culture and consumerism. And mindfulness is swallowed up in it.”</p> <p>“I think Zen is getting psychologized...it feels like a limitation on it. There is such a thing as spiritual bypassing. People attain some kind of insight and get the idea that they’re beyond their [delusions]. But they’re not. They’re still full of it. In terms of psychologizing, it just feels like a much more limited way to talk about it, to talk about what the practice is, to express the insights of the practice.”</p> <p>“Western psychotherapy has taken me so far, but I need context, I need an explanation. I will tell you that psychotherapy can answer some questions. I’m not sure it can answer all questions.”</p> <p>“In all cultures there are symbols. And so I suddenly realized that you are looking for a place of nurturing. And it can be a challenge within a Western psychology training program. So how do I keep my identity as a psychologist and yet at the same time reach out for the divine, the spiritual?”</p> <p>“It is at a level that I find, I don’t know if I want to say, it goes beyond psychotherapy, it is both embedded in psychotherapy but really transcends it.”</p> <p>Cultivating a Safe, Sacred Space:</p> <p>“And I do like to try and show up early enough. The process of even just going into the room. For me, putting sheets on the bed and getting out my oils.... So [I like] that ritual, being in the room by myself and setting things up.”</p> <p>“Just letting them be in a safe environment, nonjudgmental environment, where they get to be witnessed and you’re there for them in that time. And that whatever needs to come up can come up.”</p>
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	<p>“And that it’s very important to have that environment that is very safe, so I do it through prayer. I mean I really ask God’s help for making the environment safe and loving, so that a person can feel comfortable enough to open up and to be able to talk.... And so I want to build that safe environment first.”</p> <p>“Let’s work with this, whatever it is. Allowing it to be.... They’re okay to be okay. And so in some ways I’m being a space for that to be okay.”</p> <p>Self-Care Involves Letting Go:</p> <p>“And then practices of letting stuff go, getting out of that role of being the practitioner. Not being in that role all the time and swimming and letting go of whatever does happen with other people, that is their thing that you connected with but it’s them.”</p> <p>“I went for a ritual immersion, my <i>mikveh</i> experience, because you do have to cleanse yourself when you’re in service. You’re going to pick up stuff. You wouldn’t use your car without changing the oil filter every once and while. You got to clean. Constantly.”</p> <p>“I’ve got my own business, but I haven’t had a paycheck in three months because there’s no business, there’s no work. And I’m charging off to the zendo and I’m driving over there and I’m going, “this isn’t working.” I can’t do this anymore. I need to give more energy to my work and to my family.”</p>
DIVERGENT THEMES	
<p>Belief in a Higher Power</p>	<p>“I think ultimately [presence] comes back to a belief in higher power. Whatever title you might use for what a higher power is.”</p> <p>“At a very simple level, I could say God. I could say Ke Akua. A recognition that there is, in the universe but really is the universe, a divine, loving presence that through which all is connected.”</p> <p>“Prayer becomes important. Spiritual exercises, meditation, there are many religions, cultures. There are many ways of doing it. I don’t think there’s one right way. But I will tell you accessing higher power, if you’re doing this type of work, is step number one.”</p>

	<p>“Bringing something to a relationship where you’re allowing a higher power to come into you and have your presence reach out to the other person.”</p>
<p>The concept of presence gets in the way</p>	<p>“It’s not necessarily what’s trying to be conveyed there, but it may not be the best way to convey it. Depends on what people take away from that. ‘I really need to be present all the time.’ Relax. You don’t have to be so present. This is present! This is it. This is my mind. So we can get out of the way a little bit there. And I wonder if presence sort of gets us in the way sometimes. If we think that there’s something that’s being referred to there rather than allowing [what’s there to be there] ...If I bring in some other entity into that, with some purpose, it feels like I’ve ruined it.”</p> <p>“I’m not sure even healing is a context for me in the work. And yet, I see that happening. noticing that people do change and improve and find deeper contentment in their life and satisfaction and witnessing that happening. That’s very real. So, it’s not like I’m unaware of that but I don’t hold that as a goal. That just seems to happen as part of us practicing together.”</p> <p>“There’s a forgetting [of the <i>self</i>] and so there’s a freshness that can’t be a matter of being present, because it is me.”</p>
<p>Working within a corrosive professional system</p>	<p>“So there is that goal that’s driven by the insurance company. And relates specifically to a physical injury and a physical matter. But I think there’s so many other contributing factors that make up our life. The reason we get injured, how we get better.... But how they’re going to get it is often times dictated by what insurance is going allow, which can be very disempowering.</p> <p>“The therapeutic presence suffers...they need more than what I can offer. They need to be in a system that is functioning to connect them to the right people.”</p> <p>“...or else I would continue to get angry and disheartened and bleak, [have a] bleak outlook on the medical field, and healing, and insurance, and that would be a huge frustration and anger. And I think it would make my life angrier. And more depressed, and sad, and less empowered. Not good things.”</p>

	<p>“But it’s just a lot harder when there’s so much frustration involved along the way. It’s a lot harder to create the space for good healing to happen. So the presence can be there, but it’s really, it’s just heavily influenced by setting. It’s harder to create a really strong, I guess it’s still therapeutic presence, but I don’t know that the whole setting is made for healing at that point. Because there’s frustration, frustration, anger, and fear.”</p>
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Common Themes

Presence Is the True Nature of Being.

Presence Is Greater than the Individual Self and Beyond Knowing. Presence was widely described as being beyond the grasp of the strategic or rational mind. It was frequently commented that an understanding of presence transcends language—it cannot be fully understood by words or concepts alone. It touches something more visceral and innate within the human experience. To define it is “to limit it in some way.”

Although language cannot capture all that presence is, we still must find ways to use our minds and language as investigative tools to our existential inquiry. Presence was described by participants as being connected to something greater than our individual identity. Katie compared this aspect of phenomenon to two distinct bodies of water joining in a unified flow:

Your tributaries both contributed and now you’re kind of in the same river it feels like. You’re in the flow...and then you’re off and you’re running, and you’re in this current together, and the river’s kind of flowing.

This greater, sacred whole—to which we belong, and which also belongs to us—is an embrace of the dialectical both-and. It is large enough to contain the paradoxes and contradictions of life—both individualistic and collectivistic, both knowing and not-knowing, both self and other. As Jared described:

And that's the paradox of it.... It's yin and yang. The two need each other, trust and doubt. Trust and un-trust. And that's really what faith is. Faith is the ability to transcend that duality.

It is living our lives in accord with this dialectic. As Jared further elaborated, it is “the dance between the metaphysical and the physical.”

Surrendering the Self and Meeting Life Just as It Is. Another primary feature of presence is an experience of surrendering the “self” to the greater whole. This version of “self” has been described in psychological terms as “the egoic self.” However, Michael preferred to steer away from the term “ego,” as he felt that Zen was losing the richness of its original metaphors and meaning to western psychology. He described this concept of the “self” as a false identification with our thoughts and ideas about who we are rather than seeing our true nature, which transcends thinking. When we forget this delusion *self*,

We lose the skin barrier and the whole inside-outside, me-you orientation to things. And there's a different experience that's possible.

Both Jared and Katie did not reference an egoic self, rather Katie described her experience as becoming “less self-conscious” and joining in an energetic “flow.” Jared frequently spoke about “surrendering to God” and feeling like a “vessel” or “facilitator” for God's will to be expressed. As a result, what psychology literature has traditionally defined as the “egoic self” will simply be referred to as *self* hereinafter.

The participants noticed that when one is wholly present with another, our attention is no longer consumed by self-centered preoccupations. As the *self* no longer occupies the driver's seat of our attention, we begin to recognize our connection within the larger web of existence and can more fully experience life as it is. Michael described it as an “absence of some identity of myself other than what's happening.” Life, just as it is, embraces the aforementioned dialectical nature

of being—there is no picking or choosing or adding or subtracting. It is meeting whatever is showing its face just as it is, free of judgment, anxiety, or agenda. As Katie observed:

When there is frustration, anger, or fear, to have that presence with that, to have awareness of that, it doesn't have to look a certain way. It's just like, ah, presence, staying present. Identifying things as they are.

The experience of surrendering the *self* to the greater whole is a paradoxical and parallel process of feeling completely grounded and centered in one's own being as an individual.

As Jared said, there is a sense that:

On the one hand I would say, I totally surrender myself and by doing so, I'm totally aware of myself...I have both completely surrendered myself and yet I'm completely aware of who I am.

By letting go of the *self* that has become so central to western psychology, one paradoxically becomes more connected with one's true nature of being.

Blockages: Separation from Our True Nature Obscures Presence. Each of the participants referenced blockages that can obscure the essence of our divine nature, creating a false sense of separation between ourselves and our true nature. Blockages include delusional thinking that reinforces the concept that we are inherently separate from the greater whole. Katie described it as “head chatter,” noting that when we are preoccupied with our own personal dramas or over intellectualize our work, we are unable to focus our attention on what is immediately transpiring, which is critical to healing.

It was also noted that we can accumulate blockages throughout our life from past transgressions that we have not been able to heal or clean. This in turn creates imbalances and stagnation within the energetic flow of our lives that often leave us angry, depressed, and anxious—what Jared described as “hungry” for connection but never satisfied. Jared likened

blockages to “rocks” that obscure the light of our true essence. He further explicated his understanding of their origins:

They could be rocks that have been passed down from generation to generation unwittingly. I also think rocks can happen from day to day, what we accumulate. And some of it is normal. So rocks can accumulate just through the course of activities. Rocks can come to the surface when we are in a situation where maybe we face something within ourselves that has been deeply buried and then all of the sudden it becomes triggered and it’s brought to the surface.

Blockages were also characterized as objectifying another and being overtly attached to an agenda or outcome. This occurs when we turn the process or the person into a means to an end.

Presence as a Path Back to One’s True Nature

Finding Your Path. In describing their ability to cultivate presence and more deeply connect to others, each of the participants shared an experience of finding a discipline or path that resonated with their deeper, true nature. For Michael it was Zen Buddhism, for Katie it was Shiatsu massage therapy, and for Jared it was psychotherapy. Jared illustrated presence as a process of pathfinding in his description of being called by God to live his purpose:

This is what you have asked me to do. While I know that the path is arduous, and it will be challenging, I know this is what I’m supposed to do. *Koho ‘ia*. Choice, no choice. The Hawaiian meaning, when you come right down to it, ultimately, you’re presented with your path. And you have to choose to walk it. You can choose not to walk it, but the path is the path.

The participants noted the importance of studying and learning the theories, traditions, and practices from the ancestors and lineage of their given discipline.

To have a tradition to be familiar and somehow those stories are your own stories in some way but in some ways, they’re not because your own story needs to be told.

The art of cultivating presence asks us to remember those who came before—to honor the wisdom and knowledge passed down, which supports our present-day journey.

Knowing Your Gifts and Intention. Discovering one's unique path is discovering a way home, a way back to our life, just as it is. In this process, we discover what it is we want to contribute to the world, what it is that makes us come alive, and what it means to live in an intentional way. Presence is what Michael described as "living our aspiration." Katie and Jared both referenced the term "intention," which mirrored the meaning of "aspiration." The relationship between our intentions and presence is reciprocal: presence enhances our intentions while our intentions also enhances our presence. These narratives pointed to the imperative of finding a distinct path where our intentions and innate gifts can be nurtured and shared with others. Jared referenced native Hawaiian beliefs to expand this notion:

Hawaiians also talk about each of our having a gift. And I believe that. And ultimately each of us has the responsibility to understand what that gift is so that we can glorify God. And so that's also part of the healing process, and my living who God ultimately meant me to be.

Becoming clearer on our purpose, gifts, and intentions in this world supports our presence.

The Breath. All of the participants noted that paying attention to the breath is an important aspect of cultivating presence. The breath provides a pathway back to the body, back to one's intention, and back to the source of our being. Jared described the breath in relationship to the Hawaiian word *aloha*, which he described as "the bosom of the universe."

When one is greeting someone with *aloha*, it is honoring the bosom of the universe that is within that particular person. It is honoring the breath of life, the soul, the spirit, all that is for that person. When we do that, an I-Thou sense as Buber talks about, that is both enhancing our presence, but ultimately, it is bringing us closer to God.

Connecting with one's breath is a way to connect soul to soul with another and with the enveloping divine presence. Katie shared that the breath and one's breathing patterns reveals the health and well-being of another.

Sometimes someone will start to hold their breath, or their breathing pattern will change, so it's a way to understand what they're experiencing by paying attention to the breath.

She commented that she will synchronize her breathing with her client as a way of synergistically joining the dyad. Both Katie and Michael warned against turning the breath into a means to an end. As Michael explained,

If [the breath] becomes an end in itself, it's poison. And it just short circuits the practice...If it's over emphasized, then people can get obsessed with it, and that's not good. On the other side of things, if we're just too passive, just kind of watching our breath...unfortunately, whatever aspiration there might be for awakening is squelched.

Their observations imply that presence is diminished when the breath is either overemphasized or not fully engaged.

The Ability to Commit, Be Vulnerable, and Trust the Path. The narrative findings revealed that presence helps us discover a path or discipline that allows our inner gifts to come alive. Of critical import is a willingness to engage in the process of discovery with vulnerability. The participants implied the necessity of wanting to participate in the process of exploration. As Michael shared:

There's some way of allowing something to come forth and being willing and wanting to do that, wanting to participate in some way.

To engage in an endless process of discovery—full of peaks and valleys—requires a certain degree of openness and sincerity. Michael highlighted the significance of openness and sincerity to initiating the process of mutual engagement:

We realize something together through our own sincerity of our interaction. Openness might be another word.... It seems like part of that is there is some attitude or some way of living that is prerequisite.

Presence necessitates a willingness to sincerely open our hearts in the face of loss and uncertainty. Each of the participants described the important role trust plays in presence, both in their personal lives and professional work.

A lot doesn't necessarily come naturally. It's not obvious. So you have to trust.

I had to get to point where I learned to trust God in that way, but I had to trust myself.

Usually in an experience you can open up [a blockage] through trust and proper respect to be able to connect.... Trust is really important in massage and I think things open up from trust.

The participants also emphasized the difficulties inherent to the work of presence. One will inevitably be faced with not knowing the way forward, losing that which you love and are not ready to lose, and doubting your own strength and ability to keep going. Jared noted that life's struggles are part of the process of becoming whole, as they function to enhance our gratitude, vulnerability, humility, and compassion.

I think if it were easy, I don't think we would value and appreciate it. Knowing the struggles, I think humanize us, I think they humble us. When I look at others, I see where I have been and the struggles I still have. It does teach you a level of humility and compassion that are so important to have. That's why I think there's struggle.

Presence helps us more fluidly move between the trust and the doubt, the struggle and the ease, the joys and the pains. It requires us to engage our lives with vulnerability—a sincere, open willingness to be transformed by whatever we meet.

Repetition. Becoming more present to our life and surroundings is an iterative process. It is not a path with a destination but a path that unfolds endlessly, continuously revealing itself. As Michael noted:

There's no attainment. It just means that you keep going. It's attainment after attainment. Attainment beyond attainment.

Jared reiterated this sentiment by likening the process to building spiritual muscle. It takes practicing various moves repetitiously—such as prayer or meditation—even when our muscles are sore or unfamiliar with the movement.

Building your spirituality is very much like exercising and building your muscles. And when we first begin that process of exercise, oh my gosh, our muscles hurt. It's not easy...It is the same with spirituality...you really have to work at it. It's building those muscles.

Ordinary Living of the Day to Day on the Path. Part of the recursive nature of connecting to one's true essence involves practice within the ordinary activities of day-to-day life. Synergistic connection through presence is not confined to mystical moments or spiritual ecstasy—it is also found in our daily comings and goings: washing the dishes, driving the car, doing the laundry. Connecting to the greater whole can occur in any given moment or situation, and it is within the more mundane and bland moments of our lives where this connection can be practiced and come to life. As Jared noted,

I believe that so much of spirituality is the day to day. It's knowing to wash the dishes. It's preparing dinner. It's all of those things that are important. So insight doesn't happen from being in this state of constant spiritual awareness.

The Meeting between Self and Other

Mutual Engagement. Findings from the narratives indicated that presence is inherently relational and reciprocal. Jared referenced the Kabbalah teaching of *Tikkun Olam*, which describes every being as representing a piece of the divine whole. When a piece of the divine whole comes in contact through presence, the original wholeness is restored. In this meeting place of mutuality and reciprocity, two individuals join, creating what Katie called “a whole other energy”:

It's like being totally absorbed in the moment. Being totally connected...when these two people come together, allowing for things to happen and paying attention, it's like a whole other energy starts to happen.

Jared alluded to this experience of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts in his description of the moment of meeting:

That person and I are one. We are one because of the connection with God. I don't know if one could say it's the three of us. Or I don't know if that's really the best language or words for it. But that's kind of how I see it. It's almost like three become one or three are one.

In that space of mutual presence, as Michael noted,

We are each other.... what happens together changes the both of us.

Using All of One's Senses. Listening by using all of one's senses facilitates the process of synergistic joining. This includes listening for the deeper messages perhaps not being conveyed on the surface by paying attention to body language, breathing patterns, speech, smells, posture, coloring, eye contact, and paralinguistics. As Katie described:

It's [paying attention to your] feeling of the person and using your intuition.... Paying attention and caring and using your knowledge as well as all of your senses to take in information.

This deeper listening also entails utilizing intuition, paying attention to images or signs that might be arising from within, and noticing one's own visceral and physical responses to the meeting. It is being attuned to both physiological and extrasensory perceptions.

Setting Aside Agendas. Each of the participants also cautioned against bringing in an agenda or becoming attached to a specific outcome in the course of meeting. This includes subverting power dynamics within the relationship in which the healer or teacher is viewed on high as one who can "fix" the other. Michael emphasized the importance of transcending frameworks that presuppose an expert-client model of relationship.

As long as they feel like they're there to get fixed for example, that the context is therapeutic or that their condition is a disease of some sort that needs to be healed, in some way that limits the potential of the interaction.

Presence promotes collaboration and exploration, a mutual offering of gifts and perspectives to deepen the relationship. Paramount to presence is providing a space in which whatever needs to arise can show its face without fear of being judged, shamed, or rejected. Katie explained this aspect of the phenomenon as

Just letting them be in a safe environment, nonjudgmental environment, where they get to be witnessed and you're there for them in that time. And that whatever needs to come up can come up.

It is bearing witness to the other's experience, allowing one to be just as they are.

Fresh and Spontaneous Discovery. There is a sense of limitlessness when two people are joined in presence. In that liminal meeting space of presence, possibilities are endless, and everything is new. An experience that has never existed before comes to life. When one's attention can be focused on the immediate experience, a sense of wonderment and discovery is elicited at the fresh and spontaneous nature of life. In their narratives, the participants referenced the novelty and surprise that arises in this process of discovering our true nature:

There's a freshness that can't be a matter of being present, because it is me.

She surprised me, it surprised both of us because she so spontaneously and so fully started sobbing.

Sometimes you trigger something through the bodywork, and somebody needs to tell you a story because it just came up.

There is nothing stale or lifeless when we intimately engage with our journey. More things are possible.

Creating and Checking Boundaries. Presence also requires checking and creating boundaries between self and other. As aforementioned, presence elicits both a sense of oneness but also a sense of being grounded in one's own true nature. It is important to create boundaries that maintain the integrity of both members of the dyad. Discernment of what Jared called "knowing when to share and what to share" highlights knowing when personal disclosure will support and elevate the client's well-being versus when it is rooted in personal gains and interests. Katie and Jared both noted the dynamism of boundaries—that they are constantly moving and "semi-permeable." As Jared shared,

Boundaries are like cell walls, semi permeable. The art is regulating...letting the good stuff flow in and out.

However, Katie explained that ethical and professional boundaries, such as draping and covering the client in massage therapy, "should be rigid." Violating such boundaries can "shatter" the presence, which signals a need for repair through enhanced communication and compassion.

I think in the working environment there are certain boundaries that should be rigid...If boundaries are getting crossed in something as intimate as massage or any sort of human exchange, I think it shatters the presence.

So if somebody's boundary gets crossed, sometimes all you need to do is to communicate to establish a boundary does need to be there so that the presence can be there.

It is also critical to regularly check in with the other to ensure that boundaries are not being crossed. Each participant confirmed that it is not helpful to push someone beyond their level of readiness, such as applying too much pressure in a massage or pushing someone into an emotionally painful space. It is important to constantly check in with the other, to reinforce the collaborative nature of the relationship and ensure that trust and safety are maintained. Jared alluded to his process of member checking:

Okay, is this alright? If at any point along the way, someone gets a little overwhelmed or is not ready, it's alright, I'm going to back off.

If trust, safety, and rapport are difficult to establish, it can be signal that the pairing is not a good match. In these situations, it is best to discontinue the relationship and make a referral.

In Yiddish, we say sometimes it's a *shidduch*, it's a match, and sometimes it's not a *shidduch*. Sometimes it fits and sometimes it doesn't fit. That's just the way it is.

The Impact of the Environment on Presence

Influences from Larger Systems. Presence extends beyond the dyadic relationship and is influenced by the environment and systems in which it is enveloped. This includes more immediate systems such as the physical working space and organizational systems, as well as broader systemic layers such as cultural, social, economic, and political factors. These larger systems significantly impact the energetic flow of the therapeutic relationship. Katie observed,

The influences from the setting start doing a lot of the work... Presence can be supported a lot by environment, and it can make the work a lot more powerful. Or weaker.

Presence is enhanced by systemic influences that support holistic approaches and embrace the cultural heritages from which those approaches emerged. Each of the participants cautioned against influences that by-pass the spiritual and cultural aspects of presence and realization.

I think Zen is getting psychologized. And so instead of our metaphors and ways of understanding being tigers, and cliffs, and rivers, people are talking about ego, and stuff like that. Undeniably we have to deal with that territory, but it feels like a limiting of the Zen horizon. On the other hand, there is also such a thing as spiritual bypassing. People attain some kind of insight and get the idea that they're beyond their [delusions]. But they're not. They're still full of it.

Western psychotherapy has taken me so far, but I need context, I need an explanation. I will tell you that psychotherapy can answer some questions. I'm not sure it can answer all questions.

Cultivating a Safe, Sacred Space. One of the most significant environmental influences to cultivating a therapeutic relationship is safety. The participants noted the importance of creating a safe and sacred space where self and other can meet in mutuality. Environmental safety and sacredness are enhanced through cleanliness, privacy, organization of the room, pleasant aromas, soft lighting, quietness, and minimizing distractions. The participants strive to arrive early to an appointment to ground themselves through rituals of prayer, meditation, and mantra recitation. Jared elaborated on his pre-session process:

And that it's very important to have that environment that is very safe, so I do it through prayer. I mean I really ask God's help for making the environment safe and loving, so that a person can feel comfortable enough to open up and to be able to talk....And so I want to build that safe environment first.

The surrounding environment serves to enhance the presence and mutual engagement.

Self-care and Letting Go. Working intimately in relationship with others also necessitates that the practitioner commit energy to taking care of their own health and well-being. Both Katie and Jared highlighted the importance of letting go of the energetic point of contact with their clients through rituals of internal cleansing or clearing.

You're going to pick up stuff. You wouldn't use your car without changing the oil filter every once and while. You've got to clean. Constantly.

And then practices of letting stuff go, getting out of that role of being the practitioner. Not being in that role all the time and swimming and letting go of whatever does happen with other people, that is their thing that you connected with, but it's them.

This kind of self-care ranges from the simple act of talking a walk through the woods or jumping in the ocean at the end of the day, to more involved rituals of cleansing, such extended retreats that prioritize prayer, meditation, and internal renewal. There was a shared sentiment that

if you are unable to care for yourself, it becomes increasingly difficult to fully show up for the other.

Divergent Themes

Belief in a Higher Power. Unique to Jared's narrative was connecting the phenomenon of presence to a belief in a higher power. For Jared, the greater whole represents an all-knowing, divine Creator to whom we must surrender. Connecting with a higher power through prayer is a critical component to invoking presence:

I think ultimately [presence] comes back to a belief in higher power. Whatever title you might use for what a higher power is.

He did not limit his belief in a higher power to a specific culture or religious tradition, noting that there are innumerable representations of a divine Creator across cultures.

Prayer becomes important. Spiritual exercises, meditation, there are many religions, cultures. There are many ways of doing it. I don't think there's one right way. But I will tell you accessing higher power, if you're doing this type of work, is step number one.

In accessing a higher power, our mind and bodies become a vessel through which the divine spirit can flow. Jared viewed his role as a healer to serving as a "facilitator" or "vessel" for God's will to be expressed.

The Concept of Presence Gets in the Way. An important construct within Michael's narrative was examining the incongruencies of meaning systems related to presence. Amongst the participants, he was the only one to question the diction and meaning of the phrase *therapeutic presence*. He felt that the term had a strong overlay of western ideology that did not accurately align with his eastern spiritual philosophies, which subscribe to the notion that there is no *self*. Without a *self*, he noted, there is nothing there to be present. Michael mentioned that

within the western lexicon there has become an imperative to “be present,” which turns presence into an external object of striving. He shared:

I wonder if presence sort of gets us in the way sometimes. If we think that there’s something that’s being referred to there rather than allowing [what’s there to be there] If I bring in some other entity into that, with some purpose, it feels like I’ve ruined it.

He also felt that the term *therapeutic* missed the mark in capturing the meaning of the phenomenon. Healing may be a byproduct of intimate engagement with another; however, the term also subtly implies a hidden agenda, turning the interaction into a means to an end. Michael preferred the phrase *mutual engagement* or *mutual investigation* to *therapeutic presence*.

Presence within a Corrosive Professional System. Katie’s narrative uniquely demonstrated the powerful impacts on presence when working within an unethical and non-supportive system of care. While Jared and Michael both referenced difficulties of working within western ideological and cultural systems, Katie was the only participant to share experiences related to working more immediately within the context of a professional organization and office space. The cultural and professional values of the organization in which she was working at the time of the interviews did not embrace a holistic view of healing or well-being. These rigid and narrow definitions of betterment and healing—which only elevated measurable, quantifiable goals within the body—made her work and ability to invoke presence much more difficult.

It’s just a lot harder when there’s so much frustration involved along the way. It’s a lot harder to create the space for good healing to happen. So the presence can be there, but it’s really, it’s just heavily influenced by setting. It’s harder to create a really strong, I guess it’s still therapeutic presence, but I don’t know that the whole setting is made for healing at that point. Because there’s frustration, frustration, anger, and fear.

Her narrative demonstrated that the challenges of the clients mirrored the challenges within the organization—both the clients and the office was imbued with distractions, frustrations, and stagnation. Katie noted that when the working environment does not support healing, the injury or imbalance is merely sustained. The energetic flow is blocked, and the healing process stagnates, which causes the therapeutic presence to suffer.

There's more of a redundancy of people coming in that are not experiencing much change.... There's a lot more people not really having long lasting change. They'll feel better at the end of the massage, but then they'll come back and be in pain again, the same situation.

Summary

Overall, each participant offered unique and valuable perspectives to expanding knowledge about the phenomenon of presence. Many of the themes converged to create a beautiful tapestry of the meanings, processes, and experiences that further illuminate a global understanding of presence. The unique themes were just as valuable as the common threads, as they added greater breadth and generalizability to this inquiry. These findings will be examined alongside the extant literature in the following section.

Chapter V. Discussion

A Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Extant Literature

The goal of this qualitative study was to capture a global understanding of therapeutic presence within the context of dyadic relationships. Three participants were interviewed regarding their experience and understanding of therapeutic presence within their practices, with each participant nominally representing one aspect of the *mind*, *body*, and *spirit* triad. Participants included a psychologist (*mind*), massage therapist (*body*), and Buddhist teacher (*spirit*).

The genesis of this qualitative study started with a literature review, which examined the phenomena of the therapeutic alliance (Norcross, 2002; Rank, 1996; Rogers, 1961; Wadlington, 2012) and therapeutic presence (Buber, 1958; Geller, 2013; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Geller et al., 2010; Rogers, 1961) and its impacts on treatment outcome (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Crits-Christoph et al., 1991; Norcross, 2002; Wampold, 2013) from a western psychological framework. The therapeutic alliance was identified as being the second most significant factor to treatment outcome, following client related factors (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Crits-Christoph et al., 1991). A model for therapeutic presence was constructed by Geller and Greenberg (2002) that utilized findings from a qualitative study they conducted, which asked seven seasoned psychotherapists of various theoretical orientations to describe their understanding and experience of presence.

Many of the findings unveiled in Geller and Greenberg's (2002) qualitative work coincided with the participant's narratives within this study, which undertook a more global examination of therapeutic presence. Findings from this study also revealed several unique

perspectives and experiences not included in Geller and Greenberg's (2002) research. These convergences and divergences in findings will be discussed in a general manner as they fall into the various categories presented below. The following section evidences the knowledge gleaned from this qualitative study in relation to the extant literature. The findings are organized into categories based on the research questions that guided this study.

The Nature of Presence

Results from this study demonstrated that presence is inextricably linked to the fundamental nature of being human, raising existential, ontological, and philosophical questions about the nature of consciousness. As Michael noted, "There's something to stay with that is a guide in us. I can't say what it is...it has no form, but it's me."

Jared further observed that presence "goes beyond psychotherapy. It is both embedded in psychotherapy but really transcends it." While psychology has made significant contributions to the unfolding canon of knowledge regarding the nature of being (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989; Kramer, 1995; Rank, 1929–1931; Rogers, 1961), a richer understanding of this phenomenon is elevated through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates literature from philosophy, religion, anthropology, physics, and poetry (Bateson, 1972; Buber, 1958; Coyne, 2007; Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014; Lázár, 2015; Rovelli, 2018; Whyte, 2009).

The participants noted that the nature of presence is "abstract" and "not very definable," as it is "both unknowable and known." At the heart of our existence is an ineffable mysteriousness that transcends the investigative tools of science and logic (Coyne, 2007; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Whyte, 2009). In effect, examining the human experience cannot be reduced to a purely empirical and analytical frame of reference. Researchers across multiple disciplines

of hard science, including astronomy, physics, and biology (Bateson, 1972; Coyne, 2007; Kimmerer, 2013; Rovelli, 2018), have noted the deleterious effect of limiting our understanding of the world and human experience to scientific knowledge. A failure to incorporate a multidisciplinary approach that embraces the empirical as well as the experiential impoverishes understanding. As Michael shared, when an examination of our inherent nature crosses too heavily in the realm of empiricism, it “feels like a much more limited way to talk about it.” In an interview toward the end of his life, Carl Rogers (1980, as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989) called for future researchers to advance the field of psychology in a manner that harmonizes the knowable with the unknowable:

Perhaps in the coming generations of younger psychologists...there will be a few who will dare to investigate the possibility that there is a lawful reality which is not open to our five senses; a reality in which present, past, and future are intermingled, in which space is not a barrier, and time has disappeared; a reality which can be perceived and known only when we are passively receptive, rather than actively bent on knowing. This is one of the most exciting challenges posed to psychology. (p. 373)

Presence as a “dance between the metaphysical and physical,” as stated by Jared, also highlights the non-dualistic nature of the phenomenon. Presence is essentially dialectical, a space of living the tension of opposites (Bateson, 1972; Rank, 1929–1931; Whyte, 2009). Kramer (1995) comments that “tension is not the same as opposition” (p. 86), as presence calls us to inhabit the totality of life, to set aside the notion of having to choose a side. There is a dynamic flow to presence that is conversational by nature, which allows us to wax and wane between giving and taking; listening and speaking; solitude and togetherness (Kramer, 1995; Rank, 1929–

1931; Whyte, 2009). The ability to transcend the appearance of opposites brings us closer to a wholeness that characterizes our true nature (Bateson, 1972; Rank, 1929–1931; Rogers, 1961).

As Rank (1929–1931) noted, to be whole means an individual “must learn to live, to live with his split, his conflict, his ambivalence, which no therapy can take away, for if it could, it would take with it the actual spring of life” (p. 206). Katie echoed this sentiment, sharing that presence is being “in the flow...identifying things as they are...whatever it is, joy or pain.” This quality of wholeness was also referenced in statements like “presence is everything” and “it’s 24/7.”

Research evidences that this ability to be authentic and whole is a more critical factor to treatment outcome than one’s theoretical orientation (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Hycner, 1993).

How Presence Is Experienced Individually

Presence is experienced as being firmly embedded in one’s own true nature of being—a holistic merging of *mind*, *body*, and *spirit*—which is simultaneously an expression of being connected to something greater than the individual self (Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014; Kramer, 1995; Rank, 1929–1931; Rogers, 1961). Each of the participants alluded to the notion that presence is being a part of a larger experience to which we are all connected, which was classified in various ways such as “God,” “Creator,” “The Divine,” “Energy,” the “flow of life,” “life, just as it is,” and “not separate.”

The word *whole* is etymologically rooted in the Old English word *hal*, meaning “healthy” or “hale”—that which is intact, unbroken, or unhurt (Kramer, 1995). The word *wholeness* is derived from the word “healing,” which is linked to the terms “holy” and “holiness.” Tracing the evolution of these words demonstrates that the essence of “healing” and “wholeness” extends

beyond just the physical or psychological; it also touches on something inherently transcendental (Buber, 1958; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Hycner, 1993; Kramer, 1995; Rank, 1929-1931).

When we connect to the greater whole through presence, in some way we are being healed on a deeper, spiritual level. Jared penetrated to this core in his observation that healing is the embodiment of a greater, divine presence: “That’s what I see myself doing is allowing Creator to enter both of us, so not only is the person who I’m working with healing, but on some level, I’m also healing something within myself.”

Findings from the participant’s narratives revealed that this experience of being inextricably connected to the greater flow of life led to a falling away of an identification with the *self*. For Michael, it is experienced as “an absence of some identity of myself other than what’s happening,” whereas Katie likened it to becoming less “self-conscious.” Jared explained the experience as a process of “surrendering yourself to divinity....At some level I feel myself dissolving, but it’s not that I would say I don’t have a sense of my not being there.”

Various cultural traditions and literary works (Kramer, 1995; Whyte, 2009) have referenced this experience of a no-self, what the philosopher and poet Rumi referred to as the *I-I* relationship (Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014). Whereas Buber (1958) described the highest relational stage as the *I-Thou* relationship, Rumi (2001) argued that *I-Thou* still implied a duality that needed to be transcended. Ghazazani and Alizamani (2014) clarify the differences between Rumi and Buber’s philosophies:

Rumi does not regard the “I-Thou” relation as the highest stage of relation. The apex of relation is where “I” and “Thou” do not independently engage with each other; rather, both sides of the relation become “I” and touch existential union. Generally speaking, in

western thought, the highest degree of relation is sought for survival, while in eastern thought, the noblest stage of relation is extinction....When we compare Buberian paradigm with Rumi's ideas, we come across a new paradigm which is deeper and more extensive than Buber's "I-Thou" paradigm. (p. 94)

The *I-I* relationship speaks to the participants' experiences of feeling "totally connected, totally absorbed...as one" and "not separate" from the larger energetic flow of life. This feeling of no-self, which was also affirmed by participants in Geller and Greenberg's (2002) qualitative study, is not characterized as a sense of lack but an experience of wholeness, being fully connected to something bigger than one's individual, separate identity.

The Experience of Presence in a Therapeutic Relationship

The findings of this study revealed that we experience our true nature by connecting to the true nature of other. Jared described therapeutic presence as an experience of having "both completely surrendered myself and yet I'm completely aware of who I am." Rank (1929–1931) asserted that healing was fundamentally tied to the experience of being fully separate while simultaneously being fully connected with another. The extant literature highlights the importance of recognizing the symmetry between self and otherness, as it is the frame from which both the *I-Thou* and *I-I* relationship emerges (Buber, 1958; Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014; Hycner, 1993).

The ability to realize the essence of one's true nature through presence requires cultivating a relationship with the "other." Jared described this experience as "meeting another part of the whole, another spark, another bit of essence of the divine presence." The relationship with other enhances our presence and connection with our ineffable true nature, which Buber

calls the eternal *Thou* (Buber, 1958; Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014). Buber (1958) emphasized the importance of this marriage between the finite and infinite, noting that both are necessary in experiencing the true nature of being. Michael described this relationship within the context of Zen Buddhism as emptiness and form, with form being akin to otherness and emptiness to the enigmatic *Thou*. He delineates the differences between the phenomena but also the inherent non-duality of the relationship: “It’s a bit like form is emptiness and emptiness is form. That they really are together.”

The ability to connect with one’s own experience, distinct from that of other, creates a clear contact point in which two unique boundaries can meet and merge (Bateson, 1972; Buber, 1958; Polster & Polster, 1999; Rogers, 1961). Findings from the individual narratives emphasized the significance of establishing boundaries, which serve to enhance therapeutic presence and healing in the relationship. Katie stated that boundaries “creates a foundation for presence;” while Jared elaborated on the importance of boundaries in the self-other relationship: “*I-Thou* to me is respecting the integrity of that person. It’s also respecting the integrity of yourself and saying can I engage in that relationship with the integrity of both of us.”

Current research supports the participants’ experiences (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Wampold, 2013), indicating that maintenance of healthy boundaries can deepen the therapist’s presence, thus fortifying the therapeutic alliance. Rogers succinctly summarized the power of respecting the boundaries within the self-other dynamic: “When I can freely feel this strength of being a separate person then I find I can let myself go much more deeply in understanding and accepting the client because I am not fearful of losing myself”

(Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, p. 121). Presence, therefore, is a process of acknowledging the true nature within oneself in order to clearly see and support the true nature of the other.

This mutual, bilateral acknowledgment of the true nature of self and other points to the salience of what Geller and Greenberg (2012) call “the moment of meeting” (p. 20) or what Buber (1958) described as the *between*, that is, the common ground that is created by what each member of the dyad brings to the interaction. Michael spoke extensively about this aspect of the phenomenon, commenting that he preferred the term “mutual engagement” over *therapeutic presence*. He shared that mutual engagement was a way “to be with each other that aren’t just back to our usual ways that somehow ignore this deep connection with one another. And that we are each other.” Exploring the mystery of our being requires a collaborative effort and mutual willingness to intimately engage with one another (Buber, 1958; Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014; Rogers, 1961). Presence, therefore, is an inherently relational experience that requires an engagement of self with otherness (Buber, 1958; Geller & Greenberg, 2012).

Experientially, presence also has a conversational nature to it that is unpredictable, intimate, responsive, and ongoing (Whyte, 2009). Like a conversation, in presence, one is never completely certain of what will emerge—what or how something will be said or how we will respond to the other in the moment of meeting. The participants noted the feeling of flexibility and moving with the flow of life rather than opposing it. They also described a sense of being surprised and moved by the spontaneity that arises through presence. These observations mirror Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) work, which identified *increased spontaneity/creativity* as a notable aspect of therapeutic presence. Participants in their study observed that in presence they

felt more trusting of their intuitions, were willing to take more risks, and were more capable of responding in creative and unexpected ways (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Rank (1929–1931) described this aspect of the phenomenon as “the New, which the patient has never experienced before” (p. 65). He likened people to artists, noting that only by inhabiting the *here and now* can one be fully alive and free to create and be created anew (Rank, 1929–1931). Change does not occur in the past but through presence, the experiential moment of mutual engagement in which life is constantly appearing and disappearing (Whyte, 2009). Presence brings us to a place of living in constant discovery, compelling us to explore and experience our existence in a surprising and everchanging world (Buber, 1958).

In sum, the experiential nature of presence is a feeling of making contact with and being connected to different forms and boundaries, which inherently share the same true nature. In this place of meeting, the *self* begins to fall away, and we are touched by and made aware of the interconnected dynamism and fullness of life itself. The experience is always new and ever-changing—fresh discoveries and surprises are constantly emerging.

The Maintenance and Deepening of Presence During the Course of a Relationship

The Breath. All of the participants discussed the importance of the breath as a tool or gateway to connecting to our true nature. The breath allows us to make contact with our bodies—the vessel which contains the totality our human experience (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Lázár, 2015; Tong, 2009). As Michael noted, the breath is a way of getting “the mind and body together....They are the same thing.” Anthropologist Lázár (2015) points out that western cultural frameworks have promoted a mind-body dualism that asserts a superiority of an intentional, volitional mind over an intention-less, instinctual body. However, in eastern

traditions, *mind*, *body*, and *spirit* are inextricably linked, and the breath is viewed as the “Universal Life Force that is both transcendent and imminent. It is the all-pervasive Energy that sustains all that exists and has being. It is integral to the path of enlightenment that leads to increasing oneness” (Tong, 2009, p. 61). By attending to the breath, our attention turns to the greater dynamic flow of life to which we belong. As Jared described, when we acknowledge our breath, we are “honoring the bosom of the universe...that is both enhancing our presence, but ultimately, it is bringing us closer to God.”

The breath also provides a pathway for synergistically linking self with other. Katie extensively described using the breath as a way of connecting energetically and rhythmically with her clients during the massage, a way of better understanding their state of health and well-being: “I definitely concentrate on my breath too. [It’s a] really powerful way to connect up and create synchronicity....It is a way to understand what they’re experiencing by paying attention to the breath. It’s a way of not speaking but really [hearing] them.” The breath is a salient tool in not only connecting us mentally, physically, and spiritually to the greater whole, but a way of holistically and synergistically affirming rapport with others (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Tong, 2009).

Attending. Each of the participants described the ability to listen deeply and attend to the other’s phenomenological experience as a key factor to promoting presence. Listening was defined as more than simply hearing but as using all of one’s senses—physiological and extrasensory—to fully attend and attune to the other. Jared uses intuition, images that come to him, and physiological reactions as instruments for better understanding his client’s interior world. Katie also discussed how touch, observation of smell, posture, coloring, breath patterns,

and paralinguistic communication provides her with important information for guiding the bodywork.

Geller and Greenberg's (2002) qualitative study on therapeutic presence identified *receptivity*, as defined by the subcategories of *sensory/bodily receptivity*, *extrasensory perception/communication*, and *listening with the third ear*, as critical to the process of therapeutic presence. Participants in their study shared feeling that their bodies became a tool or a barometer in which to experience the client. Jared echoed this process in his observation that "it's almost like using *you* as a meter or a sensor or gauge." This way of listening has been described by dialogical traditions as *availability*—listening as offering all of oneself to the other (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Hycner, 1993; Lázár, 2015). It is attending to the person in Rumi's *I-I* sense, in which the listener "may not really be present at all because there is a way of listening that involves refusing oneself" (Geller & Greenberg, 2012, p. 23). While the therapists' physical ability to connect with the client through good eye contact, smiling, and open body language are shown to effectively strengthen the therapeutic alliance (Duff & Bedi, 2009), the notion of *availability* hooks into a deeper kind of attending in which the therapist uses his/her own bodily experience to better understand the client's experiential reality (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Listening by using all of one's senses transcends a passive physical experience by integrating a kind of sixth sense that is intuitive, extrasensory, and experiential (Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Lázár, 2015). In attending to another through presence, the body becomes a playground for physical and metaphysical experiences to arise; a tool and instrument of healing (Lázár, 2015).

Restrained from Change. Therapeutic presence was understood as meeting the client just as they are, free of judgment or attachment to a specific outcome. The ability to listen by using all of one's senses without inserting personal agendas or judgments taps into what the participants described as "holding space" and "bearing witness" to the other's experiences. As Katie shared, "It is giving that person your attention...allowing people to express who and what they are...being neutral, listening without making any judgements."

Offering a neutral but engaged stance creates greater egalitarianism within the relationship, thwarting power dynamics and dampening the instrumentality of the therapist (Hoffman, 1993; Rogers, 1961). Hoffman (1993) argued that therapists should "be restrained from change" in order "to minimize the consciousness of the therapist in pushing for, or strategizing for, change" (p. 44). This includes suspending personal, cultural, and theoretical biases, including diagnostic labeling and making assumptions about what the other needs to change (Hoffman, 1993; Hycner, 1993; Rogers, 1961). Therapists must refrain from projecting their own personal needs or vanities about what constitutes successful outcome onto the relationship. As Jared and Katie noted, the effects and outcomes of presence are residual and not always immediately realized—you may help plant a seed in a garden that you do not get to see grow.

Presence is therefore *holding space* for another to be just as they are and *bearing witness* to the authenticity of their experience. This frees the relationship from the constraints of biases, frameworks, and judgements, allowing the dyad to work more creatively and collaboratively in finding a path through challenging circumstances (Hoffman, 1993; Rogers, 1961).

Vulnerability. Engaging in the relationship with openness, sincerity, and a spirited whole-heartedness were identified as critical factors to deepening presence. Michael stated that “we realize something together through our own sincerity of our interaction.” Open and sincere engagement are foundational to Rogers’ core conditions, particularly regarding the condition of congruence (Greenberg & Geller, 2001; Rogers, 1961). Congruence has also been described as genuineness or authenticity; rather than a static state, congruence is better understood as a process underscored by open discourse, deep mutuality, and respect for the other (Greenberg & Geller, 2001; Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014; Rogers, 1961). Greenberg and Geller’s (2001) findings suggested that therapeutic presence is a pre-condition to congruence and that being receptively open and meeting the other with a genuine desire to be with and for their experience has a significant impact on therapeutic effectiveness.

Furthermore, meeting with sincerity and openness involves a willingness to come forward despite facing the possibility of rejection, failure, abandonment, or death (Rank, 1929-1931; Whyte, 2009). At its core, presence is a practice of being vulnerable, what Whyte (2015) described as our “underlying, ever present and abiding undercurrent of our natural state. To run from vulnerability is to run from the essence of our nature” (p. 98). Both Rank and Rogers implied that in our pursuit of becoming fully human we must be willing to risk everything—to have the courage to step directly into our life, in full awareness of the suffering, pain, and ultimate demise that inevitably comes to pass (Kramer, 1995). Rogers (1961, as cited in Kirschnbaum & Henderson, 1989) described it as “saying ‘Yes’ to the ‘Must’” (p. 418). Presence requires us to meet the moment with an open and sincere spirit and step into the unknown of the encounter with courage and vulnerability.

Intention. Participants shared that being grounded in one's intention or aspiration also significantly impacted presence. The phenomenon was described in two different ways by participants: Katie and Jared used the term "intention" whereas Michael preferred the term "aspiration." Despite these differences in diction, the meaning being explicated was congruent. Aspiration, as described by Michael, was differentiated from agenda or attachment to outcome. Aspiration implies an unfolding, lived experience of discovery rather than an efforted striving for goal attainment. He elaborated, positing that "you're not trying for a goal out there. But without making it an external object, to live your aspiration for awakening. To have that be what you're doing. Not trying to get yourself into some kind of condition." Through presence, intention becomes a lived experience.

Geller and Greenberg (2012) noted that the therapist's intention guides and deepens the therapeutic encounter. One of the veteran psychologists interviewed in their study summarized intention as bringing their all of their being to the space in order to support the client's well-being (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Intention was also linked to *receptive openness*, *acceptance*, and *allowing* (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). This alludes to what Katie described as "allowing [the client] to have the experience they need to have...an invitation for things to expand as needed." Intention reminds us of our presence as the true nature of our being. It invites us to come back to the reality of who we are. Intention is not simply a static mantra or resolution that is declared, but, like presence, it is an experiential process that is constantly unfolding and becoming (Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Rank, 1929–1931).

Recursive Recollection. Presence is a recursive process; it is a practice of continuously returning our attention to our life, just as it is. Michael defined this aspect of the phenomenon as

recollection, a remembering of purpose. He shared, “The recollection part is, what am I here for? What’s important to me?....I’m going to die, and you’re going to die. This is precious time. Let’s use it for what we want to use it for.” It is something that we remember over and over again, something we keep returning to in the course of meeting and living our lives.

Rank (1929–1931) frequently referenced the everchanging nature of life and consciousness, noting that transformation is never complete. In effect, we must repeatedly solve and re-solve the endless mysteries of our lives (Kramer, 1995; Rank, 1929–1931; Whyte, 2009). Michael reiterated this notion in his assertion: “There’s no attainment. It just means that you keep going. It’s attainment after attainment. Attainment beyond attainment.” Presence is a process of continually coming back to our true nature of being—it is a path with no final destination, an endless cycle of simultaneous endings and beginnings (Kramer, 1995; Whyte, 2009).

This process of returning to presence is also recursive—every time we return to the reality of our lives, something new has been created (Keeney, 1983, Rank, 1929–1931; Rovelli, 2018). This speaks to Heraclitus’ maxim that ‘one can never step in the same river twice,’ as both the river and person are ceaselessly changing, always meeting anew (Rovelli, 2018). Keeney noted that when the client can more clearly examine the recursive nature of existence, we become aware that “there is no such thing as an objective demonstration of which side is correct....We can see [our views] as partial and open to correction or as complete and closed to correction” (p. 33). By repeatedly returning to presence in the moment of meeting, we see new views and solutions with greater clarity. Exposure to these new viewpoints transforms us in the process (Keeney, 1983).

Creating a Sacred Space. Findings from this study also evidenced that presence manifests within the physical space of the meeting. The participants discussed the value of intentionally creating a safe, quiet, sacred space to enhance presence. This is done by engaging in acts of prayer, mantra recitation, and/or meditation prior to meeting with the client. Jared will “ask God’s help for making the environment safe and loving, so that a person can feel comfortable enough to open up.” It is also ensuring the space is clean, private, and free of extraneous distractions. This helps elicit a feeling of safety within the relationship. Thus, the participants ground themselves in their intention, which is extended into the physical space, prior to making contact with other.

Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) findings identified pre-session *preparing the ground for presence* as a significant process within their model of therapeutic presence. This was described as *clearing a space*, grounding in their *intention for presence*, and *putting aside self-concerns* prior to the meeting (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). These processes help maintain the experience of presence by cultivating a sense of physiological and emotional safety within the relationship. Research shows that safety is paramount to strengthening the therapeutic alliance (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Geller & Porges, 2014). Diminishing perceived threats within the space of meeting includes reducing visual and auditory distractions as well as offering supportive behavioral expressions such as speaking softly, making appropriate eye contact, and smiling (Duff & Bedi, 2009; Dunn et al., 2013; Geller & Porges, 2014). Such conditions stimulate a physiological chain reaction in which the client’s physiological defenses are down regulated resulting in more spontaneous and socially engaged behaviors (Geller & Porges, 2014). These findings suggest that cultivating an intentional space and offering one’s self in therapeutic

presence significantly impacts the emotional and physiological experience of the client, which therein by effects treatment outcome (Geller & Porges, 2014).

Self-care. Self-care was also identified as an important factor to maintaining and deepening presence within the therapeutic alliance. The participants disclosed that creating time for oneself to renew and shed any energetic residue that results from making contact with others allows for the work to be sustainable. Findings from the extant literature suggest that individuals who work as caregivers are often susceptible to burnout or *compassion fatigue*—a reduced capacity to care about the suffering of others (Figley, 2002). Figley (2002) emphasized the importance for caregivers to physically and emotionally separate from work in order to continuously bring oneself fully to the encounter. Jared precisely echoed this finding, noting:

You're going to want to make sure that you have time to cleanse, spiritually. Whether that means going to the ocean, meditation, prayer, relaxation, anything like that, you want to be able to cleanse. So that you can begin the work anew, because you can't do it constantly.

Katie highlighted the importance of turning to nature for renewal and inspiration—taking walks in the woods or swimming in the ocean. Cultivating a relationship with the natural world is demonstrated to have healing qualities, inviting us to see more deeply into our own true nature and reflecting the inherently reciprocal essence of being (Kimmerer, 2013; Whyte, 2009).

Overall, these findings reveal that the therapist-client relationship benefits from the therapist prioritizing his/her own health and well-being (Figley, 2002).

The Significance of Presence for the Relationship

Self-development. The participants described the significance of finding a path or career that served to enhance their presence. They noted that finding one's calling is a process of circular causality, as presence supports one's work and one's work supports presence. Jared

described it as nurturing one's "inner gifts," one's "spark of the divine within." He noted that when we take care of our natural gifts, "people will begin to find you. They're going to glorify your gift and you're going to glorify their gift."

This aspect of presence is explained by Rank (1929–1931) as "self-development." The word *develop* is derived from the Latin word *devolvere*, meaning to unfold, unveil, cause to grow or bring into fuller view, to make the invisible visible (Kramer, 1995). The roots of this word imply a process of going deeply within and allowing that which is below the surface to come to the light. Rank described *self-development* as "the person is to develop himself into that which he is" (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 20), harkening to presence as a process of discovering one's true nature. When one discovers his/her purpose, the individual is "delivered from his isolation and becomes part of a greater and higher whole" (Rank, 1932, p. 134). Buber supports this assertion, noting that when we realize our true gifts, we touch the existence of God in the world (Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014). The issue of self-development also became a central motif in Rogers later works, and current research findings show self-development to be a significant factor in the therapist's capacity for presence (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Kramer, 1995).

The participants also discussed the reciprocal nature of finding one's work—we both choose the path and the path also chooses us. As Jared shared, "Ultimately, you're presented with your path. And you have to choose to walk it. You can choose not to walk it, but the path is the path." Whyte (2009) expanded on this feeling of being chosen by the world:

It is as if we choose and choose until there is actually no choice at all. When the level of attention reaches a certain intensity, then the person who has been looking suddenly feels as if he or she has been sought out by the world, sought out, acknowledged, named and

recognized. The only question is whether you will respond, whether you will not turn away, whether you will turn toward it—whether, in effect, you will become a *dedicated spirit*. (p. 76)

Presence as self-development involves a reciprocal process of both looking for and being found by the world. In this process of interaction, we develop a commitment to the work. Geller and Greenberg's (2002) study revealed that the therapists' commitment to presence and personal growth in their daily lives significantly influenced their in-session presence. Jared reinforced these findings, noting the significance of cultivating presence in the ordinary acts of day-to-day living. Research shows that presence takes time to develop and fully understand—it involves a consistent practice of being with oneself in silence (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Whyte, 2009).

It was also noted by the participants that the process of self-development is difficult and full of challenges. Suffering is inevitable and universal (Whyte, 2009). Part of the challenge is confronting the unknown—the fear embedded in not knowing what lies ahead or how long one will have to tolerate discomfort. Astronomer George Coyne (2007) noted that quantum mechanics shows us that uncertainty is built into the universe; that there is a certain level of indeterminism even on the macro-scale of the universe. Uncertainty, in effect, is part of our true nature of being.

Discomforts of uncertainty, silence, and fear of being vulnerable were identified as viable challenges faced by the therapist within the therapy session (Bar-Anan et al., 2009; Geller & Greenberg, 2012). Not knowing how to navigate discomfort can cause therapists to respond in reactionary and unhelpful ways, which can result in the client feeling misunderstood or unheard (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Geller & Greenberg, 2012). Presence requires that we acknowledge

these challenges and are committed to working through our own personal issues (Bar-Anan et al., 2009; Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Whyte, 2009). It was noted that when there is a rupture in the therapeutic alliance, the process of repair can ultimately enhance and strengthen the therapeutic bond (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001).

Part of cultivating presence and becoming more comfortable with unease is the ability to trust the process. Both Michael and Jared spoke extensively about the significance of trust in the developmental process—for Michael it is trusting his Zen practice and what he referred to as “The Way”; for Jared, it was putting his trust in “God.” As Whyte (2009) noted, there is no sincere path you can take in life without having your heartbroken. As a result, you have to continuously develop your relationship with your interior self—trusting in the greater whole of life—in order to know how to proceed (Whyte, 2009). In sum, presence helps us in find our path, engage in work that nourishes our inner gifts, and trust the process amidst uncertainty.

Interacting Systems. The participants emphasized that the prescribed values, ideology, and ethics of the surrounding organizations or systems had a significant impact on therapeutic presence. They commented that underlying belief systems—such as western frameworks of individualism, competition, medical models of healing, and linear thinking—notably affected their work. Jared and Michael both commented on the limitations of working within western ideological frameworks that prioritize individualism over collectivism, outcome over process, and the empirical over the experiential. Katie extensively elaborated on the difficulties of working within a medical system that prized quantifiable results over holistic care. She noted the challenges of offering therapeutic presence in an unethical, distracting setting, which was compared to her former work environment at a spiritual retreat center that celebrated holistic

well-being. She found that treatment outcome was demonstrably impacted by the larger organizational systems that enveloped the dyad.

Bateson (1972) highlighted the significance of interacting systems, which he viewed as interconnected patterns and processes. Systems are identified by the differences we choose to distinguish between these patterns and processes (e.g., objects, individuals, and societies). These distinctions are categorized and given meaning, creating and organizing our world of experience (Keeney, 1983). Modern physics supports this Batesonian view, as scientific findings verify that the world does not operate on a linear plane, in a vacuum of space and time; alternatively, it is a system of occurrences affecting one another (Rovelli, 2018). Quantum physics, Maxwell's Theory, and Newtonian mechanics have verified that nothing is static nor exists in an isolated vacuum (Rovelli, 2018). Rather than thinking of the world as being comprised of things, entities or objects that are, it is more accurately understood as made up of events, happenings, and processes that are in a constant state of interaction and exchange.

Perhaps what the participants in this study are alluding to in their descriptions of presence as a "dissolving" of self and being "totally connected" to the other is a different way of experiencing and organizing the differences we see in a world of processes and happenings (Keeney, 1983). In presence, it seems that awareness of our own being as a process of becoming, rather than a static, enduring object, heightens. From this viewpoint, presence enables us to detect differences we are unaccustomed to experiencing, differences that foster the realization that there is no true fundamental difference at all. In general, these findings indicate that how differences are defined and organized can either enhance or obscure therapeutic presence and the treatment process (Bateson, 1972; Keeney, 1983).

Additionally, all of the participants called for greater integration of holistic and collectivistic approaches to western paradigms of health care and education. While it was noted that collective awareness in the United States is surging regarding the benefits of holistic and multi-cultural practices of care, the fundamental meaning underlying such cultural practices and traditions at times have been watered down or by-passed in the process of integration (Grossman & Dam, 2011). There remains an important opportunity to include spiritual, experiential, and wisdom cultural practices within Western systems of healing, while also maintaining fidelity to the ancestors and core meanings at the heart of these traditions (Grossman & Dam, 2011).

Mechanism of Change. Perhaps the most significant factor of presence within a dyadic relationship is its power to effect change. Findings from the narratives suggested that when both members of the dyad are mutually engaged in presence, the transformative possibilities within the exchange are significantly enhanced. As Katie commented, “When two people being open, coming together with that sense of that therapeutic presence can be super powerful! Like so powerful!”

The word *change*, derived from *cambire*, means “to give and take” or “exchange,” highlighting the intrinsically relational and reciprocal nature of change (Kramer, 1995). Geller et al.’s (2010) quantitative study yielded statistics that indicate therapeutic presence is fundamentally relational and impacted by the client and therapist’s abilities to be present in the session. Their data evidenced that the therapist’s level of presence correlated to the depth and transformative power of the session perceived by the client (Geller et al., 2010). The extant literature further demonstrates that client related factors, such as being open and ready to engage in the process of healing, is the most significant factor to treatment outcome, followed by the

strength of the therapeutic alliance (Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Crits-Christoph et al., 1991; Norcross, 2002; Wampold, 2013). Mutual engagement through presence embodies both of these critical factors of treatment outcome. Results from this study and current literature affirm that therapeutic presence is a significant mechanism of change (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Kramer, 1995; Rank, 1929–1931; Rogers, 1961). Presence, in effect, can be healing and transformative in and of itself.

The Significance of an Absence of Presence

Participants described several mitigating factors that can diminish presence. Jared described this diminishment as “rocks” that block our “light” or true essence from shining through. Katie used terms like “imbalances,” “stagnation,” and “blockages,” whereas Michael frequently made reference to the notion of “delusional thinking” and believing in a “separate self” as obscuring one’s true nature. The consequences of not acknowledging or giving our attention to these blockages results in a life that is “bleak,” “angry,” “depressed,” and “hungry.” As Jared shared, “When the gift isn’t nurtured, what’s inside becomes mean and angry and hungry....What is within each person hasn’t been fed.” It was also noted that being judgmental, trying “to fix the other person,” and turning something or someone into “an external object” or “means to an end” had adverse effects on presence.

Findings from the extant literature suggest that when the therapist does not work collaboratively with the client or fails to understand the other’s phenomenological experience, both the therapeutic alliance and treatment outcome is negatively impacted (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001; Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Hoffman, 1993). This harkens to what Buber (1958) described as the *I-It* relationship, in which the other is reduced to an object. *I-It* enhances

hierarchical power dynamics that elevates the status of one member of the dyad over the other (Bateson, 1972; Ghazazani & Alizamani, 2014; Hoffman, 1993). Hoffman noted that in this state, “each person has broken down into a monad, so to speak, and it is important to find ways to replace the connections that allow for a renewed sense of the *Virtual Other*” (p. 43). This implies that when we experience ourselves as inherently separate from the other, operating from an isolated *self*, presence suffers. Current research demonstrates that when we feel separate or disconnected from our world and surroundings, psychological distress significantly increases (Strange & Bashford, 2003). Separation, isolation, and lack of social contact is linked to elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and self-harming behaviors (Strange & Bashford, 2003).

It was also found that when the therapist becomes too attached to a certain therapeutic technique or attempts to force a certain outcome, the therapeutic presence and treatment effectiveness is undermined (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Hoffman, 1993). Overintellectualizing the therapeutic process, what Rollo May described as becoming a manipulator of objects rather than a creative artist, causes presence to suffer (Kramer, 1995). In effect, any act or process that “hurls a ‘Big No’ at the full awareness of living” (Kramer, 1995, p. 61) diminishes presence.

Establishing good rapport and determining goodness of fit within the relationship was of critical significance to deepening presence and strengthening the therapeutic alliance (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001; Burton, 2012; Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Crist-Chrisoph et al., 1991; Norcross, 2002; Wampold, 2013). All of the participants commented that not every relationship is a suitable match, citing the importance of making a referral if the relationship lacks cohesion. Treatment outcome is inextricably linked to the strength of the therapeutic alliance—presence

will inevitably suffer if the therapist and client are poorly matched (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001; Bachelor & Horvath, 2001; Crist-Christoph et al., 1991; Norcross, 2002; Wampold, 2013).

Clinical Implications of the Study

A wide range of implications can be extracted from the findings of this study. First, this study demonstrates a need for greater research on the subject of therapeutic presence as a global phenomenon. Geller's qualitative and quantitative works (Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Geller et al., 2010) provided the primary inspiration for this inquiry, which conceptualized therapeutic presence as a working model for healing. This project aspired to deepen and enrich this formidable groundwork by understanding the phenomenon of presence on a more global scale. However, within the current canon of psychological literature there remains a dearth of qualitative and quantitative research that globally examines therapeutic presence from the perspective of the client or non-caregiver. The systemic influences on presence were also found to be of notable significance. This reveals a need to examine presence beyond the dyad and within the frame of larger social systems as well.

This study examined presence from a global perspective, taking an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to bring us closer to a more inclusive understanding of relationships and healing. These research findings indicate a need for more inclusive, cross-cultural, interdisciplinary approaches to research psychology and the training of its practitioners. It was noted that the phenomenon extends beyond the field of psychology, suggesting the need to initiate a more robust conversation with other fields of knowledge. This would include collaborating on research projects with physicists, biologists, anthropologists, historians, theologians, philosophers, and others. Engaging in a more dynamic conversation would likely

enhance the profundity of the phenomenon of presence, which was found by this study to demonstrably promote greater mutuality, relational rapport, well-being, and treatment efficacy. Interdisciplinary research also includes exploring presence cross culturally. Including voices from beyond the fringe of academia and western culture is critical to deepening and broadening understanding of the phenomenon.

The ontological and educative utility of this study illuminates another implication of these findings. Aspects of spirituality and holism are underrepresented in both the extant psychological literature and many of the theoretical epistemologies taught in western institutions. Spiritual aspects and ancient views of what it means to be human are often bypassed in favor of more empirical and reductionist approaches to personhood and healing. This study helps fill the gap that traditional western psychological teachings have failed to more extensively address.

Moreover, the data provides useful information for caregivers, educators, or students interested in cultivating presence in their professional, personal or educative practices. These findings provide a framework regarding the nature, experience, process, and significance of presence that can be utilized to guide and promote presence within a variety of settings. Used in tandem with Geller's (2002, 2010, 2012) theoretical model of therapeutic presence, this study can enrich and support professional development and education programs.

Limitations of the Study

The limited sample size of participants weakened the breadth of this research project. Due to time restrictions, the number of participants were limited to three. In addition to the diminished sample size, all participants were of similar ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural heritage. It is possible that the concept of therapeutic presence, the therapeutic alliance,

and therapy in general is experienced differently cross-culturally. This sample, while providing some bounding, did not necessarily reflect the broader spectrum of the phenomenon of presence in the context of healing.

Furthermore, some findings that have emerged from this study may not be representative of the population being studied. For example, the participant selected to represent the *mind* aspect of presence, due to his role as a psychologist, was also a dedicated spiritual practitioner both in Kabbalah Judaism and Native Hawaiian spiritual traditions. His perspective embraced spiritual and ancient wisdom practices that may be atypical of the general population of practicing psychologists. Additionally, the *spirit* participant represented a very specific and narrow religious sect in the form of Zen Buddhism. It is often debated if Zen is a philosophical or religious tradition, as it promotes a non-dualistic view that places greater emphasis on one's mind and attention than on faith or dogma. Interestingly, the *spirit* participant placed greater emphasis on the role of *mind* whereas the *mind* participant more frequently highlighted the significance of spirituality in presence. Additionally, the *body* participant also subscribed to a healing framework embedded in eastern spiritual philosophies. It is possible that a bodyworker that subscribed to a more western model of healing may have offered a different perspective. As a result, these findings may not be generalizable, particularly when compared to more individualistic or western cultural views of *mind*, *body*, and *spirit*.

While utilizing a “backyard research” approach—conducting interviews with participants with whom I had already had an established relationship—benefited the strength of this study in various ways, it also contributed to some drawbacks. For example, in having a pre-existing understanding of Zen practice, as well as having pre-existing friendships with both Katie and

Michael (I had also worked with Michael in my own Zen practice), I had some brief moments of “going native,” asking etic questions that were not meaningful to the participants, and making assumptions about what was being referenced rather than approaching the topic with greater neutrality. Personal biases that favor an eastern perspective of presence also impacted the distillation process of coding and combining themes. The aim of the research shapes the questions being asked and thereby effects the answers given. These personal and methodological biases were managed through processes of repetitious examination of the audio recordings, transcription, self-reflection, and most significantly, meeting with my peer debriefing and peer examination team.

Recommendations for Future Study

Results from this study verify several areas of opportunity to further investigate the phenomenon of presence. This query examined presence in the context of dyadic relationships in which only half of the dyad was given a voice. This reveals an opportunity to research presence as a global phenomenon from the perspective of the client/student/other. Research could take the form of a qualitative study in which clients or students of the participants selected from this project are interviewed using the same research questions and methodological approaches. The study could then be compared with these findings to glean a more complete understanding of how the phenomenon unfolds across the relationship.

Findings also pointed to a need for greater inclusivity and diversity with regard to treatment methods and practices. This illuminates an opportunity for future studies to examine presence as a global phenomenon more dynamically by including participants from differing cultural, ethnic, religious, professional, and socioeconomic backgrounds not represented in this

study. Both of these studies would provide a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the phenomenon.

A quantitative approach to these recommendations could utilize Geller's Therapist Presence Inventory (TPI-T and TPI-C) design (Geller et al., 2010) along with other survey measures that rate the therapeutic alliance and session outcome found in the Relationship Inventory (RI), the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI), and the Client Task Specific Measure-Revised (CTSC-R). Future qualitative analyses could follow the methodology and transcendental phenomenological approaches utilized in this study.

Participants in this study highlighted how larger systemic influences impact presence. A study that examined presence in the context of larger systems that extend beyond the dyad would provide additive benefits to the current understanding of presence. This could include qualitative studies that investigate therapeutic presence within the context of group therapy, a professional business, or on the scale of larger social networks, such as community organizations or public and private institutions.

This further segues into an opportunity to examine presence within the context of organizations that are not typically affiliated with therapeutic caregiving or healing, such as finance, law, or law enforcement. The participants noted the significant impacts that ethical and cultural values had on presence, particularly with regard to relationship building and treatment efficacy. A comparative analysis of presence within settings not strongly associated with therapeutic presence compared with settings that promote therapeutic presence would help clarify the phenomenon's impact on work-life satisfaction, relationship development, self-development, and overall goal outcome. The study could choose to focus on presence within the

context of dyadic relationships, as professionals in these fields regularly engage in one-to-one interactions. Examples of professionals that work dyadically but are not typically associated with therapeutic presence include but are not limited to lawyers, financial consultants, and police officers. This would help advance understanding of the systemic impacts on presence.

The research also evidenced that presence is inherently relational and embedded in making contact with others. Energetically using the body to connect with the other was also noted to be of significant importance. These findings allude to a need to examine presence amongst groups that do not co-inhabit the same physical space, such as online technology-based social groups like Facebook. With the lightening-speed pace of technological development, it is difficult for the research to keep up with the real-time psychological, social, and ontological effects resulting from such advancements. As a result, there is a marked and immediate need to better understand presence within this new interface of technological engagement.

Conclusion

A global examination of presence reveals it is a ubiquitous phenomenon critical to relationship building, healing, and self-realization, not only within the therapeutic context but within life itself. Presence transcends logic and empirical analysis; by nature, it is experiential, ineffable, and unquantifiable. It does not exclude but is not limited by the strategic mind. At its core, presence is the nature of our true being; it is our life, just as it is. Presence invites us to explore our lives, revealing the non-dualistic nature of reality, which is large enough to encompass all of life's binaries and paradoxes. Presence is experienced as a feeling of connectedness with the dynamic energetic flow of life. The participants noted that in presence,

we realize that we are more than our individual, separate selves—we are a piece of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The participants expressed that presence is a paradoxical experience of the separate *self* dissolving while simultaneously feeling totally anchored in own's own being. When we are grounded in our true essence, we are able to fully meet and make contact with the other. Presence in the encounter between self and other was described as an experience of mutuality and reciprocity. We discover our own true nature through the reflection of the other. This connection is deepened and maintained by energetically connecting to the body through the breath; using the body as a sensory gauge for attunement; setting aside biases, agendas, and frameworks; meeting the other with openness and vulnerability; grounding in and returning to one's intention; creating a safe environment; and appropriately taking care of one's own needs. These processes can be used as a guide for caregivers interested in cultivating presence and as an effective mechanism of change in their practices. Findings from this study and the extant literature suggests that therapeutic presence is a transformative process—presence in and of itself can effect change.

It was noted by the participants that presence is a recursive process that must be regularly practiced. Presence is developed through daily practices of silent contemplation, such as prayer, meditation, or taking solace in nature. The act of nurturing presence helps us to discover and better understand our life path and inner gifts. Simultaneously, when we develop our inner gifts our presence is enhanced. The participants observed that when we neglect our gifts and bypass presence, we experience adverse effects such as anxiety, depression, anger, and delusion. It was found that presence is diminished when the process or the other is turned into a means to an end.

Presence is further obscured by a sense of being separate or not whole, what Buber and Rumi refer to as the *I-It* relationship.

Furthermore, presence is influenced by the systems in which we are enveloped. For the participants, the organizational setting and western systems of thinking notably impacted presence in their work. They pointed to a need for better integration and understanding of holistic, traditional cultural practices within western society. Findings from this study also suggest a greater need for more holistic and interdisciplinary approaches to western psychological training practices and models. More extensive research on this topic is warranted, particularly with respect to a global understanding of presence from the perspectives of clients and larger social systems.

Presence is more than a technique but rather a way of being that refuses to deny the interconnected nature of reality. Presence is not a static state of being that one attains, rather it is a constantly unfolding process of realization. Presence is inherently relational and particularly intimate, it is not lived from a distance but up close, face-to-face with the fullness of life. Otherness is integral to presence, as our true nature is reflected back to us through the differences we detect in the world. When we see our own true nature with clarity, the less obvious those differences become. As Jared effectively summarized, presence is “a recognition that there is, in the universe but really is the universe, a divine, loving presence that through which all is connected.” Hopefully this study inspires each of us to live more fully in this truth.

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June 27, 2018

Holly McFarland
2747 Waiomao Rd.
Honolulu, HI 96816

hongro@gmail.com

Dear Ms. McFarland:

Your application, "I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation," is fully certified by the Institutional Review Board as of 6-22-2018.

You need to abide by the requirements in any letters of permission you have obtained.

Please note that research must be conducted according to this application that was certified by the IRB. Your proposal should have been revised to be consistent with your application. Please note that you also need to abide by any requirements specified in your letter of permission. Any changes you make to your study need to be reported to and certified by the IRB.

Any adverse events or reactions need to be reported to the IRB immediately.

Your full application is certified for one year from 6-22-2018. Please be aware that if your study is not likely to be completed one year from 6-22-2018, you will need to file a **Continuing Review for IRB or Continuing Certification of Compliance** form with the IRB at least two months before that date to obtain recertification. If your proposal is not recertified within the year specified (365 days), your IRB certification expires and you must immediately cease data collection.

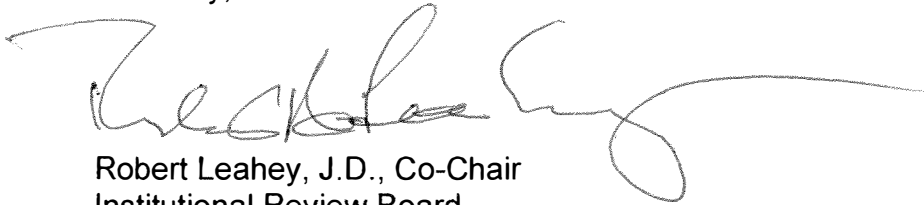
When you have completed your research you will also need to inform the IRB of this in writing and complete the required forms. You may use the **Project Completion Report** form for this purpose. Records must be retained for at least three years.

Good Luck with your research!

Please be careful not to lose this letter.

If you have questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Leahey', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Leahey, J.D., Co-Chair
Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Joy Tanji

May 17th, 2019

Ms. Holly McFarland
Psy.D. Program
Chaminade University

Dear Ms. McFarland:

This letter is to confirm receipt of your Argosy University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for "I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation".

The CUH IRB IRB00007927 reviewed the above IRB external approval.

The Chaminade University IRB will accept your current number and will not require reapproval at this time. Your Chaminade IRB protocol number is CUH 095-2019. You will now be entered into our annual report cycle (due date below). Please use the attached Form IV to complete your annual reporting.

Your annual report was received on May 17th 2019 and is approved. Your protocol renewal is now approved. The final date for your CUH approval is May 17th 2020. Continuation of research after this date will require:

1. Submission of Form IV Final Report; and
2. Request for an extension letter to be submitted to irb@chaminade.edu 30-days prior to the expiration date of your Argosy approval. The Board may require a new protocol submission, so please do this as early as possible.

Proposal approval date: May 17th 2019

Date of annual or final report due to Chaminade IRB: May 17th 2020

Please submit a copy of your current CITI training certificate by email to irb@chaminade.edu. Please be advised that if you submit future protocols to our IRB we will require updated CITI certification aligned with Chaminade's requirements.

Please feel free to contact the IRB above with any questions or concerns.

Kind Regards,



Helen Turner, PhD
Chair, Chaminade IRB Committee

Appendix C

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University

Script for Working with Gatekeepers

I plan to use the following script for approaching gatekeepers under the circumstances that I do not find a participant for the study through purposive sampling within the mental, spiritual, and body work communities with which I am already connected. Upon receiving their permission and approval, I will provide the gatekeeper with the invitation to participate in the study letter in a sealed and signed envelope.

Contacting A Gatekeeper

Researcher: "Hello _____. My name is Holly McFarland and I am a Clinical Psychology doctoral candidate at the Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to talk with you today. I am conducting a qualitative research study for my doctoral requirements and am hopeful that you might be able to help me find a willing participant. The topic of the study is entitled "I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation." I would like to explore the experiences of an individual who works with individuals in a one-on-one capacity and that has a strong reputation for being highly present and skilled at holding space for others. Would you be open to helping me find potential participants?"

Wait for verbal understanding and approval of gatekeeper.

Researcher: "Wonderful. Thank you; your assistance is extraordinarily helpful and encouraging. Before you contact any potential participants, I would like to highlight the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of their identity in relation to this study. Your role will be to identify people who may be interested in learning more about this study and may be interested in participating in it. I ask that you give those who are interested a letter that I will provide to you in a sealed and signed envelope at a later date. This letter will discuss a general overview of the study and provide contact information. As the gatekeeper, in the interest of anonymity, I request that you neither ask nor will I, the principal researcher, disclose who ultimately participates in the study. Can you agree to maintain the confidentiality of the potential participant's identity in connection with this qualitative research study?"

Wait for verbal agreement of gatekeeper.

Researcher: "Wonderful. Thank you very much. I greatly appreciate your assistance in this matter. Please contact me on my cell phone if you find a potential participant. My phone number is: (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Appendix D

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University

Letter for Invitation for Participation in the Study

I plan to use the following letter for inviting participants to participate in the study. This letter may be provided to the gatekeeper in a sealed and signed envelope.

Invitation to Participate in the Study

Hello, my name is Holly McFarland and I am a Clinical Psychology doctoral student at the Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University. I am in the process of conducting a Clinical Research Project as a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Psychology. This research and subject matter speaks to something deeply important and meaningful to me. I strongly believe that one's presence, that is the ability to intimately engage with self and other in the here and now, can tremendously impact the quality of our own lives and those with whom we come in contact. Through this study I hope to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be present in one-on-one interactions with others.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview that will explore your work in being present for others in a one-on-one context and what it has meant in your life. I would be honored to receive your thoughts and experiences related to this topic, as I believe that you possess valuable insights into the heart of this exploratory quest. Your personal story may serve others who are seeking to better understand and cultivate presence in their professional and personal relationships.

If you are interested in participating in this study or would like to know more before making a decision about participating, please contact me, Holly McFarland, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Warm Regards,

Holly McFarland, M.A.

Appendix E

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University

Participant Information File Form

Participant's Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Please indicate your preferred method of contact with the researcher, Holly McFarland:

☐ Phone ☐ E-mail

Appendix F

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University

Initial Consent for Participation in Research

1. *Who is the researcher?* Hello, my name is Holly McFarland and I am a student at the Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University. I am conducting this study in partial fulfillment of my requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology, in Clinical Psychology.
2. *What is the aim of the study?* The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the experience of presence for individuals with reputable knowledge of and ability to be present with others, the experiences of presence they have had at different times in their lives, and their thoughts about these experiences. The ultimate aim of this study is to help me understand more about your experiences and what they have meant to you.
3. *How was I chosen?* I will be interviewing three individuals about their experiences. I have chosen you because I think you have some valuable insights to offer. You have demonstrated tremendous presence power and attunement with others through your work and experiences. Community members also recommended you as a valuable source of information on this topic.
4. *What will be involved in participating?* I would like to schedule three (3), 45- to 60-minute interviews with you and one (1) meeting at the end to see whether I have captured your journey accurately. During our meetings, I would like to explore your experiences of participating in this project, too, so that as the process unfolds, I can structure it in a way that is most beneficial to you. With your permission, I would like to audio record our conversations, take notes during the interviews, and make transcriptions from the recordings, so that I may attempt to accurately represent your perspectives in the narrative write-up I will generate of your experiences over time.

The interviews will take place in a location that is both quiet and private. It should also be a place that is easy for you to reach. We may also decide to conduct some of the interviews via Skype or FaceTime if that is more convenient for you. (Please see section 6 for further discussion of online interviewing.)

Prior to our last meeting, I would like to give you the opportunity to review your transcripts and the narrative I have written about your experiences so you have time to review it carefully before we meet. During our last meeting, I will begin by reviewing this consent agreement, and you will have the opportunity to ask questions about

anything that still remains unclear. You will then have the opportunity to discuss where you might want to add, remove, or adjust the write-up I sent to you in order to make it more accurate. I will take notes again, to ensure my understanding of what you have shared with me and then let you review the edited draft before signing off on the final consent and release of information form. You will also have an opportunity to revisit your decision to remain anonymous in the final document or select a final pseudonym that will be used in the document.

5. *Who will know what I say?* Currently, I plan to transcribe the audio recordings of our conversations and check them for accuracy. In the event that I am unable to transcribe the interview recordings in a timely way, I would like to utilize a transcriptionist. If I chose to use a transcriptionist, I want to reassure you that this individual will be educated about the importance of confidentiality and security of the data and will sign an agreement to maintain these ethical standards. Additionally, if a transcriptionist is used, you will be made aware of the identity of the individual. If, for any reason, you do not feel comfortable with the transcriptionist I have selected (i.e., there is a conflict of interest where confidentiality is concerned), I will then obtain another transcriptionist and ask for your consent again. I also will be personally auditing or checking the accuracy of the transcriptions against the audio recordings even if I use a transcriptionist.

The following individuals, who are members of my research team, will also know what you share with me: Dr. Joy Tanji, my research committee chair; Dr. Robert Anderson, my research committee member; and Joy Quick, MFT and Family Therapy Director of Training at Argosy University, Hawai'i will serve as my methodological consultants and debriefers. Their job will be to review the rigor of my work and help me to tell your story with as much accuracy as possible. Dr. Katherine Ratliff, qualitative researcher and professor at Hawai'i at Manoa; Joy Quick, MFT and Family Therapy Director of Training at Argosy University, Hawai'i; and Dr. Joy Tanji, my CRP Chair will serve as my peer examiners. Their job will be to look at my analysis to make sure that it remains faithful to what you have shared with me. Drs. Tanji, Anderson, Ratliff, and Joy Quick will have only limited access to the password-protected transcripts/audio recordings in order to check my work and provide further support.

All notes, audio tape recordings, transcripts, and drafts for the study's final write-up will be stored using a double-locked system. The pseudonym of your choosing will be used to identify you. I will place these documents in a locked box that will be secured in a locked filing cabinet to which only I have access. Whenever members of my research support team (the debriefers, peer examiners, and transcriptionist) are in possession of the interview transcripts, these documents will be secured using password-protected files or password-protected data storage devices (USBs) that will be further secured in a locked filing cabinet. Passwords will be sent to members of my research team through a separate email. Team members will not be permitted to save these files onto their own personal computers.

6. *What potential risks may be associated with participation?* I will work closely with you throughout the process to minimize any major risks to you. This process privileges you in terms of direction and pace of the study. What this means is that while I may offer some questions to start us off, I would like you to help me in understanding what is meaningful to look at in your experience. I would also like to work closely with you to determine the pace of our exploration—deciding what is meaningful to explore first, what you feel ready to disclose, and how much time passes between each interview.

Despite my efforts to minimize major risks, I am aware that talking about your experiences may sometimes bring up unexpected memories and insights that could be disturbing. The remembrance and experience of intense feelings associated with certain experiences may be painful and possibly unresolved. If at any point in the process, you find that the recollection and processing of your experiences contribute to feelings of distress, I would like to end the interview, stop recording, process what may be coming up for you, and explore what may be the most helpful way to address these concerns. Anything we discuss when the tape recorder is turned off, would not be included as part of the study unless you choose to share it with me again at a later date while we are taping.

Since my role during the study will be that of a researcher and interviewer rather than a therapist. Thus, you are encouraged to continue mental health treatment with your treatment team (e.g., therapist or psychologist) during this time to discuss your thoughts and feelings about the process during your participation in this study.

Should you begin to feel distressed during an interview, there are a number of options. You may decide to end the interview for the day and reconvene at a later date, allowing you to process what came up and to engage in self-care. You may decline answering questions you do not wish to answer. You also may table questions you do not wish to answer in the moment, but would like the option of returning to in the future. You also may decide to withdraw from the study without having to provide a reason and without being concerned that such a decision might result in negative consequences from me.

I would then encourage you to contact your mental health provider. You might also wish to utilize some of the resources included on the Community Resource List I am providing you today. Please be assured that your welfare, above all else, is most important to me.

Following the conclusion of an interview, in which the circumstances described above occur, I also would contact my research committee members to consult, explaining what has happened. A follow-up call later that day or the following day would be made to you from me, and then over the course of the following few days to check in with you for your safety and well-being. If you experience severe emotional distress at all during the study, even if unrelated to the interview content, I would suspend the interview(s) and

resume only when you feel that you have recovered sufficiently enough to make an informed decision about continuing your participation.

During the study, I will attempt to protect not only your confidentiality but your anonymity too. Since some of the interviews may be conducted via Skype or online FaceTime, confidentiality and privacy may be compromised; video chats may not be as secure as face-to-face interviews. Although highly unlikely, it is possible for computer hackers to listen in on a Skype or FaceTime interview. Moreover, because this is a small community, there is the possible risk that despite my best efforts, someone who reads the study may be able to figure out who you are. To minimize this risk, your real name will not appear on any transcripts or in my write-up. In addition, when not in use, I will store your audio recordings and transcripts in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet to which only I have the keys. My peer debriefer, peer examiner, and research committee members will have only limited access to these materials when performing their duties as described above. In my journal entries and discussions with them, I will not refer to you by name. Instead, I will refer to you by a pseudonym of your choosing. This will be the name used in all transcriptions and write-ups. Please indicate below:

The pseudonym I would like to use is: _____

If I see you or you see me in the community, I will make no reference to the study or your involvement in the study.

While there are no anticipated physical, psychological, economic, or legal risks associated with this study, there could be social ramifications for you if you choose to inform others of your participation. For example, if informed of your participation in the study, others may make assumptions and express biases based on their interpretations of the findings.

Every attempt to protect your confidentiality will be made, as the law requires, with the following exceptions: Any reports of suicidal or homicidal intent that appear to be imminent, or any reports of abuse of children, elders, and/or individuals with mental or physical disabilities will be reported to the proper civil or legal authorities. My research supervisor, Dr. Joy Tanji, will also be notified in such instances. Confidentiality also may have to be broken if the materials from this study are subpoenaed by a court of law. The limits of confidentiality are in place to protect your safety and the safety of others.

7. *What are the potential benefits of participating?* Sometimes people find participating in focused conversations about critical life experiences to be beneficial insofar as it gives them a chance to talk about things that deeply matter to them. I hope the same will be true for you. I also hope that your participation will help you gain a better understanding of your own life story, perhaps some greater clarity about what has helped within your process of presence and relationship building and what may have been challenging in this

process. It is also my sincere hope that your participation in this study, and the subsequent data gathered, will encourage and empower other individuals that work in dyads or one to one relationships to be more aware of their impact and service to others as an avenue of transformation.

8. *What are my rights as a participant?* As a participant in this study, you are considered a co-owner of the outcomes of the study. The study attempts to document important themes from your personal story that may be of benefit to you, others with similar stories, service providers, researchers, and program development specialists. To best benefit these many stakeholders, I want to tell your story with fidelity. As such, I want to work closely with you throughout the interviewing, analysis, and write-up process.

As a participant in the study, you have the right to ask any questions regarding the study at any time, and I will attempt to answer them fully. You will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences from me. Your participation is completely voluntary.

If at any time, you would like to speak to me off the record, you may turn off the tape recorder, then turn the tape recorder back on only when you feel that you are ready to proceed. As stated above, anything you discuss while the tape recorder is turned off will not be included as part of the study unless you choose to share this information later while we are taping.

You also may take breaks as needed during the interview. You may pass on any question you do not wish to answer, and you may choose to think about a question and answer it at a later time.

At the conclusion of the study, you also will have the right to add, remove, or change anything in the final write-up so that it best represents your experiences.

On April 20, 2020 or sooner, at the conclusion of this study, I would like to give you a copy of the transcripts and recordings of our conversations. Please verify which of the following you would like me to do at that time (please check all that apply):

- ☐ Please return my audio recordings to me.
- ☐ Please provide me with electronic transcripts (e.g., on an electronic storage device).
- ☐ Please provide me with a copy of your clinical research project.

Alternately, I can do one of the following (please check all that apply):

- ☐ Please destroy my audio recordings.
- ☐ Please destroy the transcripts of the audio recordings.

I am required by the Argosy University Institutional Review Board to keep the audiotapes and transcriptions of the study for three (3) years following completion of the study. This is so that I will be able to respond to any queries by other researchers regarding the findings and approach used. On April 20, 2023, I will shred the paper documents I have that are associated with the study and erase the audio recordings of our conversations.

9. *What will be published?* Prior to our last meeting, I will send you a draft of my findings. During our last meeting, I would like to review this draft with you. At that time, I will ask you for permission to use certain quotes from our conversations to illustrate your experiences more clearly to others. You have the right to review these materials and decide which quotes you will allow me to include. You may also reword, add to, or decline my use of others. The final write up of this study, including the materials you have reviewed and given your consent to use, will be published as part of the Argosy University e-library. The study also may be presented at a conference. Prior to any presentation of information, you will be contacted and consulted regarding what will specifically be presented in the conference presentation. At that time you will have the opportunity to either agree or not agree to what will be presented.
10. *If I want more information, who can I contact about this study?* If at any point in the course of our work together, you have questions about anything regarding this study, you may contact me at: (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Argosy University, Hawai'i. Thus, if you have questions about your rights as a participant or ethical concerns, you can contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Argosy University, Hawai'i Dr. Robert Anderson, at: (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If at any time in the process, you have any concerns about my study or our interactions with each other, you may contact my clinical research committee chair, Dr. Joy Tanji, with your feedback, via her direct line at: (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

By written notification to Holly A. McFarland, below, I indicate that the information
(*interviewer*)

presented in this document has been reviewed and explained to me to my satisfaction. This procedure does not preclude me from seeking further clarification of any items in the future. I understand the nature and intent of this study. I also understand my rights and what is being asked of me as a participant. I understand all of the above and provisionally agree to the terms and conditions specified. I understand that I will be given an opportunity to complete this informed consent procedure at the completion of my participation—after I have had a chance to review the materials I have been provided for this study. This will allow me to make any corrections or changes I feel necessary. I understand that I still maintain the right to revoke this consent at any time during the study.

By signing this form I am also affirming that I am at least 18 years of age or older and am not considered a minor.

Participant's Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Interviewer's Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University

Page 1 of 1 _____ Initials _____ Date

Appendix H

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University

Community Resource List for Oahu, Hawai'i

As a researcher, one of my top priorities is your welfare and the welfare of others. I encourage you to maintain communication with your own mental health provider or treatment team, and contact them should the need arise. Below, I also have compiled a list of mental health centers with multiple providers and services, as well as a 24-hour crisis line should you experience any feelings of distress, whether due to your participation in this study or not.

Mental Health Centers:**Oahu Community Mental Health Windward**

45-691 Kea'ahala Rd

Kaneohe, HI 96744

(808) 233-3775

North Shore Mental Health

46-001 Kamehameha Hwy # 213 Kaneohe, HI 96744

(808) 235-1599

Waimanalo Health Center

41-1347 Kalaniana'ole Hwy

Waimanalo, HI 96795

(808) 259-6449

Kalihi-Palama Community Mental Health Center

1700 Lanakila Ave

Honolulu, HI 96817

808-832-5770

Mental Health Kokua

1221 Kapi'olani Blvd

Honolulu, HI 96814

(808) 737-2523

Crisis Line:

You may call the 24-hour Access line at **(808) 832-3100** on Oahu or toll free at **1-(800) 753-6879** for support. They are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Chaminade University of Honolulu

Date _____

I also am aware that the study may be presented at a conference. Finally, by signing this form, I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

Participant's Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Interviewer's Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Appendix J

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Chaminade University of Honolulu

Scripts for Audio Recordings

I plan to use the following scripts for turning the recorder on (begin the session) and off (end the session) to give the participant clear notification each time. It is also a courtesy so that the participant can mentally prepare him or herself for the interview process to begin and end.

Turning Recorder On

Researcher: "Hi _____. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. Our meeting today will be about one to one-and-a-half hours long with breaks as needed. Let's go ahead and get started. Are you ready for me to begin recording our conversation today?"

Wait for verbal approval of participant.

Researcher: "Okay, great. Just as a reminder, I want you to know that if you feel the need to speak off the record that you may do so at any time and without negative consequences. Please stop the recorder or let me know whenever you'd like to speak off the record. At that time, I will stop the recorder and only begin recording again once you are ready to do so. I will now press record and we can begin."

Press record and begin.

Turning Recorder Off

Researcher: "Okay _____. Thank you so much for sharing your story with me today, and for being part of my study. I think we did some wonderful work for today, and are now at the time to be finished. Are you ready for me to stop recording?"

Wait for verbal approval of participant.

Researcher: "Ok, I'm going to stop the recorder for the day. Thank you again." Press stop.

Off-the-Record Discussions

Participant states that he or she would like to speak off the record:

Researcher: "Okay, that's no problem at all. I'm going to turn off the recorder now, and I want to remind you that whatever you share with me off record will not be part of the study unless you share the same information with me later on the record."

Turn off the recorder. Attend to off record discussion, and ensure safety and wellbeing of participant. Utilize the Community Resource List should the participant be experiencing feelings of distress beyond the scope of processing through conversation with the researcher, and consider taking a break or discontinuing for the day, depending on issues that have come up.

If the Participant shares that he or she is ready to begin recording again: Researcher: “Okay, so it sounds like you are ready to begin recording again?” Wait for verbal approval from participant.

Researcher: “I am going to press record on the recorder and we can begin again.” Press record and begin.

Participant Requests Break/Stop for the Day

Participant states that he or she would like to take a break from interviewing:

Researcher: “Okay, that’s no problem at all. I’m going to turn off the recorder now, and whenever you are ready to begin again, just let me know. You can take a break for as long as you need to.”

Turn off the recorder. Attend to the safety and wellbeing of participant. Offer assistance as needed as well as water and/or directions to refreshments. Utilize the Community Resource List should the participant be experiencing feelings of distress and/or process their feelings through conversation with the researcher. Consider discontinuing the interview for the day depending on the issues that have come up.

If the Participant shares that he or she is ready to begin recording again: Researcher: “Okay, so it sounds like you are ready to begin recording again? Wait for verbal approval from participant.

Researcher: “I am going to press record on the recorder and we can begin again.”

Press record and begin.

Participant states that he or she would like to stop for the day.

Researcher: “Okay, that’s no problem at all. I’m going to turn off the recorder now.”

Turn off the recorder. Attend to the safety and wellbeing of participant. Offer assistance as needed as well as water and/or directions to refreshments. Utilize the Community Resource List should the participant be experiencing feelings of distress and/or process their feelings through conversation with the researcher. Ask whether you might check in with them in the coming days to debrief further. Discontinue for the day and reschedule the interview as necessary.

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Chaminade University of Honolulu

In performing research, the confidentiality of the data gathered from participants must be prioritized and upheld. The information contained in the audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews conducted in this study may be sensitive in nature and need to be kept confidential. Like the principal investigator of the study, the members of the research team are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of the participants and data. The limits of confidentiality apply throughout the duration of the study and after its completion.

I understand that these recordings/transcripts contain personal and confidential information. The researcher, Holly A. McFarland, has instructed me that she will transport and deliver all audio recordings, project drafts, and password protected USBs to me in a locked box.

- 1) Data will consist of audio recordings;
- 2) Transcripts of the audio recordings, generated by me, will be saved onto the password-protected USB (electronic storage unit) provided by the researcher. I will not store any data on my hard drive;
- 3) Data stored on a password protected USB will be transported securely in a locked box provided by the researcher to which only the researcher and I have the key. When not in use, the data (e.g., password-protected USB, audio recordings) will be stored securely in the locked box provided by the researcher, and locked in a filing cabinet to which only I have access;
- 4) Keys to the locked box will be kept by the person in possession of the data in a separate, secure location;
- 5) Passwords for the location will be communicated by the researcher to me (the transcriptionist) in a separate e-mail or in person;
- 6) I am responsible for keeping the participant's identity and data confidential and secure during and after the conclusion of the study. I will not discuss the contents of the interview with anyone but the researcher, Holly A. McFarland.

My signature, below, indicates that the information presented in this document has been reviewed and explained to me to my satisfaction. I have read the terms and conditions of confidentiality listed in this document. By signing this agreement, I agree to protect the identity

of the participant in the study. I also agree to keep all documents, audiotapes, and transcripts secure, and agree to protect the personal and sensitive information contained in these materials.

Transcriptionist's Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Researcher's Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Appendix L

I and Thou: Understanding Presence as a Process of Transformation

Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology at Chaminade University of Honolulu

Confidentiality Agreement for Debriefers/Peer Examiner/Auditor

As a researcher, one of my priorities is to uphold and protect the confidentiality of the participant in my study. The information contained in the audio recordings and transcripts of interviews conducted in this study may be sensitive in nature and personal, and must be kept confidential in order to protect the privacy of the participant. By signing this agreement, the Debriefers/Peer Examiner/Auditor acknowledges the importance of protecting the participant's confidentiality and agrees to protect the information contained in the conversations, audiotapes and transcripts, including the identity of the participant. The limits of confidentiality extend throughout the duration of the study and even after the study has been completed.

I, _____, have accepted the responsibilities of (*Debriefers/Peer Examiner/Auditor*) reviewing and discussing transcriptions and audiotapes as a part of the research support team for _____'s clinical research project. I understand that these (*Principal Investigator*)

transcripts, and the discussions I will have with the principal investigator will contain personal and confidential information. I understand that during the course of the study, I will be provided limited access to research materials in order to help me provide appropriate feedback and support to the principal investigator. While in my possession, I accept responsibility for keeping the password-protected documents provided by the principal investigator, Holly A. McFarland, protected and secure. When in my possession, I agree that when not in use, I will keep the audiotapes and transcripts being reviewed stored in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet to which only I have the key. I will not release these research materials to, and will not discuss their contents with, anyone other than the researcher, Holly A. McFarland. No copies of the transcripts or discussions will be retained by me during or after the study. I understand the importance of keeping all discussions, audio recordings, and transcripts secure and confidential.

I have read the terms and conditions of confidentiality listed in this document. By signing this agreement, I agree to protect the identity of the participant(s) in the study. I also agree to keep all documents, audiotapes, and transcripts secure, and agree to protect the personal and sensitive information contained in these materials.

Debriefers'/Examiners'/Auditors'
Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Researcher's Signature

Please Print Name

Date

Appendix M

Axial Coding

Jared's Axial Coding

1. The Academic Journey

- a. "I took one marriage and family therapy course with a professor from the Ackerman Institute, which is one of the big marriage and family therapy centers. So I got a taste, and I thought, 'hmm, there's something to it.' Got accepted into my doctoral program at California School of Professional Psychology."
- b. "And then later, James Framo, my mentor, believed how important it was for you to go through your own family of origin work in order to be able to understand that....Western psychotherapy has taken me so far, but I need context, I need an explanation. I will tell you that psychotherapy can answer some questions. I'm not sure it can answer all questions."

2. Identifying His Divine Purpose

- a. "I can look back, and I would say there were instances of where my father would just see the way I would talk with people. And he was like, you're meant to be a psychologist, this is what you need to do."
- b. I almost drown when I was 9 years old....We were somehow able to make it there, and they pulled us up. And by the time we pulled up, all of the sudden it was a raging current again. That's when I know God saved my life. But I remember the calmness. I was going to be okay."

3. Wisdom of the Elders

- a. "There's nothing I think that anyone could ever do that wasn't repairable in my grandmother's eyes. That's what I'm really feeling from her. Everyone was worthy of forgiveness. She had a way of just really looking inside someone and seeing the hurt. And identifying it but then loving it. Loving that and helping to remove the hurt."
- b. "That is such an important act because you recognize, yes the person's a stranger, but they are your brother and sister. They are a father, mother, aunt, uncle, whoever cousin. Each one has the spirit of God inside."

4. Called by Name

- a. "In Judaism, there's the expectation that we wrestle with God. My Hebrew name is Jacob, so it's kind of an expectation. I may wrestle with God, but I don't ignore God. Because I want answers."
- b. My Hawaiian name is Pukana o keakua. Pukana means a source or outlet. So Pukanawai means an outlet which water flows. O Ke Akua refers to Creator, the Almighty. So I'm a source through which the Almighty flows."

5. *Mind and Beyond: Therapy as an Integrative Practice*

- a. "Life is an indivisible whole."
- b. "In all cultures there are symbols. And so I suddenly realized that you are looking for a place of nurturing. And it can be a challenge within a Western psychology training program. So how do I keep my identity as a psychologist and yet at the same time reach out for the divine, the spiritual?"
- c. "It is at a level that I find, I don't know if I want to say, it goes beyond psychotherapy, it is both embedded in psychotherapy but really transcends it."

6. *A Belief and Trust in a Higher Power*

- a. **A divine, loving presence through which all is connected**
 - i. "I think ultimately [presence] comes back to a belief in higher power."
 - ii. "At a very simple level I could say God. I could say *Ke Akua*. A recognition that there is, in the universe but really is the universe, a divine, loving presence that through which all is connected."
- b. **An act of faith and doubt.**
 - i. "There is a saying that goes, if you start with certainty, you will end with doubt. If you start with doubt, you will end with certainty. Doubt is part of the process. The trust comes from the questioning, from the doubt, from the seeking. When we seek God, we are filled with doubt."
 - ii. "It's really about surrendering and asking for help. That's the real key. And to say, God, I'm not sure. I don't know. Can you help me?"

7. *Presence as Connecting to the Greater Whole*

- a. **We are part of a greater whole**
 - i. "You could say there's presence that comes from the spark within me that is unique to me. But I'm also a part of something that is much greater. And that's what I'm trying to do, in some ways, is when I heal, connect soul to soul, so that ultimately, we become all enveloped in the love and blessing of Creator."
 - ii. *Tikkun Olam*: "Each shard had a piece of the Almighty. And that ultimately, our job, in each lifetime, is to be able to collectively bring the shards of glass back together."
- b. **The divine spark within**
 - i. "The Jewish belief is that each of us has a spark of the divine within us. And all together, collectively, all of those sparks make up a part of a greater whole. I do believe that there is something within us that is part of something that is greater."
 - ii. "So anytime you meet someone, you are meeting another part of the whole, another spark, another bit of essence of the divine presence."
 - iii. "*Aloha*, not only does it mean breath of life, but it also means bosom of the universe. When one is greeting someone with aloha, it is honoring the bosom of the universe that is within that particular person. It is

honoring the breath of life, the soul, the spirit, all that is for that person. When we do that, an I-Thou sense as Buber talks about, that is both enhancing our presence, but ultimately, it is bringing us closer to God.”

c. Three become one

- i. “So at some level I feel myself dissolving, but it’s not that I would say I don’t have a sense of my not being there, but there’s something that is metaphysically different is how I would describe it. That person and I are One...It’s almost like three become One or three are One.”
- ii. “And I think there’s an art to knowing how much to polish and how much not to polish. Because on the one hand, someone who is a master gem stone expert or crafts person can polish it in such a way to bring out the brilliance without necessarily removing the natural essence of what it is.”

d. The synergy of healing

- i. “So, so much of healing I think is about finding and learning to love and accept oneself...a lot of the great master therapists talk about learning to love all the parts of oneself.”
- ii. “That’s what I see myself doing is allowing Creator to enter both of us, so not only is the person who I’m working with healing, but on some level I’m also healing something within myself.”
- iii. “My grandma used to always say, ‘I listen to the heart, not the mouth.’”

8. Eternal and Limitless

a. Presence is being a vessel through which the Divine can flow.

- i. “The Hawaiian belief of course is that there are often blockages, so, when healing is done, it is really to remove the blockages...So therapy is a process where a person’s true nature, his or her true nature, his or her presence is blocked. And you’re asking for divine spirit to help in order to do that.”
- ii. “I look at the healer’s role as being more a vessel and a facilitator. When I meet with people to do healings, what I am trying to do, in essence, is surrender myself. To the point where I would say it both is and is not my presence.”

b. Presence is 24/7.

- i. “I’m going to argue that our presence is 24/7....We extend our presence and it’s not only our presence. We’re really extending the Almighty’s presence.”
- ii. “It is learning to trust and knowing that God is there 24/7. That the ancestors are there 24/7.”
- iii. “I look at God within everything. So I would say we both draw upon it, but it is also within us. It is the still small voice.”

9. Walking Your Path

a. Honoring one's gift

- i. "Hawaiians also talk about each of our having a gift. And I believe that. And ultimately each of us has the responsibility to understand what that gift is so that we can glorify God. And so that's also part of the healing process, and my living who God ultimately meant me to be."
- ii. "Each one of us is meant to glorify God in some way."

b. The responsibility of sharing one's gifts

- i. "I know this is what I'm supposed to do. *Koho ia*. Choice, no choice. The Hawaiian meaning, when you come right down to it, ultimately, you're presented with your path. And you have to choose to walk it. You can choose not to walk it, but the path is the path."
- ii. "If you ask, are some of us chosen? Yes. In spite of all of the darkness, in spite of what people may be doing to others more so God implores who amongst you will be righteous? And that's why you've been called. To demonstrate that."

c. Grounded in day-to-day living

- i. "You can walk into your closet and find God."
- ii. "It's people who are grounded and who have lived life and really understand the day to day, that's so important....When you think of what I-Thou is in some ways, you could say it's the sometimes, the dance between the metaphysical and the physical."

d. Healing and presence require discipline

- i. "Spirituality is very much like exercising and building your muscles. And when we first begin that process of exercise, oh my gosh, our muscles hurt. It's not easy."
- ii. "In some ways, when the gift isn't nurtured, what's inside becomes mean and angry and hungry. And so when you talk about [societal] atrocities, one way of looking at it is because what is within inside each person hasn't been fed."
- iii. "At times it can be overwhelming, but nothing great comes without the struggle or comes without the search."

e. Discernment and Boundaries

- i. "You have to know your boundaries and you have to know your stuff. I remember one of my professors telling me, knowing when to share and when you share, knowing how to share. And that is as much art as it is technique."
- ii. "I-Thou to me is respecting the integrity of that person. It's also respecting the integrity of yourself."

- iii. “In Yiddish, we say sometimes it’s a *shidduch*, it’s a match, and sometimes it’s not a *shidduch*. Sometimes it fits and sometimes it doesn’t fit. That’s just the way it is.”

10. The Process of Presence

a. Prayer

- i. “So when I do a ritual of prayer...I make it very clear that it is not for my glory. I always make it clear this is for your glory God, that I do this, that it is in your service, that I do this. I will say each healing is very different. And then I really go from there and so as I hold on to the person, I really trust and I let the person who I’m working with guide me. Because I feel that God will speak through that person.”
- ii. “*Pule*, pray. There always is an answer for whatever you may have concerns about, whatever is bothering you.”

b. Creating a safe space

- i. “And usually I’m going to pick a place that is quite...I carve out the sacred place. I find the place and I make it sacred.”
- ii. “I would say so much of it is about creating the environment where God can just kind of take over.”

c. Contact

- i. “I’ll say, ‘I’m going hold your hands, it’s going to be a connecting of energy, it’s a very personal experience.’”
- ii. “I will go with impression. Hawaiians call them *ho‘ailona*, or signs. But I will look for signs and try to be observant, and I will go with images.”
- iii. “It’s almost like physiologically I’m feeling what they’re feeling. I’m seeing what they’re seeing. Then I know that’s God’s work.”

d. Self-care

- i. “I went for a ritual immersion, my *mikveh* experience, because you do have to cleanse yourself when you’re in service. You’re going to pick up stuff. You wouldn’t use your car without changing the oil filter every once and while. You got to clean.”
- ii. “So there are places I go that are spiritually very important to me that I ask God, I will say, please clean me.”

Katie's Axial Coding

1. Finding a Framework: Zen Shiatsu Massage Therapy

- a. "I took that course [on shiatsu] and then I got some books and it became a lens through which it actually changed the way I look at life."
- b. "Our spiritual, emotional, mental faculties, which often times are directly linked to the physical body—the muscles, the tissues, and kind of what gets caught up [in that]. And shiatsu tapped into providing a good framework that brought all that together."

2. Personal Life Transitions

- a. "And I lost my old job and then got this job. I lost my old job because the place closed down. And it went from basically one side of the spectrum of massage clientele of a very New Age kind of resort that a lot of people take either spiritual retreats or wellness retreats."
- b. "It's been difficult switching between those two things because they are so, so different. And there, I have some frustrations with both the work and setting at this place."

3. Presence is Everything

a. Synergistic joining

- i. "It's like being totally absorbed in the moment. Being totally connected [with the client]."
- ii. "Just having somebody really pay attention to you and being heard and noticed and felt and understood is energizing. That has an energy, that has a therapeutic effect."

b. Intention

- i. "Perfect state of health, perfect state of mind."
- ii. "What I think they are pointing to and what they are actually feeling is my intention. It's my intention to be present and promote well-being and balance."
- iii. "Intention, attention, and presence are all forms of energy."

c. Presence moves blockages.

- i. "Recognizing stagnation is part of a larger process that can be respected. Just acknowledging it can create movement. Moving blockages, not staying in that spot for too long, and respecting the stuck-ness or boundary can soften it. Simply bringing awareness to it can transform it."
- ii. "Release isn't required for healing. Movement can happen simply by having someone pay attention or care."

d. A holistic approach

- i. "And then often times there is an emotional, spiritual, those aspects of our being, components that can come up in the massage and can be addressed

in the massage and sometimes that becomes apparent when I first kind of talk with someone about how they're feeling."

- ii. "As well as realizations that they had, again, a little bit more of an integrated experience. Of kind of mind, body, spirit."

4. Process of Synergistic Joining

a. Safety and trust: Creating the groundwork for something new to emerge

- i. "I'm listening to whatever, wherever they're at, and I'll check in to make sure they feel okay, that they're safe."
- ii. "She surprised me, it surprised both of us because she so spontaneously and so fully started sobbing."

b. Bearing witness and holding space

- i. "Being neutral, listening without making any judgements."
- ii. "And sometimes having somebody acknowledge that in their body, that you can tell what's kind of going on in their life through the [message], sometimes creates a huge relief because their experience is being witnessed."
- iii. "Holding space is an invitation for things to expand as needed. Whatever it is, joy or pain. It is helping someone feel comfortable to have the experience they need to have."

c. Breathing

- i. "That's why so many people come back to the breath because there's something so simple about focusing into the breath that it has a bit of like a concentrating and opening quality."
- ii. "Often times in massage there is a bit of a synchronizing that can happen. And sometimes I'll take extra breaths, like exaggerated breaths, just as a form of encouraging the other person to breath and to connect with their breath."
- iii. "The breath provides a segue for things to go to another level."

d. Deep, attentive listening

- i. "Listening to what they have to say. The words but also the inflection, where the sighs are. Where the pauses are."
- ii. "In bodywork listening definitely shows up as watching."

e. Communicating with the body

- i. "I try keeping it in the framework of bodywork. Not to rely too much on the word, let the bodywork speak for itself."
- ii. "It's often the case with those people that say, 'No pain, no gain.' Usually they don't like very deep massage. Which is interesting to me. Where I'll be like, okay, I'll give you deep massage, and they're like, could you back off a little bit. And then I often find they really need to do is relax. They need to relax and they actually need a super nourishing massage."

f. Offering guidance

- i. “By offering a different perspective to see that they can maybe look at it [differently] and garner a little bit more awareness or understanding.”
- ii. “I feel like people often want guidance whether it is just the physical body or a little bit of a witness of what you felt, and some input.”

g. Respecting boundaries

- i. “Everybody’s boundaries are different.”
- ii. “Certain boundaries can definitely cultivate, it supports the presence.”
- iii. “The concept of boundaries is a very ethereal thing.”

5. Presence Is Systemic, Existing Beyond the Dyad

a. Environmental impacts

- i. “We are impacted by everything that happens in life. We’re impacted by everything we do.”
- ii. “And often times here in the new setting it is a lot more about, the focus and awareness is just on the physical. And part of that is because the way the system is set up, part of it is the client’s coming in. I guess part of it is cultural in what you normally talk about with a massage therapist. What is considered normal. Socio economic stuff factors into it. In this new setting I have frustrations because sometimes I feel like I have a belief system that it could be more.”
- iii. “Frustration and negativity is influencing this person’s journey with their health.”

b. Characteristics of spaces conducive to therapeutic healing

- i. “They were already focused on empowering their own wellbeing.”
- ii. “That yes, sometimes, two people being open, coming together with both that sense of that therapeutic presence can be super powerful! Like so powerful.”
- iii. “There’s you as a practitioner and what you can bring in, but then, in that setting of seeing somebody to have good presence, so much factors into it.”

c. Characteristics of spaces not conducive to therapeutic healing

- i. “My ability to be present is a little bit more frustrating at this place [medical clinic] only because there’s a lot more distractions within the office itself.”
- ii. “The goal is to try to get them to heal and improve range of motion and reduce pain and muscle hypertonicity. So there is that goal that’s driven by the insurance company. And relates specifically to a physical injury and a physical matter. But I think there’s so many other contributing factors that make up our life.”

- iii. “Which then, there’s a lack of trust and fear and uncertainty in that you’re dealing with somebody who even cares about your well-being at all, is a part of the whole clinic and that’s just not a supportive or conducive environment to healing. And part of it is the system.”

6. Effects of Therapeutic Presence within an Unethical System

a. Therapeutic presence suffers

- i. “The therapeutic presence suffers. I still try and be really present. I feel loyalty to my clients in doing what I can do for them.”
- ii. I guess sometimes expectations for me get dashed where it’s like, this could be more powerful healing.”

b. Maintaining homeostasis

- i. “There’s more of a redundancy of people coming in and they’re not being all that much change.”
- ii. “And sometimes that’s accepting the reality that someone’s not going to get better and you’re trying to manage pain.”

c. Parallel process

- i. “There is a blockage in this person’s life. And then there’s blockage in this kind of system that seems to be the same.”
- ii. “It’s hard to break through that [blockages in the larger system]. And I think you can. But [you need to] have that team set up kind of counterbalancing that.”

7. Presence Amidst Frustration

a. Identifying things as they are

- i. “That’s just kind of about accepting where I’m at but then also trying to communicate [what I need] to create improvements.”
- ii. “It’s all presence. Because when there is frustration, anger, or fear, to have that presence with that, to have awareness of that, it doesn’t have to look a certain way. It’s just like, ah, presence, staying present. Identifying things as they are.”

b. Coming back to intention

- i. “Can we get on the same page with our intention in the massage and what we’re working on and why?”
- ii. “To have compassion for that and take that in...it helps me to focus on okay, what is my role and how can I help?”

c. Goodness of fit

- i. “You aren’t going to be the right therapist for everybody.”
- ii. “I felt in the beginning with him we got off on the wrong foot and that’s okay. He can go work with somebody else.”

8. Presence as Ritual**a. Preparation**

- i. "Eating is really, really important, that I have enough energy."
- ii. "So [I like] that ritual, being in the room by myself and setting things up."

b. Letting go

- i. "And then practices of letting stuff go. kind of getting out of that role."
- ii. "And so that practice for me is usually getting in the ocean and being outside in some regard. Going for a walk. That's really important. Nature is so important."

Michael's Axial Coding

1. Immersing in the Tradition

- a. "I went and asked [my Chinese philosophy teacher], when I was going to graduate, about schools and where I might learn more about this thing called Chan."
- b. "This is it! I want to know more about this." And I stayed with it. I like the particulars...I love the Chan way of expressing it and practicing it and all that. So that's sort of how I got into it."

2. Attending to Personal Needs

- a. "I'm down to my last thousand dollars of savings, I've got my own business but I haven't had a paycheck in three months because there's no business, there's no work. And I'm charging off to the zendo. I gulp down a peanut butter sandwich and some black tea and head off to the zendo, and I'm driving over there and I'm going, this isn't working."
- b. "But I completely stepped back for about 10 years. And didn't come to sit. Didn't do *sesshin*. Still sat every day. My wife and I sat together. And that's so how it went."

3. Return to Collective Practice

- a. "It's not two people there [student and teacher]. We're just working on the same *koans* [dialogues, stories, and questions used in practice] with people. Trying to find some light. Some movement."
- b. "When I think back about being a student, that was different. I was often not comfortable as a student, with the territory, with not knowing."

4. Beyond Limits

- a. **Undefinable**
 - i. "We discover what there is to discover in the course of that kind of emergence of meeting and engaging. And that's not very definable."
 - ii. "I want to be careful about defining it because I don't want to limit it in some way."
- b. **Clarifying terms and examining incongruencies in meaning systems**
 - i. "You're not trying for a goal out there. But somehow, without making it an external object, to live your aspiration for awakening."
 - ii. "It's not necessarily what's trying to be conveyed there is improper, but it may not be the best way to convey it. Depends on what people take away from that."
 - iii. "I'm not sure even healing is a context for me in the work."

c. It transcends form, concepts, and frameworks

- i. “There’s something to stay with that is a guide in us. It has no form. I can’t formulate it and say what it is. But it’s me.”
- ii. “In terms of this kind of mutual engagement in an investigation of what life is, part of what it does seem like I’m often doing is trying to get there with people. To get through that framework of teacher and student.”
- iii. “We’re in the usual framework of our being, of our life. We’re either present or we’re not present. And so that’s a framework. It’s being or non being. And so what I’m trying to talk about and say what isn’t helpful is that framework.”

d. An absence of something: forgetting the self

- i. “Part of what feels therapeutic to me is absence....Absence of some identity of myself other than what’s happening....Liberation from delusion about who we are seems like the greatest therapy.”
- ii. “I feel concerned when people tell me their practice is being present. I want to tell them Zen practice is about forgetting yourself.”

e. Recollection

- i. “The recollection part is, what am I here for? What’s important to me? In traditional Buddhist teachings recollection is in part [the knowledge] that I’m going to die. And you’re going to die. This is precious time. Let’s use it for what we want to use it for. That’s a kind of recollection.”
- ii. “There’s some way of allowing something to come forth and being willing and wanting to do that, wanting to participate in some way—but without some premade formula...There’s a remembering of my purpose.”

f. Trust

- i. “And what are we left with? Our life, just the way it is. And I trust that. I really trust that.”
- ii. “A lot doesn’t necessarily come naturally. It’s not obvious. So you have to trust.”

5. Mutual Engagement

a. We do it together

- i. “Out of [mutual engagement] comes not some knowledge necessarily but like going through an experience together.”
- ii. “The only way we can do it is together...It is dependent on a strong effort of the individual. When we do that, we benefit other individuals to come.”

b. We discover as we go

- i. “We discover what there is to discover in the course of that kind of emergence of meeting and engaging.”

- ii. “It’s something that is being discovered as we go.”

c. It is dynamic and we are not separate from it

- i. “If I can move with it, rather than opposing it, rather than affirming it, negating it, trying to change it, then that’s the experience that I’m talking about of being there with because there’s not another person there either as a fixed entity. It feels like part of what we get to realize is something much more dynamic.”
- ii. “What I’m saying is coming out of you being there, it’s not just this fixed thing here. I don’t know what you’re going to ask me about and I don’t know what I’m going to say.”

d. Over and over again

- i. “Play it over and over again, just the way they played it. And then out of that, you’ll be able to bring it forth in your own way, but in absolute accord with the tradition itself.”
- ii. “Your own story needs to be told. And it needs to keep being told.”

6. Living A Spirited Life

a. Aspiration: sincere and open engagement

- i. “It feels like spirit in a sense of having a spirited life. You know, being willing. Let’s go! Let’s do this! This is it!”
- ii. “It’s like showing up. It’s straight. It’s honest. So it has that kind of abandon to it. Let’s do this. It’s our life. We’re here!”
- iii. “[Mutual engagement] shows that we realize something together through our own sincerity of our interaction.”

b. You gotta get out of the car

- i. “You gotta get out of that Goddamn car! And walk! And when you can’t walk, you gotta crawl. And maybe then you’ll see something.”
- ii. “But it doesn’t show itself when you’re in the car and all wrapped up in your next viewpoint or whatever.”

7. A Companion on the Path

a. A wise friend

- i. “I see myself as a companion on the path with people that are interested in the same path. The path being Zen, the practice of Zen Buddhism. Part of the ideal for me is what’s called in Indian Buddhism *janamitra*, a friend in The Way, a wise friend in The Way. Someone who doesn’t just stand apart and give instruction but who walks with you through wherever the path takes us together.”
- ii. “[The relationship can’t] feel too formal. If it feels like they’ve got me on a pedestal or something.”

b. Discernment of readiness

- i. “In terms of [establishing] a teacher-student relationship, it [needs to] feel like there’s a rapport there. It certainly takes the commitment in a sense that, for them, this way of Zen practice is really the way for them.”
- ii. “And then in the course of that *sesshin* I see do they get down? Kind of you know, show their face? And can I do that or do I have something going on?”

c. Providing space

- i. “Let’s work with this, whatever it is. Allowing it to be.”
- ii. “And so in some ways I’m being a space for that to be okay.”
- iii. “That we need someone there to interact with and to be, to have that, have a space as well to do that and have a practice.”

8. The Breath

- a. “[The breath] brings it all together. That’s why it’s important. It’s a way home. It’s a way back.”
- b. “Our mind is attention. When we attend to our breath, then we get our mind and our body together. We don’t have a mind without a body. And there’s no human body without a mind. It’s just a body. So they are the same thing.”

9. Tradition in Modernity

- a. “You have a name of something, but you don’t have the substance of it. There’s a way in which American culture can just swallow things up and absorb the words and the language.”
- b. “I think Zen is getting psychologized. And so instead of our metaphors and ways of understanding being tigers, and cliffs, and rivers, people are talking about ego, and stuff like that....In terms of psychologizing, it just feels like a much more limited way to talk about it. To talk about what the practice is. To express the insights of the practice.”